

Colby College

**From Apathy to Acceptance:  
A History of Racism and Heterosexism at Colby**

An Honors Thesis Submitted to the Colby College Department of History

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## Preface

I am not an activist. I have never participated in a protest. I have never even taken a course at Colby dealing primarily with issues of race or sexuality. And until I passed by a group of loud, passionate, frustrated students protesting before the Board of Trustees in April of 2002, I could not have told you what institutional oppression means or that it could exist at a place like Colby.

Truthfully, I never thought about racism or heterosexism at Colby, or anywhere else for that matter, in any great depth until last spring. I grew up in a very small Massachusetts town (when I say small, I mean that Waterville, Maine seems like a big city to me) full of white, middle to upper class families that were clearly benefiting from the economic surge of the 1980s. It's not that in my town there existed a racial minority population and I simply did not interact with it – rather, I could count on one hand the number of non-white students in my elementary school. My high school, though a regional one combining three towns, was hardly different.

I certainly never thought about sexual orientation much before coming to Colby. Not only was there a *completely* invisible queer population in my hometown, but talking of sexual orientation, other than when referring to heterosexuality, was unimaginable. The only openly queer individual I knew before entering college was my 8<sup>th</sup> grade health teacher, a kind woman whom everyone made fun of.

When I came to Colby I blended in perfectly. Hailing from just outside of Boston, with blonde hair and blue eyes and a boyfriend still in high school back home, I eased into life at Colby with few problems. My college life was smooth and organized – just the way I liked it.

And then I walked to Roberts Union for lunch one warm, spring day my junior year. And as I approached the building, I found students yelling into a megaphone, talking about racism and heterosexism. Their voices were full of anger, of exhaustion, as they spoke of oppression and unhappiness. I remember so vividly the confusion I felt at that moment. It really had never occurred to me, before then, that some students could view Colby, a school I found to be so welcoming and nurturing, as a place where they were afraid to be themselves, to express their opinions, where they felt like outsiders. It was a sort of awakening for me...I felt that I'd missed something throughout my first three years at Colby. And, as it turns out, I had missed a lot.

I didn't stop at the protest before going into Roberts. I didn't ask the protestors what precisely they were protesting. I was too scared, too jarred. But the event certainly left me changed. I thought about this protest, about these students who were seemingly miserable in a place I hold so dear to me, in the weeks, and months to follow.

The event, which I later discovered was in fact the protest of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability before the trustees, sparked my curiosity. I began asking questions about racism and heterosexism in general, but at Colby as well. My friends helped me as best they could, but I had a lot to learn. And so, I did what I always do when something intrigues me – I went to the library.

The protest I had recently witnessed inspired me to read the whole of Earnest Cummings Marriner's History of Colby College. While Marriner presents a fascinating account of the college, my questions about racism and heterosexism at Colby were left largely unanswered. Marriner indeed mentioned protests and uprisings at Colby, though

he never explained the root of the problems causing these events. I wanted to know *who* was there, *why* they were there, *what* they were saying, *how* they were feeling.

A professor of mine once told me that often an author's main motivation for writing a book is because he or she wants to read it.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this is why I chose to write my thesis on racism and heterosexism at Colby. I couldn't find the answers to the questions the April 2002 protest had stirred in me. Throughout my time at Colby, the administration has almost constantly been referring to "diversity" and "multiculturalism," yet there was no one source where I could read explicitly on the ways in which racism and heterosexism have affected this institution, the ways in which students have worked to counter such forms oppression over time. And so I decided I would write a thesis that would answer my own questions, and perhaps those yet to be posed by future Colby students. Full of both inspirational and discouraging discoveries, full of fiercely passionate people willing to share their experiences with me, this has been quite a journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Rosten qtd. by Robert Weisbrot, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, fall 2002.

## Introduction

The energy in the air that morning was undeniable. So was the nervous excitement sitting in nearly every participant's stomach - "Are we doing the right thing? Will people show up? Will we get in trouble?"<sup>2</sup> Students of color, queer students, and their allies rose at dawn on April 12, 2002 to begin the protest they had been furtively planning for months, impelled by the belief that Colby College had not moved fast enough or far enough away from racism and heterosexism. Posters were hung, banners were displayed, and fliers were distributed before much of the campus had even awoken.

It was the blare of the megaphone that really got everyone's attention. As protestors made their way across campus to Roberts Union, where the Colby College Board of Trustees would soon be holding their annual spring meeting, it was impossible to ignore their amplified rallying cries: "We are *tired* of having to worry about being black on this campus! We are *tired* of having to deal with being queer on this campus! We belong in more places than the Pugh Center!"<sup>3</sup>

Early that afternoon, protestors settled themselves in front of Roberts Union, knowing that they had a long day ahead of them. One of the organizers of the emerging protest, Julie Land '04, commented, "This is probably the most important moment in Colby's history because we have women of color and lesbians on this campus realizing that our problems...come from the *same* kind of hierarchy structure."<sup>4</sup> Upon investigation, it is clear that Land's suspicions were correct – indeed, the spring 2002 protest before the trustees marked the first time in the college's history that students

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<sup>2</sup> Julie Land '04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 2 April 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Land '04, Jamie Muehl '02, *One Week: A Film About Change*, April 2003. Note: The Pugh Center is Colby's multicultural center, where all cultural student organizations are housed.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

fighting racism and students battling heterosexism had merged to combat discrimination at large. What the protesters were perhaps not aware of, however, was the story of the events and people who had gone before them, the pioneers who had paved the way for *their* coalition. This story must be told, and it must be remembered, if we, as the community of Colby College, are ever to reflect on where we have been and where we are going in terms of tolerance and acceptance – the very principles on which this institution was founded nearly two hundred years ago.

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The alliance that emerged in March 2002 as the Coalition for Institutional Accountability, the group responsible for planning and carrying out the April 2002 protest, was initiated in the fall of 2001 and represents the first time in the history of Colby College that students fighting racism and heterosexism on campus joined forces to fight both forms of oppression simultaneously. Somewhat ironically, Rob Tarlock '02, a white heterosexual, initiated the very conception of a coalition between students of color and queer students. At a fall 2001 meeting of the Bridge, a campus organization for queer students and their allies, Tarlock suggested holding a joint meeting between the Bridge and the Student Organization for Black and Hispanic Unity (SOBHU), one of Colby's oldest and once most active multicultural groups.

Tarlock was the first student to recognize that while the Bridge and SOBHU had very different agendas, these groups also had much in common. To many a coalition between black and queer students at Colby appeared unusual; indeed, why would groups

fighting for very different causes – racial equality and sexual equality – ever consider diluting their respective campaigns to ally with one another? However, to Tarlock, and to an increasing number of members of the Colby Community, this alliance seemed, in the fall of 2001, very obvious; why *wouldn't* groups both fighting widespread and deeply ingrained forms of discrimination work together, thus creating a massive, all-encompassing effort?

Following Tarlock's proposition, a joint meeting of the Bridge and SOBHU took place in the fall of 2001. Bridge co-leader Julia Steele '03 recalled, "At first the division was so obvious, with the black students sitting on one side and the queer students on the other."<sup>5</sup> Professor Karen Barnhardt, of the Education and Human Development Department, was one of a few faculty members present at the meeting to demonstrate support for students of color and queer students. She recalled that the mood of the meeting was "cautious, but open...people were feeling the environment, feeling the terrain...struggling with coalition building and what that might mean."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Bridge member Julie Land said of the initial tensions, "It was pretty intense: a bunch of queers and students of color. Everyone was like, 'this sucks.'"<sup>7</sup> But after a while it really struck home for the faculty members present and for the students, too, that these two groups had *so* much in common."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as the meeting progressed, most individuals present came to see that "it was just so apparent that everyone was in the same boat...we [queer students and students of color] could take them [the Colby

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<sup>5</sup> Julia Steele '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 February 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Barnhardt, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 28 April 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Here, Julie is referring to the feeling on both 'sides' that there were so many issues (concerning institutionalized oppression) that had to be faced – it was difficult to know where to even begin.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Land '04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 2 April 2003.

Community at large] by storm – they’d have to listen to us if we were all saying the same thing...all of a sudden our numbers and power doubled.”<sup>9</sup>

Though Steele also contended that numerous historical factors enabled such a meeting and the eventual coalition that resulted from it, she noted that there were three factors *directly* affecting the logistics of the joint meeting. First, Tarlock recognized that the Bridge and SOBHU had a common political agenda. Indeed, both groups were (and had been for years) working tirelessly to fight discrimination at Colby, to make Colby a more diverse and welcoming community. Second, Tarlock noticed that in 2001 the Bridge and SOBHU were increasingly comparable in number and influence. While SOBHU has been an active, influential student organization at Colby since the 1960s, the group that eventually was named “The Bridge” by Katie Morrison ’94, was “functioning mostly underground at Colby in the late 1970s and was revived in the late ’80s.”<sup>10</sup> However, by 2001, the Bridge’s membership had increased dramatically and the group itself had become a visible source of power and pride, championing homosexuality at Colby.

Finally, there was a queer student group that could match the strength of SOBHU. In their landmark manifesto for Black Power in 1967, Stokely Carmichael and Charles

Hamilton note:

Coalition between the strong and the weak ultimately leads only to perpetuation of the hierarchal status: superordinance and subordinance... Viable coalitions therefore stem from four preconditions: (a) the recognition by the parties involved of their respective self-interests; (b) the mutual belief that each party stands to benefit in terms of that self-interest from allying with the other or others; (c) the acceptance of the fact that each party has its own independent base of power does not depend for ultimate decision-making on

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<sup>9</sup> Julia Steele ‘03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 February 2003.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

a force outside itself; and (d) the realization that the coalition deals with specific and identifiable – as opposed to general and vague goals.<sup>11</sup>

Tarlock knew that for a coalition to be successful, the member groups would have to be comparable in influence and would have to have a political agenda all could agree on – conditions that were clearly present for the coming together of the black and queer student communities at Colby in the fall of 2001.

In the months following this collaboration, the struggles against racism and heterosexism at Colby merged. Their convergence gives rise to many questions. How is it that black and queer students felt so unwelcome at an institution regarded by so many as being liberal? What factors, other than those relating to hierarchical structure and power, contributed to the creation of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability? Furthermore, why did the alliance between students of color and queer students at Colby emerge in the fall of 2001 (with the formation of the official coalition in March 2002), not earlier and not later?

Historically, Colby College has been regarded as one of the most liberal colleges in the United States, with the foundation of the school in 1813 based on the defense of religious freedoms in a time when such rights were often contested. In 1871, with the admission of Mary Low, Colby also became the first school in the northeast and the twelfth in the entire nation to admit a woman into an all-male college. In 1887, nearly a decade *before* the United States Supreme Court declared state-sanctioned segregation of blacks and whites in all aspects life, including educational institutions, to be *legal*,<sup>12</sup> Adam Simpson Green became the first African-American to graduate from Colby. Just

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<sup>11</sup> Stokely Carmichael, Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. (New York: Random House, 1967) 74, 79-80.

<sup>12</sup> *The African American Almanac*. 9<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Jeffery Lehman, (New York: Gale, 2003) 17.

thirteen years later, Marion Thomson Osborne became the first African-American woman to receive a degree from the college. These milestones at Colby College occurred nearly a century before such integration became a reality at other colleges and certainly long before the United States Government itself recognized the value and justice of racial diversity in education.<sup>13</sup>

While Colby's early background appears to be extremely liberal, the fights against racism and heterosexism on the Colby campus since World War II have clearly mirrored the progress of American society as a whole with respect to these issues. In fact, specific incidents of student activism against racism and heterosexism at Colby can be closely correlated to similar occurrences in wider society. This is not to imply that Colby has become the conservative institution that student activists claim it to be, but rather to underscore the point that Colby no longer outpaces the nation in progress made in fights against oppressed groups.

Until the 2001 formation of the alliance between students of color and queer students at Colby, the struggles against racism and heterosexism at the college progressed exclusive of one another, with each fight chronologically corresponding to directly related occurrences in society as a whole. It was not until this time that these separate struggles at Colby had each evolved enough to provide a fertile ground on which such movements would truly benefit from combining their efforts. Thus, while the stories of the fights against each form of oppression eventually merged, the histories of these struggles began and progressed separately for over half a century.

The campaigns against racism and heterosexism on the national level agitated parallel fights at Colby, thus encouraging the formation of the Coalition for Institutional

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<sup>13</sup> Colby College Website, [www.colby.edu](http://www.colby.edu); Internet; accessed 2002-2003.

Accountability in 2002 (and the fall 2001 alliance that preceded it). Most important, the growing diversification of the curriculum – the availability of increasingly specialized courses in all areas of study – at colleges and universities nation-wide in the post-World War II era has had a profound influence on the movements against racism and heterosexism at Colby. Furthermore, the ability of Colby College to attract professors specializing in issues of race and ethnicity has meant that students are being taught previously overlooked materials and are thus exposed to the injustices persisting at Colby and in American society at large.

The alliance between students of color and queer students at Colby came to fruition in the fall of 2001 (with the official coalition being formed in March 2002) and was perhaps most visible in the protest before the trustees the following spring. While to some this coalition seemed unlikely, to many it appeared to be natural – an alliance that had had the *potential* to be formed for decades, though one that could not effectively emerge until American society as a whole had progressed in reducing both racist and heterosexist sentiments.

## Chapter 1

### A History of Racism at Colby: Correlations with National Events

*“Yes, you can learn in a classroom, but the greatest activism I know comes out of direct community contact.”*  
– Professor Phyllis Mannocchi

The fight against racism at Colby has persisted ever since students expressed strong anti-slavery sentiments during the Civil War era. However, it was not until after the Second World War that racism became a major campus issue once again. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were five salient moments in the fight against racial discrimination at Colby – the 1961 Nunez proposal to ban discrimination by fraternities and sororities; the 1970 chapel takeover to demand changes to redress the imbalances existing between black and white students; the 1994 demands for increased attention to minority needs made by Students of Color United for Change; the 1999 sit-in against institutional racism at Colby; and the 2002 protest against institutional racism and heterosexism before the trustees of the college. Each major event was preceded and followed by periods of quiet progress.

The increasing racial tolerance and acceptance on the Colby campus throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly mirrors that of American society as a whole, with much student activism on campus closely corresponding to specific movements against and events regarding racism across the nation. While protests in the 1990s have not always emulated the action of the nation as *explicitly* as did earlier movements, there is still enough evidence to conclude that the national campaigns against this form of discrimination indeed affected events at Colby.

Indeed, Colby students were concerned with issues of slavery and abolition throughout the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the issue of overt racism did not emerge again

as a major campus concern until 1961. While students were concerned about discrimination within the fraternity system at Colby and nationwide throughout the 1940s and 50s, it was not until the spring of 1961, when Jacqueline Nunez '61, a student of Puerto Rican descent, proposed the abolition of all anti-discrimination clauses from all constitutions and charters of organizations at Colby, that racism became a widespread issue at Colby.

### **The 1961 Nunez Proposal**

In an Echo article in May 1961 Jackie Nunez proposed that the student government should adopt the rule, “Within two years, before June 1963, each group on campus must present a letter from their national organization to the effect that the local group has complete freedom of selection in regard to its members.”<sup>14</sup> While the “Nunez Proposal,” as this initiative quickly became called, did not mention fraternities and sororities outright, it was clear that the plan was aimed especially at abolishing discrimination within the Greek system. The issue had been discussed sporadically since the 1940s, though it was never acted upon at Colby for fear of expulsion of a Colby chapter from its national organization.<sup>15</sup>

Such fear was not unfounded; in November of 1947, the admission of a black student into the Phi Kappa Psi chapter at Amherst College had resulted in the revocation of the fraternity’s national charter. At this time, the trustees of Amherst College nonetheless ordered “that all discriminatory language in the charters of fraternities at

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<sup>14</sup> “Student Government to Decide on Campus Discriminating Clauses” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XLV, no. 2. 22 September 1961. p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> “Amherst Fraternity Initiates Negro; Has National Charter Revoked” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LII, no. 8. 17 November 1948, p. 1.

Amherst must be deleted by February, 1950.” Shortly after the incident at Amherst, Colby Chaplain Walter Wagoner predicted, “This affair probably will be a ‘cause celebre’ in intercollegiate circles; and frats will be condemned wholesale.”<sup>16</sup> Despite Colby’s early liberal roots, and surely to the dismay of the chaplain, no action to emulate the precedent set by Amherst was ever publicly attempted at Colby until Nunez’s proposal.

While Nunez’s proposal was seen by many of her contemporaries as extremely progressive (and, indeed it was, in comparison to most other colleges), she, like other students who approved of the proposal, was a product of her generation, inspired by similar occurrences on the national level. As historian David Chalmers notes, “Generations are made, not born. It was the civil rights movement that stirred sleeping campuses.”<sup>17</sup>

Jacqueline Nunez and her supporters had entered Colby in the fall of 1957 and thereafter. An incredibly bright and perceptive young woman, Nunez was surely aware of the brewing civil rights movement throughout her adolescence and its powerful eruption during her years at Colby. In May of 1955, the U.S. Supreme Court had ordered all legally segregated school boards to outline desegregation procedures, thus reinforcing its 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Later that year, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give her bus seat to a white man and was arrested, spurring the Montgomery Bus Boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>18</sup> In February of 1960, the first sit-in took place in Greensboro, North Carolina, when several black

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<sup>16</sup> “Amherst Fraternity,” Letter to the Editor, *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LII, no. 9. 8 December 1948. p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> David Chalmers. *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 19060s*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 69.

<sup>18</sup> Chalmers 20.

students refused to leave a segregated lunch counter.<sup>19</sup> Alabama was again the site of deep racial tensions when, in the spring of 1961, buses carrying “freedom riders” were attacked by violent mobs.

Scenes like those in Montgomery and Greensboro were emerging all over the south. Even where mass protests and demonstrations were not occurring – as in Waterville, Maine – people were thinking and talking about the issue of racial discrimination more than ever before. It is no coincidence that Jackie Nunez became interested in the pursuit of racial equality at a time when concerns over discrimination and segregation permeated the thoughts of Americans everywhere.

In October of 1961 the student government unanimously passed Nunez’s motion, with some subtle changes. Shortly thereafter, the faculty passed the proposal. The Board of Trustees issued a statement in November 1961 announcing its opposition to “a Colby chapter of a fraternity or sorority having an affiliation with a national organization, unless the Colby chapter has complete freedom to select its member without reference to criteria of race, religion, or nationality”<sup>20</sup> and agreed to write letters to national organizations championing such freedoms. However, the Board adamantly opposed a time limit on the removal of discriminatory clauses. It was not until 1962 that the Board of Trustees finally agreed to a time limit when it passed the following motion:

In order to remain active at Colby College, either as a national affiliate or a local group, each fraternity or sorority local undergraduate chapter must, prior to the Commencement meeting in 1965, satisfy the Board that it has the right to select its members without regard to race and religion or national origin.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Lehman, ed. *The African-American Almanac*, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. (MI: Gale, 2003) 27.

<sup>20</sup> “Board of Trustees Rejects Proposal of Students Faculty, Administration,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*. vol. LX, no. 9, 10 November 1961, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *The Untold Story: Activism and Social Justice at Colby*. [www.colby.edu/education/activism/nunez.html](http://www.colby.edu/education/activism/nunez.html); Internet; accessed 2002-2003.

