


Howard Thurman: The Making of a Morehouse Man, 1919-1923

By Mark S. Giles

Since their founding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have represented the intellectual incubators, nurturing social-cultural environments, and professional launching pads of numerous black leaders, such as noted black theologian and revered Morehouse man, Howard Washington Thurman (1900-1981). During the post-Reconstruction era and throughout the 1920s, lynching and race riots shaped the landscape of American race relations. HBCUs represented the educational settings where contested notions of what it meant to be an educated Black man and how black manhood should, could or would manifest itself in American life. This study examines how the ethos of Morehouse College and its Black male leadership shaped the life of Howard Thurman, class of 1923.¹

In addition to the freedman's aid societies and White missionary and industrial philanthropic or-


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ganizations, Blacks contributed mightily in multiple ways to their own educational endeavors (Gasman & Sedgwick, 2004). College-educated Blacks of the late 1900s, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, W. E. B. Du Bois, and John Hope came to symbolize the Black talented tenth, whose elite status provided access to elements of the White world closed to other Blacks, yet obligated them to lift up members of their less fortunate communities. Within that context of limited educational opportunity and Black self-agency, Black colleges offered special sanctuaries of learning and development to prepare other leaders for the Black community.

Michael Kimmel (1996) in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* claimed, "What it means to be a man in America depends heavily on one's class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region of the country" (p. 5). For Black men in the South at the dawning of the twentieth century, proudly claiming manhood proved contentious, contradictory, and often deadly. College-educated Black men were rare between 1900 and 1925, but their numbers grew as a result of the institutions many of them led and attended. Morehouse College, in particular, possesses a unique legacy in the shaping of Black men and Black male leaders.

The original institution (Augusta Institute, established in the basement of a black church, Springfield Baptist in Augusta, Georgia) that became Morehouse was founded in 1867 under the auspices and support from the local Black community and the American Baptist Home Missionary Society (ABHMS). The legacy of Morehouse in developing positive contributors to their communities reveals a type of intellectual and cultural resistance to the entrenched negative stereotypes of Black men (i.e., Uncle, Sambo, Rastus, and Black Brute) and the widespread American narrative of Black men as dangerous, dumb, pathologically sexual, lazy, and immoral. The institution prides itself on taking Black males from various walks of life and transforming them into a "Morehouse man." Clearly the label, Morehouse man, can mean various things to multiple audiences, yet historically it referred to a high standard of excellence in intellect, character, Christian values, and commitment to improving the Black community. The early history of Morehouse demonstrates the complexity of southern race relations, Black self-agency balanced with White missionary philanthropy, individual benefits for collective advancement, and how the leadership and mentoring of committed men and women, Black and White, moved generations of Black males to claim a special heritage (Jones, 1967).

The role of Morehouse in shaping Black male leaders is significant and relevant to America's educational and religious life (Williams, 2001). Close examination of the early history of Morehouse reveals how and why the Morehouse man legacy emerged and a focus on Thurman informs us specifically about one of its favorite sons.

This study examines the early history, environment, and leadership, of Morehouse College and the student experiences of Dr. Howard Thurman, one of America's most influential theologians and preachers of the twentieth century. Author of over 20 books and a founder of America's first interracial church, Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco in 1944, Thurman helped to shape

the spiritual blueprint of the Civil Rights Movement. He served as a role model and religious guide to many front-line leaders of the movement, including fellow Morehouse man, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., class of 1948. The reciprocal effect of mentoring and role modeling echoes its power to change lives and vision and is one of the strengths of how Morehouse influenced its students. How did Thurman's development reflect the institutional mission? How did Morehouse, its faculty, and administrators influence his intellectual, spiritual and civic development?

Born in 1900 in Daytona, Florida, Thurman grew up in a loving family and a racially segregated society. Thurman's parents, Alice and Saul, were hard-working folks who raised three children (i.e., Henrietta, Madeline, and Howard) to aspire for excellence in all they do. His mother and maternal grandmother, Nancy Ambrose, were the primary caregivers to young Thurman. Saul died when he (Thurman) was only 8 years old (Thurman, 1979).