The issue was not discussed again at length until October 1963, when Colby's Pan-Hellenic Council met to clarify the membership policies of sororities. The discussion centered on the terms "gentleman's agreement" and "mutual acceptance clause," both of which were included in many national constitutions of sororities with Colby chapters. These terms were used interchangeably and both stated that a "sorority will admit no member who is not mutually acceptable to all members of the sorority – that is, not acceptable to the sorority chapters on a *nationwide* [italics mine] basis." The Pan-Hellenic Council also debated the practice of the "recommendation system" at this time. This system served as a means for a sorority to gain information about a prospective member and required that each applicant obtain a recommendation for admission to a particular sorority either by any alumnae or by an alumna from the applicant's hometown or state.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the 1961 passage of the Nunez proposal, any clause seen as discriminatory could not be included in the constitution or charters of any group or organization that wished to remain active on the Colby campus after 1965. Even if such clauses existed in the writing of a national organization, though not in the writing of the Colby chapter itself (as was the case with the four sororities at Colby), the Colby chapter would not be permitted to abide by its national constitution or charter. Thus, the Colby chapter could either fight for the removal of such clauses on a national level or risk having its national charter revoked.

Many at Colby viewed both the "mutual acceptance clause" and the "recommendation system" as discriminatory. For instance, if individual members of a

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<sup>22</sup> "Sororities Present Positions on Discrimination Issue," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXVII, no. 4, 4 October 1963, p. 1.

sorority held prejudices against those of a different race, religion or nationality, a minority student's application might *never* be mutually acceptable to all members of that sorority, perhaps on racist grounds. Furthermore, if an applicant did not have alumnae of her desired sorority living in her hometown or state, she would automatically be denied admission to the sorority. Indeed, before the 1960s there were very few minorities admitted to sororities. Thus, if a minority applicant was the first from her state or hometown to even apply to a particular sorority, by default she could never gain entrance into that sorority.

The presidents of the Colby sororities had been fighting for the elimination of such discriminatory clauses from their national organizations' constitutions and charters, though their appeals for justice were largely denied. The 1963 meeting closed with all sororities vowing to commit themselves "to the fight against discrimination on a national basis" for as long as necessary. Indeed, "The sororities are progressing in their struggle against discrimination, it was stated [by members of the Pan-Hellenic Council], and progress is what is required at this time."<sup>23</sup> The sororities kept the promises made in 1963 and with the coming of the 1965 deadline set by the Nunez Proposal, the admission of minority students into fraternities and sororities at Colby, and all other student groups for that matter, became a non-issue.<sup>24</sup>

While the fight against discrimination in fraternities and sororities at Colby was clearly started by one young woman with a passionate belief in equality, it is unclear

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<sup>23</sup> "Sororities Present Positions on Discrimination Issue," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXVII, no. 4. 4 October 1963, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that individual students were not denied admission to fraternities, sororities, and other student groups because of their race, religion or nationality after 1965. Indeed, the personal prejudices of leaders and members of such groups could have led to the exclusion of an individual from said groups. However, the issue was not discussed openly at Colby again.

whether the continuing fight by each fraternity and sorority to abolish discriminatory language in national constitutions and charters by 1965 was borne mainly out of good intentions or a desire for institutional survival. Nevertheless, the ongoing debate over such discrimination began a wider long-term fight against racism at Colby.

Sadly, Jackie Nunez, the compassionate, fiercely intelligent young woman who first initiated the debate over racism at Colby was never able to witness the additional progress made in the fight against racism throughout the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nunez died of Hodgkin's Disease, at age 27, just five years after graduating valedictorian of the Colby College Class of 1961.

### **The 1970 Occupation of Lorimer Chapel**

The next major event in the fight against racism at Colby began on the evening of March 2, 1970, when members of the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU - an organization comprised of the few black students at Colby in 1969) occupied Lorimer Chapel. The occupants were acting in support of five "non-negotiable" demands presented to the entire Colby Community regarding minority students. The college had failed to act on the "Proposals For a New Colby" which were presented by SOBU in the spring of 1969 and called for a drastic change in the priorities of the college to help redress the imbalance (both in numbers and perceived disparities in privilege) between white and black members of the Colby Community.<sup>25</sup>

Tired of waiting for change while the proposals were held up in the student government and administration, seventeen black students, under the leadership of Charles

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<sup>25</sup> *The Untold Story: Activism and Social Justice at Colby*. [www.colby.edu/education/activism/chapel.html](http://www.colby.edu/education/activism/chapel.html); Internet; accessed 2002-2003.

Terrell '70, entered the chapel and locked and barricaded the doors, resolving not to leave until their five demands were met. They believed that in order to rectify the racial imbalance on campus, the following steps should be adopted:

1. The admission of at least fifty black students into the next incoming class.
2. Colby must officially implement a Black Sub-Freshman week, with transportation to and from Colby for those who cannot afford it.
3. The point average requirement for students on financial aid must be abolished.
4. A Black Studies Program must be established with a black professor hired to teach black history classes.
5. The admission of the freshman class will be at least 10% black after the class of 1974.

While the occupation of the chapel emerged out of growing frustrations, the tactic had occurred to students just days before they actually carried it out. There was no specific incident or event on campus that triggered the event. Rather, Charles Terrell '70, president of SOBU in 1970, explained that such acts were “a part of our generation...we were predisposed to direct action...we lived through Vietnam, the civil rights movement, the assassination of Dr. King...the mood in the country was fertile for this.”<sup>26</sup>

The activism throughout the country in the 1960s and early 70s encouraged Colby students to fight for what they felt was just.

Terrell was not alone in his thinking about causes for student activism in the 1960s and 1970s; indeed activism of this sort had been taking place at colleges and universities all over the country. Though student discontent in America existed since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it exploded in the 1960s and 1970s due to sentiments surrounding the Vietnam War and civil rights movement in particular.<sup>27</sup> Even at schools comprised of a

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Terrell '70, telephone conversation with author, 15 January 2003.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that college students played an important role in the 1960s civil rights movement - the actions of four students in Greensboro, North Carolina, college students triggered the spread of sit-ins and other activities that came to define activism at the time. United States President's Commission on Campus Unrest, *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1970) 21.

white majority (as Colby College was and still is), the 1960s emerged as a decade of activism – perhaps due to the fact that “a distinguishing characteristic of young people is their penchant for pure idealism.”<sup>28</sup>

Such idealism was exhibited on the Berkeley campus in 1964 when students protested the administration’s enforcement of a rule restricting the rights of political groups on campus. This event is often considered to be the beginning of intense student activism in the 60s, though in that same year “of the 849 four-year colleges responding to a national survey that year, the great majority reported some kind of protest.”<sup>29</sup> After 1964, campus activism changed to reflect a growing interest in broader political and social issues on behalf of students.

In April of 1968, five buildings on the campus of Columbia University were occupied by students protesting the building of a new university gymnasium in the park between Morningside Heights and Harlem. In May of 1969, students at Kent State University partaking in a protest against the Vietnam War refused the National Guard’s order to disperse. When the National Guard attempted to dissolve the crowd by force, four students were killed and nine were wounded. By the close of the month, roughly one third of the 2,500 colleges and universities in the United States had experienced some type of protest activity.<sup>30</sup> It was events such as these that influenced Colby College students in the 1960s and early 1970s to believe that they could engage in activism that had the potential to be taken very seriously.

The occupation of the chapel apparently took the administration by surprise, though the 1970 Student Government President Ben Kravitz ’70 said, “It wasn’t a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

surprise...we [the student body] knew there were black students there [at Colby] that were unhappy.”<sup>31</sup> The first official reaction of the college to the takeover was in the form of a letter from President Robert E.L. Strider to the participants on day two of the ordeal. Strider noted, “the college is committed to work toward still more significant achievement [in terms of racial equality]” but “the college cannot engage in the most useful kinds of discussion under the present circumstances.”<sup>32</sup> Strider also urged the students to return the chapel to its proper function, noting that the college would not allow such occupation to last indefinitely. The students in the chapel replied with the assurance that they were not leaving the chapel until their demands were met.

The takeover continued throughout the week, with over three hundred white students picketing and rallying in support of SOBU. During this time, the administration held firm that it would not negotiate with students as long as they were illegally occupying the chapel. The chapel occupants reiterated that they would not leave the chapel until their demands were instituted. Finally, at 8:30 pm on the evening of March 11, 1970, a full eight days after the SOBU students had entered the chapel, each of the seventeen occupants were served with a restraining order giving them two hours to evacuate the building. After careful consideration, the black students decided to peacefully leave the chapel in order to avoid arrest, which they felt could take attention away from the five demands and place it on legal issues.<sup>33</sup> Charles Terrell also recalled

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<sup>31</sup> Ben Kravitz '70, telephone conversation with author, 15 January 2003.

<sup>32</sup>“Letter to SOBU from President Robert Strider,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXIII, no. 14. 3 March 1970. p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> “Blacks Out of Chapel,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXII, no. 15. 13 March 1970. p. 3.

that many black students feared being expelled should they not leave the chapel, knowing that “they had no place else to go.”<sup>34</sup>

Following the occupation, the Student Government released a statement saying that it “deplored the administration’s use of legal force”<sup>35</sup> to end the occupation. The day after the restraining orders were served to the chapel occupants, over two hundred white students picketed in front of President Strider’s home, calling for “Freedom of Speech and Assembly” and asking to “Bring Equality to Colby: Support Black Demands.” While there were fewer than 30 black students enrolled at Colby at this time, the student body overwhelmingly supported the black students. Indeed, as Ben Kravitz later related, most students believed that their demands were at least “relatively valid,”<sup>36</sup> if not wholly so.

The March faculty meeting was held two days after the black students were ordered out of the chapel. President Strider himself urged the faculty to support the demands of the black students. Most immediately, the faculty passed a motion which abolished the grade point average requirements for students receiving financial aid, thus fulfilling demand number three (a move which, over thirty years later, Charles Terrell still claims as the lasting legacy of the takeover). After some further debate about the four other demands, the faculty “clearly became tired of the whole thing. It was pointed out that the faculty had a great tradition that the meeting should end by nine o’clock. It was further pointed out that it didn’t really matter if it was put off until next month anyway. And, in fact, the faculty did just that.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Terrell '70, telephone conversation with author, 15 January, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> “Blacks Out of Chapel,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXII, no. 15. 13 March 1970. p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Ben Kravitz '70, telephone conversation with author, 15 January 2003.

<sup>37</sup> “Editorial,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXII, no. 16. 20 March 1970. p. 2.

Though this faculty meeting ended somewhat discouragingly for the black students and their supporters, throughout the spring progress on the remaining demands was indeed made. Above all else, the occupation called attention to the issue of institutional racism at Colby. In the months following the chapel occupation 64% of black applicants were accepted into the class of 1975, the sub-freshman week was permanently established, and plans for a permanent African-American Studies program were made<sup>38</sup> (though Colby still struggles to hire and retain African-American professors). Of the five demands, the fifth (calling for each incoming class after 1974 to be at least 10% black) was the only one not met following the occupation of Lorimer Chapel; there has yet to be an incoming class that has met this demand.

As Charles Terrell noted, the generation of the chapel takeover had indeed grown up in the heat of both the civil rights movement and the highly visible dispute over the Vietnam War. Furthermore, Colby students of the late 1960s and early 1970s were aware of the growing power of student protests, having watched the evolution of the student movements of the mid and late 1960s. Though Colby is somewhat isolated geographically from the rest of the nation, it could not remain unaffected by societal movements. As “a white father of a white student from the white establishment” stated in an open letter to President Robert Strider, “You and your college is ‘America in Microcosm.’ You personally have the duty to help your small piece of America to see this protest in perspective.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Action on Black Demands,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXIII, no. 20. 8 May 1970.

<sup>39</sup> “Letters to the Editor,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol LXIII, no. 16. 20 March 1970. p. 6.

### The 1994 Demands of Students of Color United for Change

After the storm of the chapel occupation died down, there was little visible student action against racism at Colby. The 1970 Chapel Occupation indeed had heightened the Colby Community's awareness of minority students and their needs – two full pages of the 1975 Oracle<sup>40</sup> were dedicated to pictures of minority students under the heading “An Awareness of Minorities.”<sup>41</sup> A few Echo articles each year after 1970 mentioned race or racism on campus (generally with respect to the lack of minority students), though there was no major response from the student body. However, this is not to say that racism was no longer visible on the Colby campus. Timothy Burton, an African American student who graduated from Colby in 1989 and worked in the Admissions Office until 1991,<sup>42</sup> noted,

No one talked about it [race or racism] because there seemed little need. There weren't many minority students, so what's the problem? Why talk about it?<sup>43</sup>...What you're seeing is complacency, not contentment... Life at Colby (and at most other private liberal arts colleges) is cushy: You're told you're great, you get fed (even if the food ain't the best), you get warm rooms, showers, a staff who cleans up after you, people to shovel the walks and cut the grass, computer access, campus activities, intimate contact with professors and so much more. It's easy for people to become complacent in this environment. When all this is going on, it's easy to forget that most of the people around you have the same skin tone.<sup>44</sup>

It was not until 1994 that the issue of racism at Colby became a prominent issue once again. When one examines the race relations in the United States as a whole in the early to mid 1990s it is hardly surprising that such issues once again became salient at Colby. At this time, there was especially great tension between blacks and whites in

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<sup>40</sup> The *Oracle* is Colby's student-written yearbook for graduating seniors.

<sup>41</sup> “An Awareness of Minorities,” in *The Oracle*, (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1975) p. 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Burton's comments are particularly salient to this paper – he was also openly gay in his last two years as a student at Colby and for all three years as an employee of the school.

<sup>43</sup> In 1992 and 1993, ALANA students comprised a mere 7% of the student population – Statistics shown in records of the Office of the Registrar. George Coleman, Colby College Registrar, correspondence with author, January 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Burton, e-mail to author, 25 February 2003.

America. In March of 1991 Rodney King, a black motorist stopped for a speeding ticket in Los Angeles, was brutally beaten by four white police officers. The incident was videotaped by a nearby witness and soon broadcast around the world. Following the acquittal of the four officers in April of 1992,<sup>45</sup> riots broke out in Los Angeles, resulting in the deaths of twelve and the setting of fire to the city. After the National Guard's attempt to assist police failed to stop the violence, President George H.W. Bush deployed 1,500 Marines and 3,000 Army troops to the city.<sup>46</sup> Kebba Tolbert '94, the 1994 President of SOBHU and a key player in the 1994 movement at Colby, noted that he got heavily involved in fighting racism at Colby during his sophomore year in 1992... "because Rodney King happened that year."<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the Chapel Occupation of 1970, the 1994 movement was designed to work within the system of government already established at Colby. Over seventy students, known collectively as the Students of Color United for Change, attended the meeting of the Campus Community Committee on March 9<sup>th</sup> to voice their concerns about the treatment of minorities at Colby. Led by Tolbert, the group demanded the following changes:

1. Better funding for minority clubs.
2. Work to make the curriculum more diverse.
3. A financial aid office that tends to minority students' needs.
4. The establishment of a residence hall on campus for people of color [multicultural housing].

The students also cited the inadequate treatment of issues involving minority students by the Colby Administration, placing particular emphasis on Colby College

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<sup>45</sup> A civil suit held in April of 1993 found two of the police officers guilty while the other two were once again acquitted.

<sup>46</sup> Lehman 60-62.

<sup>47</sup> Kebba Tolbert '94, telephone interview with author, 13 February 2003.

President William Cotter. Josh Woodfork '97<sup>48</sup> said to Cotter, “ ‘You cannot put people through this over and over again...It’s disgusting. I should not have to pay to come here and educate you [about minority needs and concerns]. Don’t just patronize me. I expect the institution to take action.’”<sup>49</sup> Students left the meeting feeling that Cotter hadn’t actually dealt with the issues at hand; he merely passed them on to other committees. The Students of Color United for Change threatened further action if steps to remedy the situation were not made in the immediate future.

Within days of the meeting, the student body had formed its own opinions about the demands, taking particular interest in the possible formation of a multicultural house. It seems that the campus was divided, with some believing that minority students deserved a safe haven, and others viewing the housing as flat-out segregation. A newly-formed student organization, the Coalition for Political Action, started a massive petition and phone campaign to further these demands. On March 17, 1994, President Cotter held an informal, confidential meeting with student leaders. Cotter noted, “Since the Students of Color presented their concerns to the Campus Community Committee last week, some action has been taken, though no specific committees have been formed...everything is still in discussion stages.”<sup>50</sup>

In early April, Cotter announced his official response to the demands brought forth by the Students of Color United for Change. He stated that he would support the hiring of an intern to the Dean of Cultural Affairs Position (a new position that would be instituted in the fall of 1994). He also commented approvingly on the diversification of

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<sup>48</sup> Josh Woodfork was the future 1996-1997 Student Government Association President.

<sup>49</sup> Whitney Glockner, David Holtzman, “Students of Color Demand Change,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVIII, no. 18. 10 March 1994. p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> “New Briefs: Secret Meeting With SOBHU,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVIII, no. 19. 17 March 1994. p. 2.

the curriculum, citing the Latin American Studies Program that would be available in the fall of 1995. Cotter stated that while providing more funding for multicultural groups would be difficult because of the financial constraints of the college, discussion on this issue would continue. Similarly, dialogue about the Admissions Office's handling of minority students would persist. Regarding the most controversial demand of the Students of Color United for Change – that of multicultural housing – Cotter voiced great concern and promised further research into the matter.<sup>51</sup>

The Colby Community's concern with the minority students' demands quickly took a backseat to the issue of hate crimes, as swastikas and hate language became prevalent on the campus towards the end of March, spurring a rally of support against anti-Semitism. However, the Administration continued to discuss and research multicultural housing and by 1995 the Board of Trustees had published their "Final Report of the Colby College Trustee Commission on Multicultural and Special Interest Housing," asserting that a "Common Ground Center" would be more beneficial for and inclusive of the Colby Community. In September of 1995, ground was broken on the Pugh Center, which was to become "a hub for programs and activities that promote intercultural communication and understanding on campus."<sup>52</sup> With the completion of the Pugh Center at the start of the 1996-1997 academic year, concerns about multicultural housing were silenced, though only for a few years.

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<sup>51</sup> Whitney Glockner, "Students of Color United for Change Return to CCC: Cotter Responds to Student Demands." *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVIII, no. 20. 7 April 1994. p. 1, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Geraldine Roseboro, Dean of Intercultural Affairs, qtd. in Erin Duggan's "Pugh Center Becomes Reality," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*. vol. CXVIV, no. 1, 12 September 1996. p. 1.

### The 1999 Sit-in In President Cotter's Office

While the first three major events in Colby's fight against racism were very clearly linked to occurrences in the nation at large, the last two were more loosely correlated with events outside of the Colby Community. The racial divide at Colby, aggravated by the beating of Rodney King in 1992, persisted even after the 1994 movement had subsided (indeed, Rodney King's name was mentioned numerous times during the meeting that resulted from the 1999 sit-in).<sup>53</sup> It seemed that concerns over racial discrimination were becoming stronger as the 1990s progressed. Many of the sentiments were aroused by the Clinton administration's focus on race and racism.<sup>54</sup> Students at Colby were exhausted, with the immediate foundation for the 1999 sit-in brewing for over a year before extreme measures were finally taken.

In April of 1998, Mayra Diaz '98, a black Puerto Rican student, filed charges of racial harassment and defamation of character against a fellow classmate (henceforth referred to as Ms. R, as Mayra called her in the letter). The action was the result of the interpretation of a story, written by Mayra Diaz, for a creative writing class in which each student was to read and critique the writing of his or her classmates. The story, as Mayra described it, is as follows:

The story was about a young girl, Amber who was physically and emotionally neglected. She was the schoolyard bully and widely despised by her classmates. In the final confrontation and culminating act of the story, Twyla (*race undefined*)—a frequent victim of Amber's—decides to stand up to her. Twyla and Amber begin to argue and soon the rest of the kids circle around them, with most of them cheering Amber on. Suddenly, one young boy, Tommy (*race undefined*)—also frequently terrorized by Amber—takes a bat and hits Amber over the head and says, "I saw this in a movie once."

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<sup>53</sup> Betsy Loyd, "Protestors Stage Sit-in In Cotter's Office: Students Claim Institutionalized Racism," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 22. 22 April 1999. p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> During his presidency, Clinton appointed several African-Americans to powerful positions in his administration. He also championed affirmative action in employment. Furthermore, throughout the Clinton years, due largely in part to Clintons' own initiatives, African-American unemployment levels were the lowest they had been in years. William C. Berman, *From the Center to the Edge: The Politics and Policies of the Clinton Presidency*, (NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001) 106.

The story ends with Amber lying dead on the playground. Twyla looks down at the lifeless body and says, “The hatred wasn’t worth it...” The story is a critique of televised and cinematic violence and its affect on children. It was inspired, in part, by the ongoing tragedies of playground shootings occurring around the country.<sup>55</sup>

After reading Mayra’s story as part of her creative writing homework, Ms. R accused Mayra of murderous intent, believing that the story Mayra had written was directly aimed at her. Ms. R rationalized her accusations, saying, “ ‘Amber is my name backwards with an ‘m,’ Twyla sounds like Mayra, Tommy sounds like Randy, and Mrs. Maree, (the schoolteacher) sounds like Professor Kenny!’”<sup>56</sup> It was through this speculation that Ms. R believed Mayra Diaz had written the story as a threat to her life. Mayra defended her story, saying:

Until our Creative Writing Course, I had never known Ms. R and she had never known me. Therefore, I can only conclude that her accusations were not only unmerited but also solely premised on her prejudices, stereotypes, and racist paranoia<sup>57</sup>... The response to my story demonstrated how Ms. R racialized the characters to fit her ingrained prejudices. In her accusations, Ms. R singled out Randy and I—two black students—as the threatening characters. This is particularly significant since none of the characters in my story were assigned racial identities. She herself determined that Twyla and Tommy were children of color. The reality is that Amber is my favorite stone (which I wore on a ring every day to class) and Twyla is the name of one of the protagonists in my favorite Toni Morrison short story...<sup>58</sup>

Even after Mayra had reassured Ms. R that she had no feelings of hatred towards her, Ms. R persisted in her beliefs and telling others of them, causing Mayra enduring humiliation and pain. Mayra finally filed formal charges of harassment against Ms. R, hoping only that the College would admit that Ms. R had violated school policy and that Ms. R herself would have to take some courses on race and racism. The hearing convened nearly an hour late on May 18, 1998, in front of an all-white board that had

<sup>55</sup> Mayra Diaz ’98, letter to Colby College Administration. 7 September 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Mayra Diaz ’98, letter to Colby College Administration. 7 September 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Mr. R was reported by other students in the class as having expressed racist sentiments, once using the word “nigger” in a story of her own and arousing concerns with the professor as well.

<sup>58</sup> Mayra Diaz ’98, letter to Colby College Administration. 7 September 1998.

apparently come to the meeting unprepared. Following the hearing, in which Mayra felt she was unduly silenced, Ms. R was found not-guilty of racial harassment.<sup>59</sup>

Even after her graduation from Colby, Mayra still felt that the hearing of her charges was not fairly conducted, believing that it “served as a cruel reminder of the institutionalized racism, privilege, and injustice that lies beneath the surface of Colby’s ‘democratic’ system.”<sup>60</sup> She outlined her disappointment in her September 7 letter to the administration and eloquently cited fourteen ways to combat institutional racism at Colby. Immediately upon receiving the letter, many faculty members petitioned President Cotter to bring Mayra’s concerns before the Campus Community Committee. The committee subsequently formed the Task Force on Racism, which was to use Mayra’s concerns as a starting point for the further examination of race and racism at Colby.<sup>61</sup>

On April 14, 1999, the Task Force on Racism issued its final report before the Campus Community Committee, as well as dozens of students and faculty members. Attendees left the meeting feeling that nothing had been accomplished in terms of fighting institutional racism and believing that “there wasn’t any real commitment.”<sup>62</sup> Partially in response to the meeting, which, as former Colby Professor Sandy Grande said, “was the straw that broke the camel’s back,”<sup>63</sup> and partially out of growing frustration, a group of students wrote a list of demands and organized a protest.

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<sup>59</sup> Mayra Diaz '98, letter to Colby College Administration. 7 September 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Mayra Diaz '98, letter to Colby College Administration. 7 September 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Betsy Loyd, “Task Force to Attack Racism at Colby,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 9. 12 November 1998. p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Betsy Loyd, “Protestors Stage Sit-in In Cotter’s Office: Students Claim Institutionalized Racism.” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 22. 22 April 1999. p. 1, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Sandy Grande, telephone conversation with author, 3 March 2003.

On the morning of April 16, 1999, twenty students entered President Cotter's office (he had an "open door" policy) and presented him with the list of demands regarding race and racism at Colby, refusing to leave until Cotter and the trustees met with them and addressed their concerns. Throughout the day more students and a handful of faculty members joined the sit-in. By 5:30 that evening, Cotter and members of the Board of Trustees met with the protesters. Among topics discussed at length was the role of affirmative action in hiring new faculty. Students also expressed outrage at a satirical comment regarding Rodney King made in the April 15, 1998 edition of the Colby Echo. Emerging from his office hours later, Cotter said, "We have agreed where we can agree and still have to disagree and we can move on."<sup>64</sup> The students and faculty indeed moved on, with significantly less public discussion about the sit-in emerging in the following academic year. The dialogue would eventually resurface with greater intensity in the spring of 2002.

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<sup>64</sup> Betsy Loyd, "Protestors Stage Sit-in In Cotter's Office: Students Claim Institutionalized Racism." *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 22. 22 April 1999. p. 1, 4.

## Chapter 2

### A History of Heterosexism At Colby: Correlations With National Events

*“Who are gay people? Where have we been in history? And most important, What might we be for?  
- Harry Hay (c.1950), founder of Mattachine, the first long-standing  
U.S. organization advocating for gay and lesbian rights.*

While the struggle against racism at Colby has been defined by significant periods of intensity amid long periods of relative quiet, the fight against heterosexism has been subtler. In the relatively short history of the fight against heterosexism at Colby, there have been few highly visible protests against this type of discrimination. However, this is not to deny that progress was continuously being made. On the contrary, there has been a slow, steady movement to counter heterosexism at Colby and to better the lives of queer students at this institution. Like the struggle against racism, the attempts to end heterosexism at Colby are largely a reflection of society’s progress toward tolerance and acceptance, with each step forward at the College resembling advances made by society at large.

Because there were no official public references to homosexuality at Colby before the 1970s, the only way to extract even a slight picture of what being queer at Colby was like in the early post-World War II era is through oral history. It should be noted that because homosexuality was then extremely taboo in society, it is difficult to identify queer individuals who attended Colby before the 1970s and who are willing to share their experiences. Robert Batten, Jr., class of 1948, is the only homosexual individual who has discussed with me the experience of being gay at Colby before the 1970s and his story is indeed eye opening. When one looks at widespread societal attitudes toward queers at

this time it seems probable that Batten's recollections typify the experience of a queer student at Colby in the 1940s.

### **Pre-1970s**

Robert Batten, Jr., having graduated over fifty years ago, admits that his memories are a bit faded with time. Still, he remembers his fear that others would discover that he was gay. Batten knew a homosexual underclassman who was taunted and teased so badly at Colby that he eventually committed suicide, and stated, "That was one of the reasons for not letting anyone know."<sup>65</sup> Conversely, Batten also remembered "comments by one or more of my Lambda Chi Alpha brothers that seemed designed to let me know that they probably knew [he was gay] and that it was ok with them."<sup>66</sup>

Overall, Batten concluded, "I don't think Colby was significantly more conservative than the society in which it existed...It was simply a representative of the society around us."<sup>67</sup> In fact Batten believed that attitudes toward his sexuality could be equated those toward President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's disability: "At the time to which I refer [post-World War II], we had a president whose lower extremities had to be braced that he might stand. No one ever referred to the fact [that his legs were left paralyzed by polio], and never would, unless he had acted in such a way as to flaunt his disability."<sup>68</sup> Indeed, if you didn't flaunt your homosexuality, it was hardly mentioned. However, if you were openly gay, you'd attract attention, most of which would be negative. He recalled, "I grew up believing that I was in danger of going to prison in this

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<sup>65</sup> Robert A. Batten '48, e-mail to author, 23 February 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Robert A. Batten '48, e-mail to author, 14 March 2003.

life and to Hell in the afterlife,”<sup>69</sup> and his fear neither increased nor decreased upon coming to Colby.

Indeed, Colby reflected societal norms in regard to homosexuality in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1943 the US Military began to allow for “blue discharges” of individuals based purely on sexual orientation.<sup>70</sup> In 1950 the US Senate authorized a large-scale investigation of homosexuals and other “moral perverts” working in national government.<sup>71</sup> Despite the emerging discussion of gays and lesbians in literature and theater in the 1940s, the overall message conveyed by post-World War II American society was that homosexuality was unnatural and sinful.

### The 1970s

Again, societal attitudes and standards regarding homosexuality inhibited queer students in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s from being open about their sexuality. Robert Batten’s testimony serves as an extraordinary exception to the lack of research on mid 20<sup>th</sup> century queer students at Colby; indeed, his story was uncovered entirely by chance.<sup>72</sup> It was not until 1971 that homosexuality was overtly mentioned in the Colby Echo. The article “Gay at Colby”<sup>73</sup> discussed what it meant to be gay, and what it meant to be a gay student at Colby in the early 1970s. The article was not only meant to inform the student body about homosexuality, it was also intended to portray homosexuality in a

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<sup>69</sup> Robert A. Batten ’48, e-mail to author, 24 February 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson, *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia* (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 626. – This move was particularly salient to Batten’s generation, many of whom fought in World War II.

<sup>71</sup> Hogan and Hudson 628.

<sup>72</sup> The only reason I was ever able to locate Robert Batten was because of the fact that in 1992 he wrote a letter to the *Colby* magazine mentioning that he was gay and that he was disappointed by the fact that there was no mention of gay or lesbian students in the “Plan For Colby” that was outlined in the January 1992 issue of the publication.

<sup>73</sup> Joyce Bemak, “Gay at Colby,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXV, no. 5, 23 October 1971.

positive light. It is worth noting that there were no student or faculty letters to the editor published in Echo in response to “Gay at Colby.” Perhaps no one wrote in support of or expressed outrage at the article – or the Echo did not choose to print such letters.

It is not surprising that this article appeared when it did. The late 1960s and early 70s were full of protests for gay liberation. Indeed, one of the most dramatic events associated with the start of the modern gay liberation movement – the Stonewall Riot - occurred in 1969, shortly before discussion of homosexuality began at Colby. In June of 1969 police raided a gay and drag bar known as the Stonewall Inn and arrested two barmen, two drag queens and a number of patrons. This raid, which triggered days of protest and rioting, is often remembered as “ ‘the shot heard round the homosexual world.’”<sup>74</sup> That same year, *Time* magazine’s article, “The Homosexual in America” marked the first cover story on gay rights in a national magazine<sup>75</sup> In 1970 the first legislative hearings to address gay and lesbian rights in the United States were held at the New York State Assembly.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the 1970s, United States politicians, actors, actresses, and social leaders were emerging in support of gays and lesbians. However, except for the lone Echo article, the 1970s were still a time of calm for the queer movement at Colby. Though the ice had been broken, throughout the entire country and at Colby itself, homosexuality was still largely unacceptable.

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<sup>74</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press, 1996. p.30.

<sup>75</sup> The National Museum & Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, *The Gay Almanac*, New York: Berkley Books, 1996.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

### The 1980s

An Echo article published in 1981 claimed, “Homosexuality: Still a Colby Taboo.”<sup>77</sup> The article was published in response to the newly formed Gay-Straight Alliance at Colby.<sup>78</sup> The alliance was created in the spring of 1981 after representatives of similar alliances from Bowdoin and Bates came to Colby; not surprisingly, Colby was compelled to keep up with progress outside of Waterville, Maine. The president of the Colby alliance, Ann Renner, claimed, “Homosexuality is *starting* [italics mine] to be condoned in the general public but not at Colby...A lot of students who are gay feel uncomfortable because of Colby’s ‘rigid’ social attitudes.”<sup>79</sup> Due to the perception that Colby was still unwelcoming to queer students, there was very little publicity for the alliance after its initial formation. Furthermore, the records and histories of groups like the Gay-Straight Alliance were largely underground, so it is difficult to track the progression and popularity of such groups. Certainly the fact that the Gay-Straight Alliance dissolved in 1984, just two years after its founding (when it became apparent that some individuals attended the meetings just to find out who on campus identified as being queer), speaks to the negative attitudes still permeating the campus.

Ironically, it was also in 1984 that queer issues really started to become frequently addressed at Colby. The Echo consistently ran articles calling for education about and tolerance of homosexuality. At the same time that the Gay-Straight Alliance dissolved, the Lesbian

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<sup>77</sup> Steve Riley, “Homosexuality: Still A Colby Taboo,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXV, no. 23, 1 March 1981, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Because the record keeping and histories of such alliances were largely underground before the 1990s, it is difficult to say if this alliance can be viewed as the early years of “the Bridge” at Colby. While this alliance dissipated in 1984, there is no evidence to say that it did not emerge again, under a new name, with an influx of new students.

<sup>79</sup> Steve Riley, “Homosexuality: Still A Colby Taboo,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXV, no. 23, 1 March 1981, p. 6.

Support Group was formed, citing the goal of creating “a less homophobic environment at Colby.”<sup>80</sup> In a letter to the editor signed only “The Lesbian Support Group” (no names were mentioned), students expressed disgust with the homophobia that permeated the campus in the early to mid 1980s:

Homophobia takes many forms at Colby. One example of intolerance has been the continual defacement and destruction of the Lesbian Support Group posters...Even dorm staff can contribute to the heterosexist atmosphere at Colby. Rather than participation in blatant homophobic acts, more often they are guilty of benign neglect of often closeted homosexual residents. Dorm staff often alienate homosexual residents by assuming that everyone is heterosexual...Heterosexism also pervades the classroom. Faculty rarely acknowledge lifestyles other than that of the nuclear family. Through their examples and even jokes, professors demonstrate their insensitivity to students who are not involved in heterosexual relationships. The most glaring example of academic neglect is the absence of any human sexuality course at Colby. The administration’s view of homophobia appears to be that it doesn’t exist. This is strikingly illustrated by the exclusion of any events designed to celebrate diverse lifestyles or confront homophobic intolerance...<sup>81</sup>

In April 1984, an anonymous letter to the editor expressed the fact that homosexuals on the Colby campus were forced to live a lie, fearing the ramifications of revealing their queer sexuality. The writer claims, “All I wanted this letter to do was to make people think...to think about how hard it is to be at Colby. I’m not seeking sympathy, lovers, friends or enemies; I’m seeking, we are seeking, acceptance.”<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, throughout the nation, attention was being called to issues of sexual orientation. The newfound conversation regarding sexual orientation at Colby was very likely spurred by similar dialogue on the national level. In July of 1981, the *New York Times* ran an article entitled “Rare Cancer In Homosexuals” – marking the first story in the *Times* about the disease that would, one year later, become known as AIDS. The

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<sup>80</sup> “Lesbians Seek Acceptance,” letter to editor, *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXVIII no. 13, 23 February 1984.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> “Homosexuals At Colby Forced to Live a Lie,” letter to the editor, *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXVIII, no. 18, 5 April 1984.

quickly spreading AIDS epidemic served to attract attention to and initiate dialogue about homosexuality throughout the nation – Colby was certainly no exception.

In 1985 the earliest inception of the student organization now known as the Bridge emerged with the intention of forming a comfortable atmosphere for queer students. This organization was really “nothing more than a groups of students concerned with their place as homosexuals within the social organization of Colby.”<sup>83</sup> At this time, “Early meetings were organized and held in private because attempts at holding meetings publicly were met with constant harassment by other students.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, at the first meeting of the unnamed organization, a number of frat brothers (though fraternities had been abolished in 1984, they still persisted underground) stood at the doorway of the meeting place in Roberts Union and took down the names of the attendees while taunting them.<sup>85</sup> Despite the blatant harassment faced by members of this early form of the Bridge, “Meetings continued for quite some time with no support or recognition from the Colby community or administration.”<sup>86</sup>

1986 brought concern about AIDS to the Colby campus, with articles on the disease appearing in the Echo numerous times. These mentions of the disease increased awareness about homosexuality itself. An editorial in a 1986 issue of the Echo noted, “The concern recently expressed in the Colby Echo regarding AIDS seems pointless given the administration’s lack of adequate concern for its prime victims, homosexuals...The liberty to exercise a sexual preference must be first protected and

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<sup>83</sup> Andel, S., Hammond, J., McDonald, L., McKillop, C., Russell, B., Smith, B., “A Theoretical Analysis of the Bridge” Anthropology 313 research paper, 2000.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Julia Steele '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 February 2003.

<sup>86</sup> Andel, S., Hammond, J., McDonald, L., McKillop, C., Russell, B., Smith, B., “A Theoretical Analysis of the Bridge” Anthropology 313 research paper, 2000.

promoted before its consequences discussed. Especially when the consequences are deadly.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the growing national concern over AIDS had pervaded the campus.

In 1987 the Colby College Gay and Lesbian Informational Phonenumber<sup>88</sup> sponsored a satirical questionnaire that was printed in the *Echo*. A number of questions often asked of queer people were turned around and aimed at heterosexual people – “What do you think caused your heterosexuality? If you’ve never slept with someone of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good gay or lesbian lover?”<sup>89</sup> The following week a letter to the editor responding to the questionnaire stated:

The questionnaire is not an effective way to express homosexual viewpoints, it only makes them look bad. They are trying to make us (the heterosexuals) see how they are oppressed. They try to make homosexuality an acceptable institution, they want to make it appear ‘natural.’ Homosexuality is not natural, if it were we would have not developed... An organism which can’t pass on his/her generations has a fitness value of 0, ‘unfit.’ I would hardly consider an individual with a fitness value of 0 to be considered a natural state of being or tendency. It is obviously unnatural...If they [gays and lesbians] weren’t so blatantly outspoken people wouldn’t notice them or bother them. They don’t want that. They want attention and they use the cry of discrimination to get it.<sup>90</sup>

This letter prompted lots of discussion and many letters to the editor of the *Echo*, all of which criticized the “narrow-mindedness” of the original letter. Despite this apparent growing support demonstrated for the queer community, the Colby College Gay and Lesbian Informational Phonenumber was disconnected shortly thereafter, with its founder, Thomas Hagerty ’88, noting that “no one ever called it.”<sup>91</sup>

At the same time that Hagerty was working to establish the Gay and Lesbian Hotline, he and others were also working on a new manifestation of the gay and lesbian

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<sup>87</sup> “Stronger Support for Gays Needed,” Editorial, *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXI, no. 6, 13 Nov 1986, p. 2, 15. At this time AIDS was primarily a disease of gay men, though today AIDS effects homosexuals, heterosexuals, men, and women alike.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Hagerty ’88, e-mail to author, 21 February 2003.