Born into slavery on a Florida plantation, maternal grandmother Nancy Ambrose proved to be an influential figure in shaping Thurman's life, educational aspirations, and spiritual foundations. As a child, Thurman and "Grandma Nancy" developed a unique bond. Illiterate but highly intelligent, she needed Thurman to read the Bible to her and he needed her to interpret the scriptures to him. However, Nancy disliked the Pauline letters. While in bondage as a young girl, she recalled being told by itinerant White preachers how Paul declared that slaves should be obedient to their masters. She never liked that part of the Bible but valued young Thurman's ability to read.

Nancy accepted nothing less than excellence from Thurman and his two sisters and inspired them to look beyond the horizon of the segregated confines of Daytona. His love of and respect for learning and religion evolved under her tutelage. According to Smith (1981), Thurman stated, "The other thing I got from her was an enormous respect for the magic there is in knowledge . . . I learned more . . . about the genius of the religion of Jesus from my grandmother than from all the men who taught me because she moved inside the experience and lived out of that kind of center . . ." (p. 31-32).

A bright student in grade school, Thurman became the first Black child from Daytona to earn a high school diploma (Thurman, 1979). This was not because other Black children lacked the intellectual capacity to attend and graduate from high school, rather the educational policy in Daytona limited Black public education to the 7th grade. Specifically, the 8th grade course work was simply not offered; therefore, the need for a local high school for Blacks became rationalized as a moot point to the White school board and school leaders. To Thurman's good fortune, several Black teachers pushed for his independent study of the missing curriculum. When prepared, he passed the exams, personally administered by the White school superintendent, in fine fashion. Because the Thurman family had relatives living in Jacksonville, high school attendance at Florida Baptist Academy emerged as the best choice among limited options. That move advanced his thirst for learning and

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aspiration to attend college. The American Baptist Home Missionary Society not only operated Black colleges, like Morehouse, it funded several private high schools in the South. Scholarships were available to those who excelled in the high schools to attend one of the affiliated colleges.

In the spring of 1919, his senior year in high school, Thurman encountered a man who would inspire him and model what a college educated Black man could become. Thurman met Baptist minister Mordecai Wyatt Johnson while attending a Christian Student Conference at King's Mountain, North Carolina. The Christian Student Movement, YWCA/YMCA, commonly used the conference site at King's Mountain. Thurman's biographer Elizabeth Yates (1964) noted how Thurman met other boys from various parts of the South and celebrated Christian fellowship.

At the time, Johnson was a young pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, West Virginia, and a 1905 graduate of Atlanta Baptist College (it became Morehouse College in 1913). Johnson served in West Virginia from 1917 until 1926 when he assumed the presidency of Howard University (McKinney, 1997). Johnson's speech at King's Mountain focused on the spiritual challenge and good works offered by the ministry and the rewards of a religious life to young men who wished to accept it. Thurman's view on this religious experience and the role it might play in his life began to gather momentum and focus. Seeking career advice, Thurman wrote a letter to Johnson soon after that impressive encounter. The reply included a challenge that shaped Thurman's young adulthood, especially his academic and professional pursuits. Elizabeth Yates (1964) documented the reply from Johnson to Thurman as follows, "If you want to be prepared, finish high school, go to college, and go on to graduate school" (p. 47). This letter, its long-term challenge for Thurman to prepare himself for a life of service, and the man who wrote it, struck an influential chord. Thurman took heed of the advice, in no small measure because Johnson was a "Morehouse man," a Black man of distinction, worthy of respect and emulation. The idea of becoming like the articulate, well-dressed, well-educated young minister sealed the deal on Thurman's college choice.