<sup>89</sup> “A Simple Questionnaire,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXI, no. 10, 12 March 1987, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> “Another View,” letter to the editor, *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. LXXXI, no. 12, 19 March 1987. p 3.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Hagerty ’88, e-mail to author, 21 February 2003.

group that had existed on campus for a few years and which would eventually become the Bridge. This organization was called the Colby College Lesbian and Gay Community (CCLGC) and was intended to make the “informal network of support and counseling available to lesbian and gay students”<sup>92</sup> a more well established organization.

Furthermore, the CCLGC attempted to:

1. provide alternative social and educational opportunities for the lesbian and gay community
2. serve all students, faculty, and staff interested in learning more about lesbian and gay issues. Through the Lesbian and Gay informational Phonenumber, the CCLGC offers information on many kinds of resources within Colby College, ME, and New England.
3. educate the Colby Campus about the problems facing lesbians and gays in the world today, such as AIDS, and about ways to constructively react to all forms of oppression<sup>93</sup>

With the graduation of Hagerty, the leadership of the CCLGC changed hands and it eventually became the Bridge. The CCLGC itself, however, demonstrates the growing strength of gay and lesbian groups at Colby, a group that would, in 2002, finally be able to parallel the membership and strength of SOBHU, enabling the formation of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability.

### **The 1990s**

Due in part to the increasing publicity that AIDS brought to the homosexual community throughout the 1980s, the 1990s emerged as a time of heavy activity regarding education about and acceptance of homosexuality. Reference librarian Marilyn Pukkila noted that the swell of activity regarding queer issues at Colby in the 1990s was “a reflection of trends within larger society. More students were going to college having

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<sup>92</sup> Deborah Gentile '88 and Thomas Hagerty '88, letter to Janice Seitzinger (Kassman), Colby College Dean of Students, 21 May 1987.

<sup>93</sup> Colby College Lesbian and Gay Community, all-campus mailing, fall 1987.

*already* come out. In the 80s, students came out *in* college.”<sup>94</sup> People all over the country, students not excluded, had become more comfortable talking about homosexuality, while queer individuals themselves began to demand equality and justice more often and more explicitly.

However, with respect to homosexuality, the 1990s at Colby began in a wholly negative fashion. Discussion about sexuality was prompted not by a newfound open-mindedness, but by a string of homophobic graffiti that defaced the campus in November of 1990. The graffiti found in numerous places on campus was threatening and violent; In Mary Low the phrase “Fag Bashing, sponsored by the Bridge – bring your own bat”<sup>95</sup> was discovered. One student noted that the graffiti is “reflective of the whole [anti-homosexual] attitude on campus.”<sup>96</sup>

While the Colby Administration was upset by the graffiti, its response implied that the graffiti was disturbing only to queer students and not their straight peers. Dean of Students Janice Seitzinger (Kassman) noted ““We are really concerned [about the graffiti]...We realize how harmful [the messages] can be to students with alternative lifestyles.””<sup>97</sup> Certainly the public response demonstrated an increasing awareness and tolerance of queer students and their needs – in the 1950s it was unlikely that such verbal harassment would have ever been made a campus-wide issue at Colby. However, the fact that Seitzinger’s words related largely to the queer community conveys the fact that homophobia was still viewed as being a problem of only the queer community, though cruel words and actions clearly affect all. Indeed, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “In the

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<sup>94</sup> Marily Pukkila, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 February 2003.

<sup>95</sup> “Editorial,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCV, no. 11, 29 November 1990, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> “Rash of Homophobic Graffiti Hits Campus,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCV, no. 11, 29 November 1990, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Janice Seitzinger (Kassman) gtd. in *Ibid*.

end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”<sup>98</sup>

Not until the close of the decade would the Colby Community, at least in part, embrace the concerns of the queer community as their own.

In 1991, the Colby Republicans sponsored a highly controversial speaker, Dr. Earnest van den Haag, to give a lecture open to all interested. Over 400 students, many of whom protested heterosexism during the speech, attended the lecture, in which Dr. van den Haag spoke out against gay-rights legislation. This lecture, besides angering a large segment of the student body, prompted the administration to explore queer issues further. Just a few weeks after the speech, the Campus Community Committee formed a subcommittee, which came to be called “Lesbigay,” to look into the atmosphere for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at Colby. This was Colby’s first subcommittee dealing strictly with issues of sexual orientation. Finally, the administration was recognizing the queer community as an important group with specific needs and concerns. Interestingly, though not surprisingly, just months before, the US Congress passed the Hate Crime Statistics Act. The signing of this act into law by President George H.W. Bush marked the first time the United States Government extended federal recognition to gays and lesbians through law.<sup>99</sup>

The spring of 1992 brought with it the most public celebration of National Coming Out Week in Colby history. Though “there seemed to be so much support during Gay Pride Week last spring,”<sup>100</sup> according to the Echo there was little public discussion about the week – it was certainly not advertised or mentioned in the Echo until

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<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. qtd in Gretchen Groggel ’03, Queer Rally speech, Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 4 March 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Hogan and Hudson, 664.

<sup>100</sup> Kathryn Cosgrove, “Coming Out of the Closet at Colby,” Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo, vol. XCVII, no. 5, 8 October 1992, p.1.

the week had passed. Still, John Cook '92, wrapped a pink ribbon around the clock tower of Miller Library in celebration of the week, noting that his idea to do so was “quite supported”<sup>101</sup> by the administration from the start. While the decoration of the tower was indeed a very visible sign of support of the queer community, the celebrations in the fall of 1992 were to be even more public.

The fall 1992 festivities for National Coming Out Week were outlined in the Echo before the events began, allowing students to plan accordingly (though after 1992, the Echo reverted to its older pattern of announcing the events of Pride Week either halfway through it or after the fact). The movies, lectures, and candle light vigil that took place that week were meant to “increase consciousness... anytime you increase consciousness and awareness you go through an educational process, and you will experience an increase in acceptance.”<sup>102</sup> Professor Of Philosophy Cheshire Calhoun also noted that “It’s important for people to know how many people are and gay and lesbian... Heterosexuals need to realize that 10% of the population is gay or lesbian...It’s also important for other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, particularly teenagers, to know that they aren’t alone.”<sup>103</sup>

In the fall of 1992 the Lesbiganay subcommittee presented its proposals, which had been researched for nearly a year, before the Campus Community Committee. The suggestions, which were all “in the spirit of Colby’s Anti-Discrimination policy,”<sup>104</sup> included, among other requests, hiring a counselor to deal with issues of sexual

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<sup>101</sup> John Cook '92, email to author, 21 January 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Al LaPan as quoted in Kathryn Cosgrove’s “Coming Out of the Closet at Colby,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVII, no. 5, 8 October 1992, p.1.

<sup>103</sup> Kathryn Cosgrove, “Coming Out of the Closet at Colby,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVII, no. 5, 8 October 1992, p.1.

<sup>104</sup> Cheshire Calhoun qtd. in Regina Lipovsky’s ““Lesbigay” Proposes Change,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*. vol XCVII, no. 8, 5 November 1992, p. 6.

orientation, the establishment of an academic program in Gay and Lesbian Studies, and reforming Colby's healthcare plan to cover the domestic partners of gay and lesbian employees. Overall, this meeting of the Campus Community Committee went smoothly, though the silence in response to the proposals was somewhat disturbing. Dean of Housing Paul Johnston noted:

No one who heard this voiced any opposition, though we can't assume silence means support. We can't assume that just because nobody questioned or challenged some of the recommendations that they accepted each of the points... Everybody just kind of nodded. There was a general fear to dissent, which silenced everyone, which was unfortunate. We are looking for input. It may also be that many people didn't have an opinion about these issues.<sup>105</sup>

The only published dissent regarding the proposals appeared in an Echo article two weeks after the meeting and represented one student's view that some of the proposed changes "intrude on the rights of those in the community who may be impartial to homosexual issues."<sup>106</sup> The author of the article went on to address the vast silence in response to the proposals noting, "The reason we have become so afraid of speaking our mind is that we know that we will be labeled as being politically incorrect. Nobody voiced objections because nobody dares oppose anything associated with minority rights."<sup>107</sup> Clearly, even as early as 1992, whether they agreed with it or not, students were becoming aware that to express heterosexist or homophobic attitudes was no longer the social norm.

Throughout 1993, the Lesbiganay subcommittee continued to investigate ways to implement its proposals. The most important outcome of the work done by the subcommittee was the establishment of health insurance that would cover same-sex

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<sup>105</sup> Regina Lipovsky "'Lesbigay' Proposes Change," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*. Vol. XCVII, no. 8, 5 November 1992, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> Nizar Al-Bassam, "Lesbigay Proposals Infringe On Rights Of Others," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVII, no. 9, 12 November 1992, p. 9, 12.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

partners of Colby employees. This plan was implemented in October of 1993 and made Colby the second NESCAC (the New England Small College Athletic Conference, of which Colby is a part) school (after Middlebury) to have such a health plan. While President Cotter noted, “This is something that we’ve wanted to do for a long time,”<sup>108</sup> the actual establishment of the policy came shortly after Levi Strauss & Co. publicly adopted such a plan to cover its 23,000 employees, making it the largest company in the US to do so at the time.<sup>109</sup>

During 1994 the Colby campus was consumed with thoughts of and by talk about multicultural housing centered on race issues. Subsequently, issues of sexual orientation once again became practically invisible, with the only published mention of queer issues being in an Echo article summarizing the events of Coming Out Week *after* they had occurred. However, with the opening of the multicultural center in 1996, which resulted from the debate over multicultural housing, the Bridge (a student group for queer students and their straight allies) received a permanent meeting place in the Pugh Center, certainly a step (or a leap) above the previous space - an old closet in Dana.<sup>110</sup>

In 1997, Colby students again worked to raise awareness of queer issues, though this time in hopes of defeating a referendum which asked voters, “Do you want to reject the law passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor that would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation with respect to jobs, housing, public accommodations, and credit?”<sup>111</sup> The referendum did not pass, and while students’ very

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<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Herbert, “Colby Insurance Now Covers Same-sex Partners,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVIII, no. 4, 30 September 1993, p.1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Hogan and Hudson, 665.

<sup>110</sup> John Cook ’92, e-mail to author, 21 January 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Maine GayNet Archives, 1997. [www.qrd.org/qrd/www/usa/Maine](http://www.qrd.org/qrd/www/usa/Maine)

visible enthusiasm about queer rights subsided for a while, they would emerge stronger than ever in 1998.

As in 1990, 1998 brought with it a heightened awareness regarding queer issues, though the new consciousness was again triggered by a setback in the fight against heterosexism and homophobia. In February 1998, the same year that the US Congress itself voted down the passage of a bill banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, Question #1 on the Maine ballot, which rejected the law approved by the state legislature and governor that would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, credit and public accommodations, passed with 52% support. Essentially, the passage of this question meant that queer individuals could legally and openly be discriminated against in everyday life in the state of Maine. However, Ward 3, of which Colby is a part, presented the greatest disparity between Yes and No votes with 450 No votes and 53 Yes votes. These statistics suggest that, overall, Colby voters were in favor of banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. In fact, “Efforts by Colby students were praised by Waterville Mayor Ruth Joseph, who said they ‘did a great job as always.’”<sup>112</sup>

Though disappointed by the outcome of the vote, many Colby students resolved to continue their fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation, noting, “We’ll just have to fight harder next time.”<sup>113</sup> Their will was tested just days later by the announcement that homophobic graffiti had been discovered the Hillside dorms. President Cotter commented, “these incidents may very well have been instigated by a recent statewide referendum which repealed legislation prohibiting discrimination on the

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<sup>112</sup> Kate Dunlop, “A “Yes” Vote on Question #1 Shocks Colby,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXX, no. 14, 19 February 1998, p. 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

basis of sexual orientation.”<sup>114</sup> An article in the Echo that week expressed the abhorrence felt by many:

We supposedly live in this other world under the “Colby Bubble,” where the real world issues and everyday problems are a myth. Under this “bubble,” we can live our lives with a carefree, ignorant attitude, blocking out anything that could interfere with our own lightheaded happiness. It’s time to wake up and realize that Colby can be just as cruel as the rest of the world.<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, while some students may have felt secluded from society at large, the Colby Community as a whole mirrored that same society in both positive and negative fashions. When it was discovered that the “perpetrator” of the hate crimes was actually the supposed “victim,” the school was shocked. The student withdrew from Colby and his or her motives for committing the crimes were never publicly discussed. Though the incident outraged the college, Bridge Member Julia McDonald ’99 noted, “The community has been wonderful; a dialogue has been opened up on campus...people really opened their eyes.”<sup>116</sup>

In October of 1998, increased attention to queer issues was triggered by yet another hateful tragedy. On October 8, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay 22-year-old University of Wyoming student, was kidnapped, robbed, beaten, and left for dead, tied to the fence of a Wyoming ranch for eighteen hours before a passing bicyclist discovered him. Shepard died five days later from his injuries. Though robbery was believed to be the primary motive in Shepard’s murder, investigators also said, “Mr. Shepard’s sexual

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<sup>114</sup> Amy Montemerlo, “Homophobic Graffiti Discovered in Hillside Complex,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXX, no. 15, 26 February 1998, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> Dan MacCarone, “Homophobia Must End,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXX, no. 15, 26 February 1998, p. 11.

<sup>116</sup> Amy Montemerlo and Wilson Everhart, “Hillside Hate Crimes Solved: Victim Turns Out to be Perpetrator, Questions Remain,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*,

orientation was a factor.”<sup>117</sup> Shepard’s death drew national attention to and debate over National Hate Crime Legislation, or lack thereof.

On campus, members of the Bridge mailed letters to all students explaining the tragedy of Shepard’s brutal death and requested that everyone join them in wearing black on October 14<sup>th</sup> as a demonstration of outrage about this type of discrimination.<sup>118</sup> In December, students and faculty formed “Project Ally” and wrote a letter to the Echo hoping to gain supporters:

How many when hearing of the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard thought there is nothing that we can do to stop this kind of violence? I welcome each of us to claim a bit more of the belief that we can TRULY DO something about this. As allies we can do NOTHING less than continue to battle homophobia...We want you to consider a program [Project Ally] that would give us a hand in this...This program would be institutionalized into this academic community. What this means is that for this program to be most effective, it would have us look at our policies, our behavior and our programming and how these either support the celebration of the gay community or not.<sup>119</sup>

Project Ally soon established itself as a persistent voice in support of queer students and against homophobia and heterosexism at Colby College.

The battle against heterosexism once again died down for a period in 1999, perhaps partly due to the focus on racial issues at Colby. However, at the start of the 2000-2001 academic year it reemerged stronger than ever. In October of 2000, the addition of a non-discrimination amendment to the constitution of the Student Government Association (SGA) was put to a campus-wide vote. The amendment would affirm that it was the official policy of the SGA to “protect members of the Colby community from discrimination ““based upon sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry,

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<sup>117</sup> James Brooke, “Gay Man Dies From Attack, Fanning Outrage and Debate,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1998, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Renee Lajeunesse, “Gay Student’s Murder Prompts Outrage,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 6, 15 October 1998, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Julia McDonald ’99, June Thornton-Marsh, Tarja Raag, “To Allies of the Gay Community,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXI, no. 2, 10 December 1998, p. 6.

religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, or access to economic resources.”<sup>120</sup> It passed with overwhelming support.

At the same time, students were working hard to plan a rally for the gay rights referendum that was to be voted upon in November. The rally, planned by students in Professor Phyllis Mannocchi’s English class, “Art and Oppression,” was announced in the Echo before it took place in hopes of gaining more support. The fall 2000 rally drew an impressive crowd comprised of students, staff, faculty and members of the Waterville Community who “chanted loudly to encourage students to support the referendum intended to end discrimination against Maine’s gays and lesbians in the areas of employment, housing, and credit.”<sup>121</sup> Despite the enthusiasm of much of the Colby Community for passing the referendum, it was, as in past years, defeated at the polls.

Once again, students at Colby refused to give up fighting heterosexism. In the spring of 2001, in response to a complaint from the queer community at Colby regarding the atmosphere on campus for queer individuals, the President’s Council<sup>122</sup> unanimously passed a motion urging President Bro Adams to add a queer studies program to the curriculum.<sup>123</sup> Integrating classes dealing with issues of sexual orientation into the academic program at Colby became a prominent campus issue in the fall of 2001. The momentum of this fight persisted throughout the 2001-2002 academic year and carried students into what would become the spring 2002 protest before the trustees.

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<sup>120</sup> Erika Thoreson, “Students Approve Non-Discrimination Amendment to SGA Constitution,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXIII, no 7, 27 October 2000, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Bernal, “Student-Planned Gay Rights Rally Draws Large Crowd,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXIII, no. 8, 19 April 2001, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> President’s Council is a council comprised of elected members of the Student Government Association including the SGA President, Vice President, Parliamentarian, Secretary, and the presidents of each dorm at Colby, as well as one representative of each class. This group is considered to be the single most politically powerful student organization at Colby.

<sup>123</sup> Liz Bomze, “Queer Life Initiative Passed Unanimously,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, 19 April 2001, p. 1.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Influence of the Curriculum and the Faculty on the Fights Against Racism and Heterosexism At Colby**

*“One of the truths of the world is that people hate that which they do not understand.”  
- Jennifer Finney Boylan, Professor of English*

While it is undeniable that activism against racism and heterosexism at Colby is closely related to larger social trends, it is also clear that the diversification of the curriculum – the offering of increasingly specialized courses in all fields of study – has had a profound influence on these movements at Colby. Since World War II, in particular, American higher education has experienced a general phenomenon where courses in every field have become increasingly specialized. This widespread expansion has included the offering of courses on race and sexuality, subjects previously overlooked in academia. Colby’s own curriculum has, unsurprisingly, mirrored this societal trend.

Throughout the past half century the curriculum of Colby College has expanded to include many highly specialized courses. This growth has been due, in part, to the increasingly comfortable financial status of the school, the expansion of higher education in America in general, the diversification of curricula at other colleges, and the demands of the student body. The trends have included greater coverage of race and sexuality, a development reinforced by the growing tolerance in American society of minority races and ethnicities, and of homosexuals. Thus, over time, it has become more and more acceptable for colleges, including Colby, to offer courses specializing in the study of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation within the framework of a liberal arts education.

With the expansion of curricula in American higher education in general, Colby has hired professors with an interest in race and sexuality. As more courses specializing

in these areas have been offered, particularly throughout the 1990s, students at Colby have been made aware of racism and heterosexism at Colby and in American society. Furthermore, professors with an interest in courses on minority races and sexual orientations may encourage, if not require outright, that students act to counter racism and heterosexism outside the classroom.

Indeed, the exclusion of courses and materials focusing on African-American and queer individuals and culture “sends a powerful message about what the College values and deems intellectually and culturally important enough to recognize and support.”<sup>124</sup> Alternately, the growing inclusion of such areas of study has helped and will continue to help all students to realize that discrimination against African-Americans and queers existed in the past, still exists, and will persist if dramatic changes in society are not enacted. By learning about subjects long overlooked by academe, students have been awakened to the possibility for such change.

### **Race and Ethnicity in the Colby Curriculum**

The diversification of the Colby curriculum in the area of race and ethnicity emerged long before it became evident in the area of sexuality – a clear reflection of societal norms and standards. As early as 1947 (more than a decade and a half before the peak years of the civil rights movement), Colby offered a sociology course entitled “Race and Minority Groups.” The course is described in the catalogue as presenting “the major problems of race and minority groups in the modern world.”<sup>125</sup> Clearly, while it might seem progressive to have offered a course about minority races in the 1940s, it is obvious

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<sup>124</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 22.

<sup>125</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1947-1948*, (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1947) p. 67.

from the wording of the catalogue description that this course did not yet fully respect and appreciate racial and ethnic minorities, as distinct from studying “the problems” they both posed and faced.

Though race and ethnicity may have been discussed by professors in courses not dedicated to the subject, it was not until the arrival of English Professor Pat Brancaccio in 1963 that a course concentrating on racial and ethnic minorities (other than “Race and Minority Groups”) emerged. As a new professor required to teach a January course, Brancaccio decided to teach a month-long class on African-American literature.<sup>126</sup> While not listed in the course catalogue, perhaps because of its January status, this course represents the first time in Colby’s history that a class on any aspect of African-American culture was offered.

While this course was supported by the administration, it was not conceived by it. Indeed, there were not yet overwhelming student demands nor was there administrative encouragement of courses focusing on African-American culture. Rather, the course was a reflection of Brancaccio’s own education at Rutgers, where he had been exposed to such courses. Furthermore, his work throughout graduate school as a substitute teacher in New York City’s public schools exposed him to many young black teachers who helped him realize the importance of learning about African-American culture.

Brancaccio’s January course had a profound effect on at least one student. Donna (Brown) Salisbury ’65 spent the spring of 1963 at Fisk University, one of the nation’s most notable black colleges (and also the one of the most racially volatile), after taking this class. She directly attributes her interest in the experience of the African-American to Brancaccio’s literature course, noting, “The readings and discussions aroused my

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<sup>126</sup> Pat Brancaccio, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 14 February 2003.

passion for racial justice, as well as broadened my understanding of the evolution and perpetuation of racism.”<sup>127</sup>

The greatest advance in the diversification of the Colby curriculum with regard to race was made by a visiting professor intended only as a semester-long replacement for a history professor on sabbatical. Shortly after Colby formed a Black Studies Subcommittee of the Educational Policy Committee, Jack D. Foner was hired to teach only during the spring of 1969. Fired years earlier from his job at City College in New York after being blacklisted as a Communist, and also because of what City College perceived as his “excessive attention to the role of blacks in American history.”<sup>128</sup>

Born in 1910, Foner graduated from City College of New York in 1932 and received his masters from Columbia University in 1933. Two years later, Foner began teaching history at his alma mater. At this time he became “involved in causes like support for the anti-fascist forces in Spain [and] the trade union movement.”<sup>129</sup> He also furthered his interest, triggered by an “acquaintance with the late W.E.B. DuBois, the famed black scholar,” in the plight of the African-American and the civil rights movement.<sup>130</sup> Due to these associations, Foner became caught up in a pre-McCarthy Red scare, eventually being called, in 1941, before the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Educational System of the State of New York. Foner refused to answer the committee’s questions and was branded a Communist, though it remains unclear as to whether he had joined the Communist Party or not. Foner was fired from his position at City College shortly thereafter.

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<sup>127</sup> Donna (Brown) Salisbury '55, e-mail to author, 11 February 2003.

<sup>128</sup> William H. Honan, “Jack D. Foner, 88, Historian and Pioneer in Black Studies,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1999, late edition, sec B, p. 13, col 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Morning sentinel 30 July 1976

Having been blacklisted throughout the Red scare, Foner had trouble finding a teaching position for over twenty years, so he took the opportunity to further educate himself, receiving his Ph.D. in history from Columbia University in 1968. Refusing to back down even after being persecuted by the government and the educational system, Foner believed, “One cannot have a fundamental understanding of United States history...without having a fundamental understanding of the black condition.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, upon his arrival at Colby, Foner immediately suggested to Albert Mavrinnac, chairman of the History and Government Department, “that the school should introduce a course in Afro-American history. Mavrinnac approved of Foner’s idea and soon a memo from the Colby News Bureau noted that among Foner’s courses “will be a new one in the Colby curriculum, ‘The Negro in American History.’”<sup>132</sup> Years later, the *Morning Sentinel* commented on Foner’s initiative:

When Professor Foner gave out his first assignment that spring semester the students in his classroom became the first in New England to embark on such a course of studies [African-American Studies]. The program was so well received by both the schools’ black and white students that Dr. Foner was asked to stay on at Colby on a permanent basis. And what began as a single course in the spring of ’69 has mushroomed to four separate offerings which trace the blacks from their African origin to the present.<sup>133</sup>

Indeed, Foner’s promotion of a program of Black Studies at Colby was revolutionary. Pat Brancaccio recalls that following his sabbatical in 1969, he returned to find the curriculum at Colby much changed, due largely to Jack Foner.<sup>134</sup> In his first semester at Colby, Foner managed not only to permanently establish one of the first programs of African-American Studies in the country, but he also “earned Colby the distinction of having *the* [italics mine] most extensive black history program of any

<sup>131</sup> *The Colby Alumnus* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, Winter 1975): 4.

<sup>132</sup> Colby News Bureau, *Memo*, Waterville, Maine, 9 December 1968.

<sup>133</sup> Ann McGowan, “Foner Time in ME – A ‘Most Rewarding Experience,’” (*Maine*) *Morning Sentinel*, 30 July 1976, p. 8.

<sup>134</sup> Pat Brancaccio, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 14 February 2003.

undergraduate school in the country.”<sup>135</sup> In 1970, only a few months after Foner began teaching at Colby, a Princeton University official with “extensive background in Afro-American studies” noted that Colby had more resources for the development of a Black Studies Program than many other colleges with already firmly established programs.<sup>136</sup> In 1972, Colby officially established a permanent Black Studies Program. In the 1973-1974 academic year, students were permitted to “concentrate on Black Studies” within the history major.<sup>137</sup> By 1975, enrollment in Foner’s four courses approached one hundred students hailing from a variety of majors. Though Foner retired from Colby in 1976 at the age of 66, just seven years after his arrival at the college, his legacy endures.

Throughout the 1970s, numerous courses on African-Americans emerged. The Departments of English and History at Colby were particularly active in including classes on ethnicity and race in the curriculum. It is interesting to note that not only were more and more courses dealing with issues of ethnicity and race added, the material being taught in these courses quickly grew more sophisticated. For instance, the course description of the new 1978-1979 “Seminar in Black History” noted that the class would consist of:

Group discussion and individual reports based on readings and research on selected topics in Black history from 1955 to the present, including current ideologies and activities in the Black community.<sup>138</sup>

Just three years later, this same course was described as:

“Black Thought and Leadership.” An intensive examination of selected leaders in Afro-American history, focusing particularly on civil rights activists and black nationalists of the past century. W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X are among those whose biographies and writings will be explored.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ann McGowan, “Foner Time in ME – A ‘Most Rewarding Experience,’” *(Maine) Morning Sentinel*, 30 July 1976, p. 8.

<sup>136</sup> “Black Studies” *The Colby Alumnus* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, Fall 1970) p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1973-74* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1973) p. 71.

<sup>138</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1978-1978* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1978) p. 136.

<sup>139</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1981-1982* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1978) p. 152.

It is clear that within just a few years the curriculum of the African-American Studies program was becoming more specialized. When, in the 1989-1990 academic year, students were permitted to minor in African-American Studies, more than 25 courses directly concerning race and ethnicity were offered at Colby. Additionally, the Colby College Catalogue from that year notes, “Interested students are also encouraged to consider an independent major in African-American Studies.”<sup>140</sup> In the fall of 1994, African-American Studies finally emerged as an interdisciplinary major with nearly forty courses dealing with all aspects of African-American culture.

### **Sexual Orientation in the Colby Curriculum**

Before the 1990s the study of homosexuality was often viewed as distasteful and unnecessary, even within the relatively liberal world of academia. Though even in the 1980s there was only one course focusing on gay and lesbian individuals and gay and lesbian culture, as early as 1945 there was a course in the philosophy department, “Ethical Issues in the Modern World,” that dealt with “specific contemporary problems,” including “American sexual morality and the family.”<sup>141</sup> Because Colby as an institution does not keep records of past course syllabi, it is impossible to know what the abovementioned “sexual morality” entailed. From the course description, it seems likely that homosexuality may have been mentioned in the class, though, because Colby was and indeed is a microcosm of the greater society, one can deduce that homosexuality was most likely portrayed as a serious “contemporary problem.” Again because of Colby’s tendency to reflect the attitudes of American society as a whole, it is probable that even

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<sup>140</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1989-1990* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1989) p. 50.

<sup>141</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1949-1950* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1949) p. 89.

when queer individuals were studied and their accomplishments celebrated in the classroom (i.e. Michaelangelo, Walt Whitman), their sexuality was never discussed.

In the 1951-1952 academic year the Sociology Department offered a class entitled “Marriage and the Family:”

A course which presents the available scientific knowledge about marriage. It deals with: mate selection, courtship, engagement, sex relations, emotional maturity, legal control, in-laws, finances, family planning and reproduction, family maladjustments, and the functions of marriage counseling.<sup>142</sup>

While not dealing outright with issues of homosexuality, as its course description indicates, this course may have touched upon it. Because the course aimed outright to present *contemporary* scientific knowledge, it is highly probable that homosexuality was discussed as a psychological disorder. When the American Psychiatric Association published its first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1952, homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder. Indeed, it was not until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from this list.

In the 1979-1980 academic year the Psychology Department offered a course entitled “Human Sexuality.” As with previous courses dealing with sexuality, the course description only hints that homosexuality may have been discussed:

This course aims to provide students with accurate information to aid them in forming their personal value systems and in coping with current and future problems. Topics will include mammalian anatomy, embryology, and sexual behavior, the physiology of human sexual response, cross-cultural perspectives, normal psychosexual development and response, the paraphilias, major sexual dysfunctions, and reproductive problems.<sup>143</sup>

Due to largely negative societal views of homosexuality in the late 1970s, the mention of *normal* psychosexual development and response, the paraphilias, and major sexual *dysfunctions* indicates that if and when homosexuality was discussed in this

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<sup>142</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1951-1952*, (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1951) p. 75.

<sup>143</sup> *Colby College Catalogue, 1979-1980* (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1979) p. 149.

course, it was in the form of a psychological disorder. This conclusion was supported by the Gay & Lesbian Almanac when it noted, “Historically, [psychological and scientific] theories to explain sexuality, particularly same-sex sexuality, have tended to reflect societal attitudes at a given time.”<sup>144</sup> The “Report of the Queer Task Force at Colby” in 2002 reiterated this notion, commenting that while many courses have included some content related to Queer Studies, they “are not typically taught from a queer perspective, but rather, from a majority perspective.”<sup>145</sup>

Because of vague course descriptions and poor record keeping, it is impossible to know for sure if queer individuals or queer culture was ever openly discussed in anything but a negative fashion in any Colby College course before the emergence of the Women’s Studies Program. In 1977, English Professor Phyllis Mannocchi was hired to teach Women’s Studies. At this time, society directly associated Women’s Studies with Lesbian Studies and, indeed, such courses generally did openly discuss issues of sexual orientation. Because of this, Mannocchi endured endless harassment from the community, often fearing for her own safety. Community members were so outraged that Mannocchi was teaching courses involving lesbian issues that they clubbed her cat to death in the 1980s.

Despite these obstacles, Mannocchi taught the first course at Colby that explicitly dealt with gay and lesbian individuals in the 1985-1986 academic year. This course, entitled “Art and Oppression,” examined,

The development of gay and lesbian literature in Anglo-American society; how a minority responds to societal oppression that ranges from “invisibility” to censorship and persecution...Special issues to be addressed include sexuality and the transformation of the literary tradition and convention, the development of an underground culture, the

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<sup>144</sup> Neil Schlager, *Gay & Lesbian Almanac* (New York: St. James Press, 1998) p. 12.

<sup>145</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 20.

unique vision of the “double minority,” and the emergence into the cultural mainstream of gay and lesbian “political” voice.<sup>146</sup>

“Art and Oppression” (intentionally vaguely named so the words “gay and lesbian” would not appear on a student’s transcript when applying for a job in the largely heterosexist society of 1980s America) was the first gay and lesbian studies college course offered in the state of Maine. Mannocchi’s idea to teach such a revolutionary course was directly triggered by a horrific event in society. In the summer of 1984, Charlie Howard, a young Bangor man, drowned after being pushed off of a bridge by three teenagers. At the time, Bangor Police noted, “Howard apparently was killed because of his homosexuality.” Charlie Howard’s murder emerged as the first well known gay-hate crime in the country.

Outraged by Howard’s murder, Mannocchi felt that it was time to teach students about gay and lesbian individuals explicitly, to create awareness about homosexuality. She recalled that when she proposed the idea for the course, “[President] Bill Cotter came to my office and said, ‘Whatever you need, I’ll help you with it.’”<sup>147</sup> However, the whole of the Colby Community was not as supportive. Mannocchi endured a “lot of personal attacks by other faculty...mocking me, making fun of lesbians.”<sup>148</sup> Mannocchi encountered resistance from wider society as well, receiving phone calls from individuals and organizations disgusted that she was teaching a course regarding gay and lesbian individuals, to which she replied, “This is a private school and it is none of your business.”<sup>149</sup> Despite the initial hardships, “Art and Oppression” has been offered regularly since its conception nearly two decades ago.

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<sup>146</sup> *Colby College Catalogue*, 1985-1986 (Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 1985) p. 84.

<sup>147</sup> Phyllis Mannocchi. Conversation with author. Waterville, Maine. 22 April 2003.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Believing that “because academics are linked to politics, if a teacher is motivated in that way [politically], then the classroom can be a dynamic place for activism, though it depends how the course is set up, who is teaching it, and what is being taught,”<sup>150</sup> Phyllis Mannocchi knew from the start that her “Art and Oppression” class would have an effect on student activism at Colby. When planning the course, Mannocchi decided “there’d be an academic part of the course [“Art and Oppression”], but there’d also be an activist part, too.”<sup>151</sup> And, indeed, students in “Art and Oppression” (and in Mannocchi’s later gay and lesbian studies courses) were active in fighting for social justice from the start – staging performances starring gay and lesbian characters, fighting for the passage of civil rights laws, making documentaries pushing for social change.

While “Art and Oppression” was indeed a groundbreaking class, throughout the latter half of the 1980s it would remain the only gay and lesbian studies course offered at Colby. Concern over the lack of gay and lesbian studies courses at Colby began in the early 1990s with the publication of the proposals made by the “Lesbigay” subcommittee of the Campus Community Committee. It was at this time that both the diversification of the curriculum with respect to queer issues and the hiring of professors who specialized in this area clearly began to influence the behavior of students fighting heterosexism. In the fall of 1992, the subcommittee called for “the establishment of a program in Gay and Lesbian Studies, a regularly offered Human Sexuality course and a first year book that periodically deals with issues of sexual orientation.”<sup>152</sup> Subcommittee member Ned Brown ’93 noted, “Issues of homosexuality have been ignored in academia until the past

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Regina Lipovsky, ““Lesbigay” Proposes Change,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. XCVII, no. 8, 5 November 1992, p 6.

two or three decades...Other colleges and universities have been changing that, and it's high time Colby does the same. It may be beneficial for Colby students to actually find out what Gay and Lesbian Studies consist of.”<sup>153</sup> Members of the Bridge supported the position of the subcommittee, convinced that “People of alternative lifestyles are one of the few minority groups not well represented in the diversity oriented Colby curriculum.”<sup>154</sup>

Proving herself yet again to be a pioneer in the academic study of queer individuals, Phyllis Mannocchi offered Colby College's first queer studies course in 1996. While the institution did not make an official distinction between “gay and lesbian studies” and “queer studies,” those who teach such courses maintain that the difference is important. The emergence of queer studies in the 1990s was a logical progression out of the constricting categories embodied in gay and lesbian studies of the 1980s. Early gay and lesbian studies courses dealt with political, cultural and social categories, whereas “queer is much more about transformative sexual identities.”<sup>155</sup> Gay and Lesbian Studies examines gay and lesbian issues as the majority perceives them, while Queer Studies takes a more intrinsic perspective –the way in which queer individuals view themselves.

While many modern academics view queer studies as being the most inclusive way to incorporate the study of gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered, and questioning individuals into the curriculum, some critics worry that the queer movement will, in an attempt to deconstruct barriers, disregard issues of race and ethnicity. Whether one agrees with queer studies, or even the term queer itself, “the fact is, it's being used” and

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> The Bridge qtd. in Whitney Glockner, “Bridge Challenges Colby to Stand Up For Lesbigan Education,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, 28 October 1993, p.2.

<sup>155</sup> Phyllis Mannocchi, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 28 April 2003.

this, in itself, is drawing attention to and debate over the study of gay, lesbian and queer culture, an area of academe previously overlooked.

Mannocchi's senior English seminar entitled "Queer Culture" was offered in the spring of 1996 and represents the first course taught from a queer perspective at Colby. Because it was a senior seminar, "Queer Culture" was never listed in the course catalogue. Inspired by reading she had been doing on the newly emerging academic topic of queer theory, Mannocchi decided to offer the course as a seminar (indeed a class on queer culture was not part of the standard core classes that the English Department expected Mannocchi to teach) and recalled with a smile, "It was packed, and we had such a great time, *such* a great time."<sup>156</sup> While the class was popular and successful, it was offered only once due to the fact that Mannocchi, on top of her regular classes, simply didn't have the time to teach it again and there was no other professor qualified to take over for her.

Despite the fact that in the spring of 1994 Dean of Faculty Robert McArthur announced that grants were available for faculty wishing to develop courses on queer issues, as late as 2001 the Queer Studies Program was still only in the planning stages (as it had been since the formation of the "Lesbigay" subcommittee in 1991).<sup>157</sup> In the spring of 2000, the President's Council unanimously passed a motion, after over 750 students signed a petition in support of the proposal, urging the Colby administration to include Queer Studies in the curriculum. However, a year later no member of the faculty had yet to submit the necessary proposal to the Academic Affairs Committee providing "detailed justification of the need for such a program, along with documentation that we have

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<sup>156</sup> Phyllis Mannocchi, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 24 March 2003.

<sup>157</sup> Alexis Grant, "Queer Studies Program Still in Planning Stages," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXIV, no. 5. 4 October 2001, p. 1.

sufficient staffing and course offerings to support a new program in this area.”<sup>158</sup>

Professor Margaret McFadden attributed the lack of initiative on the part of the faculty in pushing for Queer Studies to the fact that “everyone is pretty busy this time of year, so we really have not gotten started” and that “there are a lot of important competing priorities at this moment, so there is certainly no guarantee that the administration would provide the necessary resources.”<sup>159</sup>

Despite the lack of formal faculty proposals for a Queer Studies Program, the faculty themselves and the courses they taught (and continue to teach) have been instrumental in increasing awareness of queer issues at Colby. In the fall of 2000, students in Professor Phyllis Mannocchi’s “Art and Oppression” class staged a rally in favor of the gay rights referendum (which would have made it illegal to discriminate in housing, credit, or employment against individuals because of their sexual orientation) to be voted on that November. The Colby Echo noted that while participation in the rally was not required (the event was conceived by a student, not by Professor Mannocchi), no student in the class was left out of the preparation for the event:

Whether it has been gathering in the lounge of Mary Low to make picket signs at night, stuffing mailboxes, securing featured speakers, making phone calls, writing press releases, or spreading the word in the community, everyone has had a hand in making this important event possible.<sup>160</sup>

Though the referendum did not pass on voting day, the rally was still considered by both students and faculty alike as highly successful in increasing visibility for the queer community.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Margaret McFadden qtd. in Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Brooke Fitzsimmons, “Students Organize Rally For Gay Rights Referendum,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXIII, no. 7, 27 October 2000, p 3.

Similarly, Professor McFadden's American Studies course "Alternative Popular Culture," offered for the first time in the spring of 2002, helped to bring widespread visibility to the persistence of heterosexism on campus. The syllabus of this class states:

Mainstream American popular culture has generally not been kind to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people. Either they are not represented at all – "symbolically annihilated," in Larry Gross's phrase – or they have been depicted in predictably stereotypical and/or demeaning ways that reinforce widespread homophobia and discrimination.<sup>161</sup>

The course mandated participation in some type of activism to counter heterosexism and homophobia on campus (though the level of visibility of this participation varied). The final project in the class involved "working with a group of your classmates to design and carry out a concrete project to increase GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered] visibility on campus. This may take many different forms, and you will have lots of room to be creative."<sup>162</sup> The most obvious attempt by students in "Alternative Popular Cultures" to counter discrimination based on sexual orientation was their organization of Colby's First Annual Drag Show, which drew hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and administrative spectators. The Colby Echo noted, "The drag show aimed to break down walls that exist in the Colby community regarding queer issues on campus."<sup>163</sup> For many students not in the class, viewing the drag show marked the first time they had been exposed to the injustice inflicted on queers both on and off the Colby campus.

Though Professor McFadden's course enabled students to learn about queer culture and raised the visibility of the queer community, in a decade where Queer Studies

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<sup>161</sup> Margaret McFadden, *Course Syllabus for AM398: Alternative Popular Cultures*, Colby College, Spring 2002.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Kate Russo, "Drag Show Creates Campus Enthusiasm for Queer Community," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, 11 April 2002. p. 1.

had become “one of the most intellectually lively and rapidly expanding areas of the academy,”<sup>164</sup> Colby still offered only a select few courses in the area. The frustration of queers and their allies at Colby with what was viewed as insufficient progress in decreasing heterosexism in all areas of the college, including the curriculum, was best embodied by the formation of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability and the subsequent spring 2002 protest before the trustees. Unsurprisingly, many of the students active in this protest were simultaneously enrolled in “Alternative Popular Culture.” Indeed students who opted to take a class on queer issues were probably more likely than their peers to be concerned with discrimination against queers at Colby. Moreover, the very exposure of students to queer issues and to activism by Professor McFadden’s course may have further encouraged students to take their concerns to the Board of Trustees.

Partially as a result of the demands made by the Coalition for Institutional Accountability before the trustees in the spring of 2002,<sup>165</sup> the Queer Task Force was formed in June of 2002 with the mission of exploring “GLBTT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered] issues and concerns.”<sup>166</sup> In December of 2002, the task force, after hundreds of hours of work, published its recommendations for ensuring that queer people are “treated equally with others and are able to participate fully in all aspects of campus life.”<sup>167</sup> In discussing the importance of Queer Studies, the task force

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<sup>164</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 19.

<sup>165</sup> While President William “Bro” Adams may indeed have considered forming a task force to examine queer issues at Colby long before the 2002 protest, senior members of the administration acknowledge that the June 2002 formation of the group was perhaps somewhat influenced by the Coalition for Institutional Accountability. Arnie Yasisinski, Administrative Vice President and Treasurer and Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 April 2003.

<sup>166</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Task Force of GLBTT Issues,” 1 June 2002 [www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html](http://www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

<sup>167</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 1.

noted the intellectual and social rationale for incorporating queer issues into all aspects of teaching and scholarship:

Substantial bodies of important work in gay and lesbian history, literary studies, sociology, psychology, classics, philosophy, art history, film/popular culture studies, and social/cultural theory are now central to their respective disciplines and powerfully affect the way all scholars in their fields think, not only about the social and cultural organization of sex, gender, and sexuality, but also about much larger questions of the social construction of power and knowledge...Since Queer Studies is now frequently included as an essential part of graduate training in many social science and humanity disciplines, and in many professional schools, Colby has an obligation to its students to introduce them to this significant new scholarly field, as a part of preparing them appropriately for future graduate study.<sup>168</sup>

Indeed, today most Ivy League schools have some kind of Queer Studies Program. Furthermore, in the New England Small College Athletic Conference, “Bowdoin, Amherst, and Wesleyan have organized QS programs, Trinity is in the process of creating a program, and Tufts, Williams, and Bates all offer quite a few courses in this area.”<sup>169</sup> Throughout the 1990s Colby offered a few courses dealing with queer issues, with many being taught by Professor Phyllis Mannocchi - “the pioneer in this field at Colby.”<sup>170</sup> While some visiting professors have opted to teach courses in queer studies, there has been no consistency whatsoever in Colby’s offerings in this area. Since the late 1990s, there have been a few new Queer Studies courses taught, all of which “have been enrolled at or above capacity.”<sup>171</sup>

It was not until the formation of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability and the Spring 2002 protest before the trustees that the Queer Studies Program, initiated over a decade earlier, gained any real substance. In the fall of 2002, the Women’s Studies Program, renamed “Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies,” implemented the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force qtd. in Colby College Queer Task Force “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

requirement that majors must concentrate in one of three areas, one of which is Queer Studies. Currently there are roughly twenty courses that count toward the Queer Studies Concentration, though the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Department notes, "most of these courses that count towards this concentration are not explicitly QS courses...[but] they have significant relevant content."<sup>172</sup> While these courses are certainly a step toward establishing a permanent Queer Studies Program, "The difficulty with this is that these courses are not, in fact, Queer Studies courses, as they do not necessarily approach the material from a queer perspective."<sup>173</sup>

Currently, the administration is further exploring the proposal of the Queer Task Force to create a Queer Studies minor. The Report of the Queer Task Force highlighted the importance of the curriculum in spurring student activism, particularly with respect to queer issues:

Students of any orientation who learn queer history, analyze queer literature, look anew at the world using queer theory, and learn the details of the rich, sophisticated, and diverse cultures that queer people have created in the face of overwhelming odds and discrimination are often inspired to see themselves as a part of a tradition and a history, and to participate *actively* [italics mine] in making that tradition live here at Colby and in the larger community. For example, students taking Queer Studies courses in the last few years have organized political rallies in support of a state gay rights bill, held forums for intellectual and political discussion, put on film series, poetry readings, and various queer-themed social events, made and screened powerful documentaries, and even helped Waterville High School students and faculty create a Gay-Straight Alliance. These are wonderful educational experiences, both for the organizers and for those who attend and learn, but they are one-time events, and if the classes that enable this work are not offered, few such events take place.<sup>174</sup>

Clearly, over the past half-century, there has been a significant increase in the amount of queer material being incorporated into the curriculum at Colby. Though the

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<sup>172</sup> "Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Website: About the Concentrations," fall 2002, [www.colby.edu/woMainens.studies/about.html](http://www.colby.edu/woMainens.studies/about.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

<sup>173</sup> It should be noted that reference to a "queer perspective" is wholly theoretical, in that courses dealing with queer issues can be taught from an outside perspective (a non-traditional perspective) or from the foundations of queer theory (a theory not developed until the 1990s). The quote is not meant to imply that only queer professors can effectively teach queer studies courses. Colby College Queer Task Force, "Report of the Queer Task Force," December 2002, p. 20.

<sup>174</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, "Report of the Queer Task Force," December 2002, p. 20.

curriculum is far from satisfactory with respect to eliminating heterosexism in the academic arena,<sup>175</sup> progress has been made. Similarly, steps in incorporating African-American Studies into the curriculum at Colby came only after years of persistence on the part of students, professors, and administrators alike.

The often profound influence of professors on student activism is not limited to issues of race and sexuality, but can permeate many different disciplines as well (environmental studies, education, government and politics, sociology etc.). Professor Karen Barnhardt of the Education and Human Development Department, a key faculty supporter of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability, maintains that while many assume that education is supposed to be a neutral and objective process, she believes that education is “a very political and moral endeavor.”<sup>176</sup> The relationship between professors and students is one surrounded by a myriad of power in that professors have the ability to expose students to materials they do not necessarily want to acknowledge and say to them, “You don’t have to accept it [the material or the point of view], but I want you to become familiar with it...This is very different from espousing a set of beliefs.”<sup>177</sup>

The advances made (which were in part influenced by the expansion of the curriculum and the professors teaching it) in working to eliminate the racism and heterosexism from the curriculum may encourage future attempts at change. Credit for such progress should be given, at least in part, to the professors who so passionately

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<sup>175</sup> Even today, “Queer studies courses or courses with significant QS content are not listed together anywhere, and many of the course descriptions in the catalogue make it difficult to discern which courses explore these topics.” Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 20.

<sup>176</sup> Karen Barnhardt, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 28 April 2003.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

pioneer into often overlooked and dismissed academic fields and to the students who embrace their teachings and apply them outside the classroom. As Professor Margaret McFadden has noted, “Learning your own history is empowering.”<sup>178</sup> Indeed, as students become aware of how change happens, they are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of the activists before them.

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<sup>178</sup> Margaret McFadden, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 19 February 19 2003.

## Chapter 4

### The Spring 2002 Protest of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability

*“Someday hopefully people will actually talk about this.”  
- Colby student commenting on the 2002 protest*

In October of 2001, SOBHU began secretly planning to address the trustees as part of a protest against institutional racism at Colby to take place in April of 2002. Javanese Hailey '03, a key organizer of the protest, recalled that there was not a particular event that inspired her and others to plan the April 2002 event, but rather, “The compromise between being true to yourself and where you come from and having to change yourself to fit in here is so much greater if you’re a student of color. Everybody has a breaking point. The point for me started freshman year and it took until my junior year to really get pissed off.”<sup>179</sup>

Inspired by stories older friends had told her of the 1999 sit-in in President Cotter’s office, Hailey recalled that the “idea to do something dramatic [to protest institutional racism] was always there but no one know how to get the idea into action.”<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, Hailey spent much of the fall “looking up the history of activism [at Colby] and what *hasn't* changed through the years” and was “*amazed* at how little I knew about all these things. I never even *heard* about some of these issues that were festering. Colby does a really good job of slipping things under the table like that...”<sup>181</sup> Indeed, students were stirred by the efforts of those who had gone before them, and “a feeling on the inside that ‘this is the right time to do it.’”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Javanese Hailey '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 11 April 2003.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

Initially, the protest was not going to explicitly address queer issues, though after a professor had urged the two groups to talk, queer students joined with SOBHU to create the Coalition for Institutional Accountability in March of 2002. Julie Land '04 recalled with frustration the birth of the coalition: “*Something* had happened and we [queer students and allies] were really upset. We needed to do something. So we went to Professor McFadden [at the end of February 2002]. She told us, ‘If you guys are really serious about this, talk to Javanese [Hailey '03]...it’s really ‘hush hush,’ but they [SOBHU] are planning something...’”<sup>183</sup> While Julie could not recall the event that had so upset her, she recalled that McFadden inspired a “desire to have conversations with SOBHU students and [in turn inspire] them [students of color] to desire conversations with us [queer students].”<sup>184</sup>

At the same time, Javanese Hailey had gone to Professors Karen Barnhardt and Lynn Mikel Brown (also of the Education and Human Development Department) looking for advice on where to find white allies for the SOBHU protest. Barnhardt and Brown sent Hailey to Amanda Ashman '03, who was head of Colby’s Women’s Group and also involved with queer issues on campus, and thus further encouraged conversation between students of color and queer students.<sup>185</sup>

When dialogue between SOBHU and queer students began, it became clear that “their [queer students’] issues are really similar [to those of students of color] in terms of the way the institution works to suppress minorities.”<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, “we needed bodies...we needed people to support us and the best way to this was to make the

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<sup>183</sup> Julie Land '04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 2 April 2003. Julie cannot specifically recall the event referred to here – perhaps an issue with the administration or another student.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Karen Barnhardt, conversation with author, Waterville, ME, 28 April 2003.

<sup>186</sup> Javanese Hailey '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 11 April 2003.

coalition as wide as possible.”<sup>187</sup> Thus, at the start of March 2002, months after Rob Tarlock had suggested the initial alliance between students of color and queer students at Colby, the Coalition for Institutional Accountability was officially created and the original mission of SOBHU’s protest expanded to include fighting institutional heterosexism as well. It was then that the queer and black communities at Colby joined forces in preparing a well-written document entitled “The Coalition for Institutional Accountability: Summary of Demands Submitted to the Trustees of Colby College,” to be submitted to the trustees at their annual spring meeting.

With the completion of this report, the coalition eagerly awaited April 12, 2002 – the day the trustees were to meet at Colby to vote on the “strategic plan.” This was a document outlining how the college would change and grow over the next decade, with comments on improving student life and culture, strengthening the admissions profile, enhancing diversity, expanding and creating new academic facilities, and advancing the college’s financial situation.<sup>188</sup> The “Report of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability” was intended as a supplement to the strategic plan of the college, thus students planned on presenting their demands to the trustees at a protest on the day that very plan was to be voted on. Aside from specific demands, this report called for “administrative accountability regarding the fulfillment of the College’s diversity goals.”<sup>189</sup> In its Statement on Diversity, the institution maintains:

Colby College is dedicated to the education of humane, thoughtful, and engaged persons prepared to respond to the challenges of an increasingly diverse and global society and to the issues of justice that arise therein. The College also is committed to fostering a fully inclusive campus community, enriched by persons of different races, genders, ethnicities,

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, “Board of Trustees Passes Strategic Plan, Students Make Demands,” *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXIV, no. 21, 18 April 2002, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> The Coalition for Institutional Accountability, *The Coalition for Institutional Accountability: Summary of Demands Submitted to the Trustees of Colby College*, 12 April 2002, p. 3.

nationalities, economic backgrounds, ages, abilities, sexual orientations, and spiritual values. We strive to confront and overcome actions and attitudes that discourage the widest possible range of participation in our community, and we seek to deepen our understanding of diversity in our daily relationships and in our dealings as an institution.<sup>190</sup>

The Coalition for Institutional Accountability felt, as late as April 2002, that the college was not doing nearly enough to encourage and fully embody the diversity it proclaimed to be so valuable.

The night before the protest, many of the participants filled Page Commons Room to hear transgendered speaker Leslie Feinberg deliver an impassioned speech about the contemporary state of queer issues in America. Amy Reznitsky '02 (“Rez”), one of the protesters, said, “I think Feinberg is just one of those rare people that you meet with the ability to captivate any audience...I think what’s so great about Feinberg, too, is how accessible her politics are. They’re pretty simple yet they’re complex at the same time. But people can grasp onto it and it’s tangible and it’s real.”<sup>191</sup> Julie Land commented that Feinberg was “inspiring in that she was letting us know that we were doing the right thing.”<sup>192</sup>

Despite Feinberg’s encouraging words the night before, protest participants rose on the morning of April 12, 2002 still nervous – Would anyone show up? Would they be effective? The day began for many supporters at 5 am, with attempts to hang up posters, distribute fliers, and fasten banners all over campus before classes began, in an effort to surprise the majority. Because the protest itself was not scheduled to start until 1 pm, the time when the trustees would be entering Roberts Union for their meeting, the morning was filled with other activities to rally support. Announcements were shouted into

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<sup>190</sup> Colby College, fall 2002, [www.colby.edu/diversity/](http://www.colby.edu/diversity/), Internet; accessed 11 December 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Julie Land '04 and Jamie Muehl '02, *One Week: A Film About Change*, April 2003.

<sup>192</sup> Julie Land '04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 3 April 2003.

megaphones in dorms and dining halls. Picket signs were carried all over campus. Information was distributed in the student center as students went to and from classes. T-shirts proclaiming the injustices existing on the Colby campus were worn proudly.

Finally, shortly before 1 pm, protesters made their way to Roberts Union, jingling bells and shouting their concerns and demands into megaphones as they went – “We’re *tired* of people just brushing us off, not even listening to what we have to say. Putting words in our mouths. *Telling* us how we feel when we don’t necessarily feel that way.”<sup>193</sup> Roughly fifty students and a handful of faculty members settled on the ground outside Roberts Union, singing songs of peace, reading personal statements, and otherwise urging the trustees to take notice, though upon entrance to the building, the trustees made little effort to acknowledge protesters. While Ed Yeterian, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, along with a member of the Communications Office, indeed came out of Robert’s Union during the protest, according to Barnhardt “they were really just checking to see what the media situation was, not to engage with students.”<sup>194</sup>

Knowing that their voices would carry into the trustees meeting through the open windows of Roberts Union on this warm spring day, the protestors read the specific demands<sup>195</sup> of the coalition into a megaphone, prefaced with the following statement:

As part of a day of peaceful protest against institutional racism and heterosexism at Colby, we, a group of students of color, in coalition with a group of queer students, have come together with our allies to present our concerns and demands to the Trustees of Colby College....While students of color and queer students have different experiences of discrimination, the hostile climate experienced by both groups at a campus that purports to embrace diversity has brought us together in coalition with our allies. ...What we want, need and demand is “administrative accountability regarding the fulfillment of the College’s diversity goals.” We want, need and demand a commitment from the Trustees

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<sup>193</sup> Julie Land '04 and Jamie Muehl '02, *One Week: A Film About Change*, April 2003.

<sup>194</sup> Karen Barnhardt, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 28 April 2003.

<sup>195</sup> See Appendix I.

and a timeline for implementation of our specific demands and the elements of the Strategic Plan.<sup>196</sup>

Furthermore, the coalition noted that the deadline for a response from the trustees to their demands was May 1, 2002, assuring that failure to present such a response would result in the presence of protesters at every gathering of the trustees, including the graduation of the class of 2002.

Despite the excitement, noise, and curiosity created by the protest, the crowd remained fairly small, with only about fifty individuals there at any given point in the day. Holly Brewster '02 commented of the smaller-than-expected turnout, "I am disappointed in the student showing, I have to say. How are we supposed to convince the trustees that we want things to change around here if people won't come out and sit? Just come out and sit. Not even talk...just come out and join us out here."<sup>197</sup> Particularly disturbing to the protestors was the fact that "Alex [Aldous '02, the 2001-2002 SGA Vice President] and Jenn [Coughlin '02, the 2001-2002 SGA President] just walked right by. They didn't even say 'hi.' It was like, 'Woah! These are the people we *elected*?'"<sup>198</sup> Karen Barnhardt, one of the faculty members present consistently throughout the day, noted with a disbelieving laugh, "it was just amazing...students were playing Frisbee right next to us without a care in the world."<sup>199</sup> Some students passing by the protest made snide comments, though Barnhardt recalled with pride, "they [the protestors]

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<sup>196</sup> The Coalition for Institutional Accountability, *The Coalition for Institutional Accountability: Summary of Demands Submitted to the Trustees of Colby College*, 12 April 2002, p. 3.

<sup>197</sup> Julie Land '04 and Jamie Muehl '02, *One Week: A Film About Change*, April 2003.

<sup>198</sup> Javanese Hailey '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 11 April 2003.

<sup>199</sup> Karen Barnhardt, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 28 April 2003.

handled themselves really well, with a lot of dignity.”<sup>200</sup> Putting their disappointment aside, the protesters persisted through the afternoon.

Because some of the participants happened to host radio shows on WMHB (the student-run radio station at Colby) for two-hour slots during part of the protest, some students moved inside and voiced their concerns about racism and heterosexism on the air. However, when other DJs not participating in the day’s events came to begin their own afternoon shows, the protesters refused to give up control of the station, announcing to all listeners that they had “taken over the radio station.”<sup>201</sup> What the protesters were not aware of was that taking control of a radio station was a federal offense that the administration of Colby College would later reprimand them for.

The trustees meeting concluded around 4:30 that afternoon, after having passed the Strategic Plan for Colby, without taking into account the demands of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability. At this time protesters made their way back to the center of campus and assembled outside the Spa,<sup>202</sup> where the trustees and members of the administration were having cocktails. When, shortly thereafter, the trustees began to make their way down the stairs of Cotter Union into Page Commons Room, protesters were waiting in the foyer. However, this phase of the event was dramatically different from the time spent outside of Roberts that afternoon.

When the trustees and members of the administration ascended the stairs from the Spa to enter into Page Commons Room, they immediately found themselves in the midst of a *silent* protest against racism and heterosexism at Colby College. Protesters, still

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Julie Land ‘04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 2 April 2003.

<sup>202</sup> The Spa (a building connected to the larger student union) is a meeting place where students, faculty and staff can meet for meals, or to relax, study etc.

clinging to posters and banners, rather than proclaiming their frustrations aloud, now had their mouths covered with bands of white cloth to signify the loss of their voices as minority groups on campus. Julie Land '04 noted of the trustees and administrators passing by, "Some ignored us. Some were respectful and read the posters. One woman – I don't know if she was drunk – was making kind of patronizing comments about the bands on our mouths that were symbolic of silence."<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Land said she could not recall "even *one* trustee who went up to someone and wanted to know why these students were so upset."<sup>204</sup>

A documentary film of the protest and some of the events leading up to it made by Julie Land and Julia Muehl '02 provides powerful footage of how consciously the trustees and administrators in general tried to ignore this phase of the protest. While walking down the stairs, most dinner guests continued conversations with one another, drinks still in hand, though a few did stop and read the posters held by students. President William "Bro" Adams only looked up from his own discussion for a very brief moment before continuing on into Page Commons. Dean of Students Janice Kassman walked down the stairs expressionless, seeming not to even acknowledge the protestors.

After the trustees and members of the administrative staff had entered Page Commons Room to enjoy their dinner, closing the doors to the students behind them, the protestors dispersed. The day had been long, everyone was physically and emotionally exhausted. Most students simply went back to their rooms, sometimes with a few fellow protestors and friends, to relax and chat about the day. Julie Land recalled that she and her roommate

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

were mostly digesting what had been going on that day and wondering what the response from the trustees and President Adams would be. I think later we went back to the library and borrowed a movie to watch so we could take our minds off of everything. At 11:00 we watched the news coverage of the event and thought that was pretty well done. Overall, I think that we were discouraged by the number of students who refused to engage at all with the protest (all they would have had to do was come to show their support for at least a little while). We were pretty tired after that day, so we went to bed early.<sup>205</sup>

Similarly, Javanese Hailey remembered that she went to bed right after the protest (though she woke to watch the local news that night), disappointed by the limited participation in the event, though pleased that the protest had been “really visible...even if they [the whole of the Colby Community] didn’t understand [the issues].<sup>206</sup> And with that, the Coalition for Institutional Accountability’s spring 2002 protest before the Board of Trustees, a historical event in the life of Colby College that had taken months of planning, was officially over. At this point, all coalition members could do was sit and wait to see if their efforts would be effective. As it turns out, the students would have to wait far beyond the May 1, 2002 response deadline they had requested of the trustees to see any real progress on their demands.

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<sup>205</sup> Julie Land '04, e-mail to author, 6 April 2003.

<sup>206</sup> Javanese Hailey '03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 11 April 2003.

## Chapter 5: Where Are We Now?

*“You don’t see success in four years...You see success when you come back twenty, thirty, forty years later.”*  
- John McClain ‘69

While the Coalition for Institutional Accountability pressed the trustees of Colby College to respond formally to their demands by May 1, 2002, no such response ever materialized. This does not indicate that the protest of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability was ineffective. While only one of the ten demands of the coalition was *completely* fulfilled (restoration of access to the Black Entertainment Television channel on campus), Julia Steele notes, “the protest increased discourse and dialogue between the people at the top and the students”<sup>207</sup> – an invaluable first step in enacting change. Indeed, the administration and the student body in general have seriously addressed many of the demands posed in April 2002, though this action was not always clearly the result of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability’s demands.

Furthermore the Coalition for Institutional Accountability, which represents the first time in Colby’s history that students of color and queer students have created a formal alliance, serves as an important precedent for future coalitions at Colby. First, two marginalized groups – often viewed as being mutually exclusive – have proven their ability to form a viable coalition capable of capturing the attention of much of the Colby College Community. Second, the demands of the coalition addressed issues beyond the immediate agendas of SOBHU and the Bridge. In pushing for the rights of Native Americans and urging the college to address socioeconomic class issues, the Coalition for Institutional Accountability created the possibility for still further expansion of its

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<sup>207</sup>Julia Steele’03, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 February 2003.

membership to include other marginalized groups and their agendas. Perhaps, the work of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability will emerge as a vital factor in the eventual creation of this larger coalition, just as the fights waged by Jackie Nunez, Charles Terrell, and Students of Color United For Change, by Tom Hagerty and Phyllis Mannocchi, have all become vital segments in the story of the historical alliance between SOBHU and the Bridge.

President William “Bro” Adams initiated the first official reaction from the college to the 2002 protest when he held a meeting with members of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability a week after the protest. Gretchen Groggel ’03, the 2002-2003 Student Government Association president (then the SGA president-elect), said of Adams’ response, “He held a meeting with some of the students just so he could understand more of what was going on. And then I think he tried to see if there was anything *he* could do.”<sup>208</sup> However, Julie Land ’04 recalls, “My perception of it [the meeting] was that Bro was very evasive and basically said, ‘It’s all up to the trustees.’ He really just went through them [the demands] and said ‘there’s nothing we can do about this short-term.’ Then he delegated out other places of responsibility.”<sup>209</sup> Students left for the summer feeling that their protest did little to further their cause of recognizing and working to reduce institutional discrimination at Colby.

On June 1, 2002, however, President Adams announced the creation of a “Queer Task Force” (initially called the “Task Force on GLBTT Issues”) to be comprised of three faculty members, three members of the administrative staff, and three students. Though Arnie Yasinski, Administrative Vice President and Treasurer and Special

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<sup>208</sup> Gretchen Groggel ’03, 2002-2003 Student Government President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 6 April 2003.

<sup>209</sup> Julie Land ’04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 2 April 2003.

Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues, emphasized that work on the Queer Task Force had begun before the protest, he acknowledged that “the CIA [Coalition for Institutional Accountability] had *some* influence”<sup>210</sup> in its formation. Furthermore, Yasinski stated, “every sign that there are serious students interested in an issue pushes things along and creates occasions for further dialogue.”<sup>211</sup> Indeed, the official statement on the formation of the task force notes that while “the diversity section of Colby’s strategic plan includes the intention to review the College’s support for GLBTT students...recent events on campus suggest the need to look more broadly at the campus atmosphere with regard to GLBTT issues and individuals, and to explore ways to improve that atmosphere.”<sup>212</sup>

The task force was charged with exploring GLBTT issues and concerns in three primary areas, all of which encompass a number of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability’s demands. Areas examined by the task force included:

1. Campus atmosphere with respect to GLBTT students and staff and their concerns.
2. Existing support for GLBTT students;
3. Strategies and initiatives that might improve campus atmosphere and raise the visibility of GLBTT community members and issues.<sup>213</sup>

After working throughout the fall of 2002 to “systematically examine *every* area of the college and how it affects queers,”<sup>214</sup> the Queer Task Force published a comprehensive document of its findings and recommendations in December of 2002, though the report was not made available to the whole of the Colby Community until late February of 2003.

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<sup>210</sup> Arnie Yasinski, Administrative Vice President and Treasurer and Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 April 2003.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Office of the President, Colby College, “Diversity at Colby: Task Force On GLBTT Issues,” 1 June 2002, [www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html](http://www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

<sup>213</sup> Office of the President, Colby College, “Diversity at Colby: Task Force On GLBTT Issues,” 1 June 2002, [www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html](http://www.colby.edu/diversity/queertaskforce.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

<sup>214</sup> Gretchen Groggel ’03, 2002-2003 Student Government Association President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 30 October 2002.

The Queer Task Force provided recommendations for implementing its proposals (many of which overlap with the proposals of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability).<sup>215</sup> In March of 2003, President Adams made his official response to the report and the recommendations of the Queer Task Force, noting:

With reference both to this communication and the one that is to follow, I want you to know that I am committed to keeping this report in the forefront of my thoughts and actions as president of Colby. I was affected deeply by much of the testimony from the members of our community who were interviewed. Theirs are moving – even galvanizing – words. I also want to say that I share the committee’s core belief, that although homophobia is certainly present on our campus, it has no place here, and that we must make concerted and energetic efforts both to educate the community about homophobia and to protect those who may be subjected to it. Those efforts begin with my personal commitment and efforts and those of my senior administrative colleagues, and I want to assure you that we are of a single mind in our determination to make progress on the important issues you have raised. I thank you again for your work, and I look forward to the prospect of working with some of you on the initiatives.<sup>216</sup>

President Adams’ words indeed argued for action - as of April 2003, many of the recommendations put forth by the Queer Task Force in December of 2002 had been addressed. The chairs of an ad hoc advisory group to oversee the implementation of the above initiatives were chosen and are currently selecting their committee. Work on a proposal for a Queer Studies minor began, with a number of faculty members writing a proposal for the program. A recent opening in the Dean of Students office will allow for a redefinition of the position to focus, in part, on queer issues. President Adams has already spoken about queer issues in meetings with athletic coaches. A proposal for Spectrum Housing written by the College Affairs Committee is being submitted to the Board of Trustees.<sup>217</sup> Finally, administrators are writing a “Queer Cultural Literacy Primer,” which is intended for distribution in the fall of 2003.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>216</sup> President William “Bro” Adams, memo to Colby Community, “President’s Response to the Recommendations of the Queer Task Force,” 24 March 2003.

<sup>217</sup> Spectrum Housing will accommodate those students who wish to live in a hall with others who would make honoring and valuing difference a top priority and who would offer programs in the house and elsewhere to demonstrate these principles. Occupancy would be open to an upperclass student expressing

The work done on the recommendations of the Queer Task Force also inherently addressed some of the demands posed by the coalition in 2002. Indeed, *serious* action has been taken by students and administrators alike to fulfill three of the demands by the Coalition for Institutional Accountability (with other demands merely being briefly addressed), though it is unclear whether the coalition or the Queer Task Force was more influential in initiating this action. Whatever the catalyst, there has been a significant increase in dialogue over the coalition's first demand – commitment (according to a set timetable) to a multicultural house.

In early November 2002, Peter Brush '03, dorm president of Sturtevant, submitted a motion to the Presidents' Council motioning that the Council "affirm its stance to the student body and the trustees *against* [italics mine] specialty housing, such as fraternities or multicultural housing, recognizing that there is no place for them at a small school like Colby."<sup>219</sup> The motion was voted upon at a meeting of the Presidents' Council on November 7, 2002. Brush's motion had motivated many members of the Colby Community to attend the meeting, advocating "more discussion on the issue before the Council took a specific stance."<sup>220</sup> The heated debate at the very public meeting resulted in the passing of a severely amended form of the motion stating, "Presidents' Council affirms the stance that establishment of multicultural housing should be examined by the

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an interest in this type of housing. College Affairs Committee, "Spectrum Proposal," 2 December 2002, p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> President William "Bro" Adams, memo to Colby Community, "President's Response to the Recommendations of the Queer Task Force," 24 March 2003.

<sup>219</sup> Kate Russo, "SGA Backs Multi-cultural Housing Plan: Political Tactic Backfired on Brush '03," *Waterville (Maine) Colby Echo*, vol. CXXV, no. 10, 14 November 2002, p. 1.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

administration as a viable option for the Colby community”<sup>221</sup> – a complete reversal of Brush’s original objectives.

As a direct result of the passage of this motion, the College Affairs Committee investigated the issue of multicultural housing further. In December 2002 this committee produced a proposal for “spectrum housing.” In response to this proposal, as well as the publication of the results of the 2002 Social Life Survey,<sup>222</sup> the Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees created a “working group” to investigate multicultural housing, among other issues. The working group is to present its findings and recommendations to the Student Affairs of the Board and then to the full Board of Trustees by October 2003.<sup>223</sup> The action taken by students and administrators with respect to multicultural housing addressed the coalition’s demand that President Cotter’s 1994 initiatives be fulfilled.

Some progress has been made on the coalition’s demand for a commitment of financial and institutional support for a Queer Studies Program. In the fall of 2002, the Women’s Studies Program implemented the requirement that all majors must choose a concentration, one of which is Queer Studies. As a result of “these significant curricular changes,”<sup>224</sup> the department was renamed “Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.” Roughly twenty interdepartmental courses now count toward the Queer Studies Concentration of the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Major. Although most of

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> This survey, conducted in November 2002 by the Colby College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, is an assessment of social life at Colby.

<sup>223</sup> Gretchen Groggel ’03, 2002-2003 Student Government Association President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 5 April 2002.

<sup>224</sup> Colby College Department of Women, Gender, Sexuality, “Mission,” [www.colby.edu.woMainens.studies/mission.html](http://www.colby.edu.woMainens.studies/mission.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

these courses “are not explicitly QS courses...they have significant relevant content.”<sup>225</sup>

Currently, there has yet to be a faculty proposal submitted to the administration calling for the creation of a Queer Studies Program, though as President Adams noted in his response to the Report of the Queer Task Force, such a proposal was in the works.

Currently, the Vice President of College Relations is “working to identify and cultivate [monetary] donors supportive of queer issues and initiatives” and is also making “every effort to find donors” to support an endowed Queer Studies chair,<sup>226</sup> which would further enable the formation of a Queer Studies Minor. Overall, Gretchen Groggel '03 noted, “I think that there’s some institutional support for a Queer Studies Program in some places. But, with a lot of this, the decision goes back to the trustees and if the support isn’t there, it’s hard to get the support here on campus [from the administration].”<sup>227</sup> With respect to the financial aspect involved in creating a Queer Studies Program, the Board of Trustees has not made any official commitment to financial support for such a program.

Indeed, much attention has been given to the issues of multicultural housing and the establishment of a Queer Studies Program, both of which were included in the demands of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability. Additionally, attention has also been given to increasing the enrollment of Native American students, with special consideration for members of Maine tribal nations, but this action was not result of the protestors’ 2002 demands. Before the spring 2002 protest even took place, the admissions office had been working on attracting more Native American students to

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> President William “Bro” Adams, Memo to Colby Community, “President’s Response to the Recommendations of the Queer Task Force,” 24 March 2003.

<sup>227</sup> Gretchen Groggel '03, 2002-2003 Student Government Association President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 5 April 2003.

Colby. However, Sandra Sohne, Associate Director of Admissions and Multicultural Enrollment, noted, “Recruiting Native American students is quite a difficult task since it has not been easy to identify and work with programs designed for college bound Native American students.”<sup>228</sup>

For the past few years, the Office of Admissions has been working to establish ties with organizations that work with such students. Also, each spring and fall a number of Native American students are flown to campus to participate in the Discover Colby Program (an introductory program for minority students).<sup>229</sup> Steve Thomas, Director of Admissions, commented, “We have formed a partnership with the Penobscot Nation in Olde Town, Maine. Several of us had lunch with Chief Barry Dana last spring [March], and we agreed to have a significant number of Native American students visit Colby.”<sup>230</sup>

As of 2002, there were only seven American Indian or Alaskan Native students enrolled at Colby. This year, however, the admissions office received fifteen applications from Native American students. Of these, eight students were accepted into the class of 2007, and three were placed on the Wait List, though the Admissions Office has no way of knowing yet how many of these accepted students will actually enroll at Colby. Sohne noted, “The level of competition we face from competitors make these students very difficult to attract, recruit and enroll. Persistence on our part is the key. Nothing will happen overnight...”<sup>231</sup> Thomas further commented, “This [increased admission of

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<sup>228</sup> Sandra Sohne, Associate Director of Admissions and Multicultural Enrollment, e-mail to author, 8 April 2003.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Steve Thomas, Director of Admissions, e-mail to author, 7 April 2003.

<sup>231</sup> Sandra Sohne, Associate Director of Admissions and Multicultural Enrollment, email to author, 8 April 2003.

Native American students] certainly is something we are working on with great energy!”<sup>232</sup>

The coalition for Institutional Accountability also requested a thorough “examination of the relationship between the dining hall and residential staff and the rest of campus, paying particular attention to the class dynamics that dictate their working conditions and treatment.”<sup>233</sup> Following an annual off-campus party in March of 2002, numerous intoxicated students returned to campus only to throw food in the dining hall, speak obnoxiously to, and otherwise behave rudely and disrespectfully toward employees. The school seems to have recognized that these sorts of attitudes are a problem, though “this is a hard one [demand] because there’s not a lot of things you can realistically force students to do.”<sup>234</sup>

However, the college is working to hold students more accountable for their actions. This effort was demonstrated in the administration’s response to the same March party one year later. Students were informed ahead of time that anyone caught throwing food or destroying property would face severe consequences. Furthermore, members of the security staff would be present in the dining hall on that particular day to videotape any disrespectful behavior. Despite these initiatives, there has been no official study of the tensions between the students and staff of Colby, as requested by the coalition.

Whether the administration’s actions with respect to Native American enrollment and class issues are a result of their own initiatives or the urging of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability is perhaps secondary to the fact that a coalition of students of

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<sup>232</sup> Steve Thomas, Director of Admissions, e-mail to author, 7 April 2003.

<sup>233</sup> The Coalition for Institutional Accountability, *The Coalition for Institutional Accountability: Summary of Demands Submitted to the Trustees of Colby College*, 12 April 2002, p. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Gretchen Groggel ’03, 2002-2003 Student Government Association President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 5 April 2003.

color and queers students recognized issues outside of its immediate agenda. Indeed, it must be remembered that being a student of color or a queer student is not mutually exclusive of being a Native American or of a lower socioeconomic class. However, demands regarding Native American opportunity and class status were clearly secondary to the Coalition for Institutional Accountability's fight against institutional racism and heterosexism. Certainly the example of the alliance between SOBHU and the Bridge leaves room for the possibility for one day including other oppressed groups in the Coalition for Institutional Accountability.

The demands regarding Black Entertainment Television, Queer Studies, multicultural housing, Native American enrollment, and class issues have all been addressed, at least somewhat, by the Administration since they were issued in April 2002. Work regarding these demands has in turn fulfilled other demands of the coalition (research of multicultural housing at other colleges; fulfillment of Cotter's 1994 initiatives; request for new faculty hires to teach courses involving issues of race and sexual orientation). However, two of the demands of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability – one for a research program on inequality, the other for publicity in a college publication – have not been addressed or have been denied outright.

The coalition had demanded a program for research on inequality to be part of the Center for Public and International Affairs. Renamed the Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, this building is called for in the strategic plan and is to be the home of a program to “link teaching and research at Colby with contemporary political, economic

and social issues and problems in ways that strengthen the undergraduate experience.”<sup>235</sup>  
 The specific addition of research on inequality to the agenda has not yet been addressed.

Finally, soon after the spring 2002 protest, coalition members were told that there was no way to fulfill their demand for a feature article in *Colby* magazine on this demonstration and the experiences of students of color and queer students, written in consultation with these students. The administration of Colby College maintains that they cannot dictate what *Colby* chooses to write about. The protest was not mentioned, even briefly, in the four issues of *Colby* that have been published since the event took place in April 2002.<sup>236</sup>

Despite the increased attention given to issues of diversity at Colby recently (either as a result of the 2002 protest or other influences), many students contend that Colby College is far from being the accepting and tolerant haven of education that it was intended to be at its 1813 founding. Andrea Breau '03, the 2002-2003 Student Programming Board Cultural Chair, comments, “I think we have a long way to go. I think that I have seen incremental change over my four years here, but due mostly to *students'* progressive actions. I'd like to see the administration put themselves on the front line more.”<sup>237</sup>

After a year of tireless work dealing with such issues, Gretchen Groggel '03, the current Student Government Association President and the student perhaps most familiar with the politics surrounding racism and heterosexism at Colby at this time, explained:

There needs to be accountability on an administrative level – that's what's lacking so much, and I think that there have been some administrative changes recently that will

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<sup>235</sup> “A Strategic Plan for Colby: The Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement,” [www.colby.edu/planning/strategicplan/publicaffairs.html](http://www.colby.edu/planning/strategicplan/publicaffairs.html); Internet; accessed 2 April 2003.

<sup>236</sup> Javanese Hailey '04, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 11 April 2003.

<sup>237</sup> Andrea Breau '03, Student Programming Board Cultural Chair, conversation with author, Waterville, MAINE, 5 April 2003.

help with that. Some of the members of the administration already do a very good job...One change I have seen in the past few years is that people [the college president and others in the administration] are listening to the students more and more and taking their concerns as valid. This will hopefully lead the school to acting on those concerns.<sup>238</sup>

Indeed, it is clear that the college has seen dramatic changes with respect to racism and heterosexism throughout the college's history, particularly in the years since World War II. Students and administrators alike have reason to believe that more, and still much needed, progress is certainly possible. As Arnie Yaskinski, Administrative Vice President and Treasurer/ Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues, noted, "There has been some progress...we've changed some policies and procedures. But, there's still a very long ways to go in terms of making most students feel included."<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Gretchen Groggel '03, 2002-2003 Student Government Association President, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 5 April 2003.

<sup>239</sup> Arnie Yasinski, Administrative Vice President and Treasurer and Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues, conversation with author, Waterville, Maine, 10 April 2003.

## Conclusion

*“And I thought to myself, this is gonna be a journey.”  
- Katie Morrison '94, upon her arrival at Colby College*

Colby College is fast approaching its bicentennial, having grown and changed greatly as an institution and as a community. A constant has remained, however: Colby College, founded on the premise of religious tolerance, has always striven to be an institution where those seeking to learn may do so without persecution based on characteristics of their very being. The college maintains, as part of its core mission, that “Colby stands for diversity, without which we become parochial; for respect for various lifestyles and beliefs, without which we become mean-spirited; and for the protection of every individual against discrimination.”<sup>240</sup>

This is indeed a challenging task – striving, as an institution, to be accepting and tolerant of others regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or any other element that makes humans unique and their communities diverse. These aspirations face difficult obstacles, not because the students, faculty, and staff of Colby College are especially closed-minded, but, rather because hatred and injustice have been so deeply rooted throughout history. Professor of English Jennifer Finney Boylan once remarked:

One of the things that we require of you as young scholars at this institution is to understand that Colby is not a place separate from the world, and the things you learn, even in the most abstract and rarefied seminar or laboratory – are things which are true not only on Mayflower Hill, but in the world as well.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> This statement was written in 1988 and replaced a similar statement. While the wording of the Colby Mission has changed over time, it has, since 1813, included a word on the tolerance of others’ values and ideas. Mission statements are required by the accreditation organization for higher education. Currently, there is a task force again addressing the re-writing of Colby’s Mission Statement. “Colby,” *Colby College Catalogue, 1988-1989* (Waterville, ME: Colby College, 1988) p. 5.

<sup>241</sup> Jennifer Finney Boylan, Queer Rally speech, Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 4 March 2003.

While American society can teach us “to hate that which [we] do not understand,” that same society can influence us to change, to become more tolerant, accepting, and appreciative of the differences that make the human race beautiful. Indeed, Colby, both as an institution and as a community, never ceases to react to the world around it. This reality is best epitomized by the fights against racism and heterosexism throughout the past half century.

A myriad of students, faculty, and staff have worked tirelessly to help Colby College become the place it has striven to be since 1813 and their actions were often a product of the ever evolving society around them. These individuals have chosen not to ignore the injustice persisting in the world, but to draw inspiration from social battles and milestones in American society at large.

The Colby Community is more diverse because of Jackie Nunez, who, in the midst of the civil rights movement, called for the abolition of discriminatory membership practices of fraternities and sororities at Colby. We are a more receptive community because Charles Terrell, inspired by the volatile world around him, had the courage to lead a group of students in a peaceful protest for change. We are a more thoughtful community because Robert Batten wrote, over forty years after being a student at Colby, a letter deploring the invisibility of queer individuals at the institution. We are a more intelligent community because of Jack Foner, who recognized the value of learning about African-Americans, a people often forgotten in the academe, long before others did. Edmund Burke wrote, “The only necessary thing for evil to triumph is for good men to

do nothing.”<sup>242</sup> Indeed, Colby College has benefited from those who could not bear to do nothing.

The Colby Community is also more cohesive because of the efforts of Rob Tarlock and the members of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability. In recognizing the opportunities presented in forming a coalition between students of color and queer students at Colby, the Coalition for Institutional Accountability made history by establishing the first official alliance between these two minority groups. Their tireless efforts to plan and carry out the April 2002 protest were built, in turn, on the struggles of those who had gone before them - individuals long forgotten, buried in the history of Colby College. Furthermore, the efforts of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability, whatever its outcome may be, were not in vain; future generations at Colby will surely benefit from the battles fought by this pioneering group of students.

While geographically isolated, in the midst of one of the most beautiful states in the country, the Colby Community has proven itself, over and over again, to be highly conscious of the world around it. This awareness has spurred Colby to pursue its mission of being a tolerant, accepting, and appreciative body, though as John McClain '69 said, “Colby still struggles with its soul.”<sup>243</sup> It can be discouraging to know that despite the valiant efforts of those who have gone before, we, as a community, have yet to become the wholly tolerant and accepting institution our founders set out for us to be. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “All progress is precarious and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem.”<sup>244</sup> Indeed, it seems that each time the College

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<sup>242</sup> This line is attributed to Edmund Burke, the Irish-born British statesman and philosopher.

<sup>243</sup> John McClain '69. *The Untold Story*, panel discussion, Waterville, Maine: Colby College, 11 April 2003.

<sup>244</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959).

makes a step forward in fighting discrimination, another obstacle appears, daring us to keep fighting, to keep working for change.

John Cook '92 told the newest generation of students to matriculate at Colby, "Change is getting into other people's lives so they can't ignore you...It takes so much perseverance, it takes not fearing the future, not worrying about what can go wrong but [considering] all the great things that can happen."<sup>245</sup> Fortunately, Colby has never been lacking for passionate, intelligent students dedicated to fighting injustice at this college and in the world.

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<sup>245</sup> John Cook '92. *The Untold Story*, panel discussion, Waterville, MAINE: Colby College, 11 April 2003.

## Appendix 1:

### Selections from the Coalition for Institutional Accountability's Demands

#### THE COALITION FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Summary of Demands Submitted to the Trustees of Colby College

April 12, 2002

#### I. Primary Demands

- **Commitment to and timeline for implementing a residential Multicultural House**
- The trustees will research the success of similar multicultural houses at sister NESCAC schools, including Bowdoin, Middlebury and Connecticut College.
- If a Multicultural House is not approved, the Trustees will provide a written response to the individuals listed below, explaining the rationale for that denial.
- **Strengthen Colby's curricular and academic commitment to multiculturalism and diversity**
- A commitment of financial and institutional support for a Queer Studies program.
- 3 of the 10 new faculty hires will be allocated for programs incorporating race/ethnicity and Queer Studies into their curricula.
- A program for research on inequality to be part of the Center for Public and International Affairs.

#### II. Secondary Demands

- Fulfillment of the initiatives toward improving queer life on campus promised by President Cotter in 1994.
- Increased enrollment of Native American students, with special consideration for members of Maine tribal nations.
- Examination of the relationship between the dining hall and residential staff and the rest of campus, paying particular interest to the class dynamics that dictate their working conditions and treatment.
- A feature article in Colby Magazine on this demonstration and the experiences of students of color and queer students, written in consultation with these students.
- Repair the Black Entertainment Television channel on campus.

*THE DEADLINE FOR RESPONSE TO THESE DEMANDS IS MAY 1, 2002*

**THE COALITION FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

**A Supplement to the Strategic Plan for Colby**

Presented to the Trustees of Colby College

April 12, 2002

**INTRODUCTION**

As part of a day of peaceful protest against institutional racism and heterosexism at Colby, we, a group of students of color, in coalition with a group of queer students, have come together with our allies to present our concerns and demands to the Trustees of Colby College.

We have prepared this document in order to provide the Trustees with historical and anecdotal evidence of the discrimination which students of color and queer students face on a daily basis. While Colby has made some gains in embracing its diversity goals, we as a community still have a long way to go. Our documentation demonstrates that the college's committees, task forces and programming boards have not been successful in eliminating the daily experience of hostile "micro-aggressions" for students of color and queer students, and it is largely these experiences which make life at Colby so challenging for us [Note: By "micro-aggressions" we mean the casual and hard to prove acts of discrimination that are felt by the recipient, but may not be significant enough to be recognized as hurtful by the perpetrator. These instances may be small, but they are frequent and cumulative. An example would be a Colby staff member referring to her role in a commercial transaction as having involved "Jewling him down to a reasonable price," or a white student referring to his old clothing as being so "ghetto." The term "micro-aggressions" first came into widespread use in 1970, with the work of psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce. For further readings on this topic, please refer to Pierce, Chester M., "Psychiatric Problems of the Black Minority," in *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, v. 2, "Childhood and Adolescent Psychiatry" or Davis, Peggy, "Popular Legal Culture: Law as Micro-Aggression," found in *Yale Law Journal*, v. 98, pp. 1559-1577. Many examples of micro-aggressions are given in Appendix A].

While students of color and queer students have different experiences of discrimination, the hostile climate experienced by both groups at a campus that purports to embrace diversity has brought us together in coalition with our allies. We also recognize and affirm that "students of color" and "queer students" are not separate or distinct categories, and that there have always been intersecting memberships and interests between those groups. We have spoken at length with one another, and returned to the demands of past student groups and task forces to provide detailed and specific demands that will work in conjunction with the "Strategic Plan for Colby." We strongly believe that the entire Colby community will benefit from the implementation of our demands.

In short, we agree with the goals of the strategic plan for enhancing diversity, and particularly with the following focal points:

- Development of more rigorous forms of administrative accountability regarding the fulfillment of the College's diversity goals;
- Substantial revision and promulgation of new recruiting practices and requirements in all of the College's personnel searches;
- More careful and regular mechanisms of assessment and reporting, including annual reports in the key areas of student, faculty and staff retention and hiring, and campus environment and atmosphere;
- More thorough and systematic training for student leaders, faculty, and staff in the challenges and requirements of living in a more diverse environment.

(From "A Strategic Plan for Colby," Draft Revision dated March 29, 2002, p. 6)

Our primary concerns are embodied in the first bullet point. We do not want to see any additional task forces or college committees being formed to assess the status quo. The findings and demands have changed very little since 1970. **What we want, need and demand is "administrative accountability regarding the fulfillment of the College's diversity goals." We want, need and demand a commitment from the Trustees and a timeline for implementation of our specific demands and the elements of the Strategic Plan.**

### WHY WE'RE HERE TODAY

Today, students of color, queer students and our allies are still waiting for meaningful and substantial institutional change to address over three decades of grievances regarding the campus climate and institutional response. Therefore, once again we seek to reiterate these ongoing concerns in the following list of demands. We believe that Colby has the potential to incorporate our demands within the framework that President Adams has outlined in the Strategic Plan. **We are not asking for anything that is not *already* in the Strategic Plan for Colby. We are here to provide you with an opportunity to engage in "rigorous forms of administrative accountability regarding the fulfillment of the College's diversity goals."**<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> This appendix includes only parts of the full Report of the Coalition for Institutional Accountability. The entire document can be viewed at: [www.colby.edu/education/activism/cia\\_doc.html](http://www.colby.edu/education/activism/cia_doc.html).

## Appendix 2:

### Selections from the Report of the Colby College Queer Task Force

The Colby College Queer Task force identified five “significant, overlapping concerns for queer students at Colby:”

1. The invisibility of queer people and queer experiences;
2. Pervasive harassment that reinforces that invisibility;
3. The insensitivity of the majority community;
4. A lack of support systems and services; and
5. The absence of a healthy and vibrant queer community.<sup>247</sup>

The Queer Task Force’s top recommendations for resolving the above issues are as follows:

1. Create an implementation committee to oversee work on these recommendations and to assess further steps needed to improve the campus climate for faculty, staff and students.
2. Create a Queer Studies Minor, to be administratively housed within the Women’s Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. A proposal for this minor will be sent to the Academic Affairs Committee. Offering this minor will require hiring a new faculty member, to be appointed in the WGSS Program, to teach courses in gender studies and queer studies.
3. Hire one full-time professional, housed in Dean of Student’s Office, to oversee queer support, resources, curricular support, and assistance to all constituencies of the College.
4. Solicit funding for queer-related initiatives, such as an endowed chair for Queer Studies.
5. Create an Overseers Visit to examine the full range of queer issues.
6. Ensure that faculty and coaches are made aware of the kind of insensitive, inappropriate, heterosexist, or homophobic language and assumptions that students report hearing frequently from instructors, advisors, and coaches. Encourage faculty and coaches both to avoid such behaviors and to be inclusive in

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<sup>247</sup> Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” Waterville, MAINE, December 2002, p. 2, 4. The whole of this report can be viewed at: [www.colby.edu/diversity](http://www.colby.edu/diversity).

their examples, discussion questions, assignments, story problems, and other relevant aspects of course work or athletics. A booklet should be produced and distributed to all faculty and coaches to assist in this effort.

7. Work with those developing a campus Women's Center to provide a joint Resource Center.
8. Appoint openly queer alumni and/or experts to the Board of Trustees.
9. Provide multicultural housing as an option for queer students.
10. Address the concerns of queer athletes by action to ensure that team cultures do not create and perpetuate heterosexism and homophobia.
11. Commission a "Queer Cultural Literacy Primer" for distribution to all Colby community members. This primer would be used to educate the entire community about queer life and culture and provide a common language and understanding for discussions among various campus constituencies.

## Appendix 3:

### Definition of Terms

Many of the terms used in this thesis have multiple meaning or have definitions that have changed over time. Furthermore, for many people, these words hold very different connotations, some of which are offensive. Much of the language we use to categorize people with respect to race and sexual orientation is imperfect, often having been originally created “in the service of oppression.”<sup>248</sup> It is impossible to please everyone with respect to language when discussing the deeply emotional and personal issues of race and sexuality. As Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum noted, “it is difficult to talk about what is essentially a flawed and problematic social construct [in this case, I am referring to the social constructs of race and sexual orientation] without using language that is itself problematic,” but, “We have to be able to talk about it in order to change it.”<sup>249</sup>

Thus, the following is list of words defined as they are used in this particular paper. The definitions are drawn from a number of sources and have been combined to fit the purposes of this thesis.<sup>250</sup>

**Bi-Sexual** – A person who is attracted to both men and women.

**Culture**- The beliefs, traditions, practices, shared history and values that define a group of people.

**Ethnicity** – The part of a person’s identity that is defined by cultural characteristics, such as language, customs and shared history (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, French-Canadian, Italian, Jewish).

**Gay** – A man who is homosexual (sexually attracted to men).

**Gender** – Refers to whether a person is a woman or a man

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<sup>248</sup> Beverly Daniel Tatum, “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” *And Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Colby College, “Valuing Differences Definition List,” 18 March 2003.

The National Museum & Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, *The Lesbian Almanac* (NY: Berkley Books, 1996).

Colby College Queer Task Force, “Report of the Queer Task Force,” December 2002, p. 1.

GLSEN CT & Planned Parenthood of CT, “Levels of Homophobia,” *Tackling Gay Issues in School*.

**GLBT** –Used to describe a group of people who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered. This word is now considered to be exclusionary of transsexual, intersexed and questioning individuals and is often replaced with the more inclusive GLBTTIQ phrase.

**GLBTTIQ** – Used to describe a group of people who are not heterosexual. This group includes gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, transsexual, intersexed and questioning individuals.

**Heterosexism** – The institutionalized set of beliefs and attitudes that suggest or state that heterosexuals are normal and natural and that homosexuals are, by contrast, deviant and unnatural. It is assumed that everyone is heterosexual and that only heterosexuality is right, good, or legitimate. Because of these assumptions, a system of advantages (often called heterosexual privilege) is bestowed on heterosexuals in our culture, and the needs, concerns and life experiences of queer people are excluded.

**Heterosexual** – A person who is attracted to someone of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia** – Prejudice, discrimination, harassment, or acts of violence against sexual minorities, evidenced in a deep-seated fear or hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. It is often subconscious. Included in this concept are bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and intersexed phobias.

**Homosexual** – A person who is attracted to someone of the same sex. Members of this group have also adopted the title of Queer, thereby taking back the power from an age-old insult.

**Institutional Heterosexism** - The many ways in which governments, businesses, churches and other institutions and organizations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation. These groups set policies, allocate resources and maintain unwritten standards for behavior of their members in ways that discriminate.

**Institutional Racism** – The many ways in which governments, businesses, churches and other institutions and organizations discriminate against people on the basis of race or ethnicity. These groups set policies, allocate resources and maintain unwritten standards for behavior of their members in ways that discriminate.

**Intersexed** – A person who has in some physical way, both male and female sexual characteristics.

**Lesbian** – A woman who is homosexual (sexually attracted to women).

**Minority** –The word “minority,” when referring to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation does not *always* concern the number of individuals in a population, rather the dynamic here is power (though at Colby, number of individuals often corresponds with amount of power held).

**Person-of-Color** – A person in America who is not racially white or does not identify as racially white and has been historically targeted by racism. This includes people of African descent, Asian decent, Latin American decent and indigenous people (sometimes referred to as Native Americans or American Indians).

**Prejudice** – A preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information. Prejudice is an inescapable consequence of living in a society where racism and heterosexism exist. Often prejudice is developed simply through exposure (via media, literature, language, socialization, etc.) to negative categorizations of certain groups. Prejudice toward any group is a learned behavior.

**Queer** – A word now often used to describe gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, transsexual, and intersexed individuals in an effort to reclaim this word. This word has been used since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century mostly to denote people considered odd or eccentric. Later this word was used by heterosexuals as a label of contempt. While the word is increasingly used without any negative connotations, for many, this word continues to project homophobia and negative images. I have used the word queer in my paper due to the fact that this is increasingly *the* word used by academe in an effort to be inclusive of people of *all* sexual orientations who are not strictly heterosexual.

**Questioning** – A person who has not defined their sexuality.

**Race** – Classification of people defined by skin color and geographic origin. Used to help identify and distinguish between well-represented and under-represented groups (i.e. African-American, Asian-American, Asian-Pacific Islander, White, Latino, Latina, Native American, multi-racial).

**Racism** – Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life; A system of advantage based on race. While racism can be obvious and/or conscious, it is often very subtle and/or unconscious.

**Sexual Orientation** – Refers to one's attractions/feelings toward women and/or men. Typical terms for this attraction include: bi-sexual, homosexual, trans-sexual, heterosexual, lesbian, straight, gay, questioning. This is a more inclusive term replacing "sexual preference," "lifestyle," and "sexual persuasion" since it acknowledges that all sexual orientation is not a choice. Current research supports that the cause of our sexual orientation is a combination of biological, environmental and social factors.

**Transgendered** – Exhibiting the appearance and behavioral characteristics of the opposite sex.

**Transsexual** – A person with a psychological urge to become a member of the opposite sex. This may lead to the choice of undergoing surgery to modify the sex organs.

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