Morehouse College, 1919-1923

Morehouse had established its reputation as the builder of men under the institutional leadership of John Hope. Hope was the fair-skinned son and grandson of White men, but due to the "one drop" of Negro blood rule and from his own affections, orientation, and self identity, lived on the Negro side of American society. He was born in 1868 and raised in Augusta, Georgia. As a youth Hope's mother arranged for him to leave the South to be educated in the Northeast, completing high school education at Worcester Academy and earning a bachelor's degree at Brown University in 1894 (Torrence, 1948). He taught at Roger Williams College in Nashville before joining the faculty at Morehouse in 1898. In 1906, Hope became its first Black president. That first year was filled with many transitions and

challenges, none as dramatic as the bloody Atlanta race riots, which deeply affected the entire city of Atlanta.

During the early 1900s, Atlanta's Black colleges operated in an atmosphere of intellectual growth and promise, racial restrictions, and social landmines as starkly evidenced by the 1906 race riot (Godshalk, 2005). White city leaders fearing that Black faculty might help organize retaliatory attacks against the White community dispatched White militia to disarm and replace Black professors who stood guard over the campus (Torrence, 1948). One evening during the crisis, Hope, while walking across campus, was stopped by an armed White man. Quick thinking diffused an otherwise dangerous encounter by Hope inviting the man to his campus home for refreshments.

The attack of Whites against Black sections of town provided a rude reminder of what life was like for most Blacks in the South regardless of their station in life, a danger zone. Godshalk (2005) notes, "The Brownsville confrontation had occurred right at the doorsteps of Gammon Theological Seminary and Clark College, and the White militia had threatened Atlanta Baptist College and its faculty" (p. 141). The question of Black men resisting oppression or protecting their own rights as citizens and their homes and institutions hit at the heart of how their manhood or lack thereof was perceived by the social norms and White power structure. This notion of manhood and "building men" takes on a more profound nature in the mission and ethos of Morehouse in the early decades of the twentieth century. Benjamin E. Mays, president of Morehouse from 1940 to 1967, was hired by John Hope in 1921 to serve on the faculty. He recalled what it was like in the South during those years. Mays (2003) commented on how Black WWI soldiers were treated in the South, "In many a local communities, Negro soldiers were told, 'Take off those uniforms and act like a nigger should'" (p.68).

In the fall of 1919, Howard Thurman enrolled into the freshman class of Morehouse and by the time of his enrollment, Morehouse had earned the reputation of educating Black men for leadership roles in their communities as preachers and teachers (Sisk, 1958). During that early era, it was common practice for valedictorians from Southern Black Baptist secondary schools funded by the ABHMS to receive a tuition scholarship to affiliated Baptist colleges like Morehouse. Because Thurman graduated at the top of his class at Florida Baptist Academy in Jacksonville, he benefited from that policy. Thurman (1979) stated, "Without this aid, I would not have been able to attend college" (p.33). He entered Morehouse with a proven track record of academic excellence, a solid sense of self-identity developed from his family and hometown community, personal confidence, and high expectations.

Thurman's years at Morehouse advanced his intellectual abilities, augmented his Christian beliefs, strengthened his notions of community, and placed him in the company of many emerging Black leaders of the twentieth century. These new generations of Black college students helped to usher in the notion of the New Negro. The old ways of thinking were being tossed aside and new broader ideas

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regarding improving the Black community, exercising citizenship rights and challenging the status quo when and where possible and finding avenues for building better racial relationships with Whites who were beginning to take root. A world war had been fought and Black men played a full share in it. There was growing hope that the decade of the 1920s, the modern age, offered a new promise of intellectual, economic, and democratic possibilities.

The Morehouse class of 1923 included Edward Swain Hope, the son of president John Hope, who went on to earn a graduate degree in civil engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and during World War II became the first Black appointed as a full lieutenant in the Navy (1944 Homecoming edition, *Maroon Tiger*, Samuel Archer Collection, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library SystemóResearch Library) and future Howard University president, James M. Nabrit, Jr. Coincidentally, Thurman's second wife, Sue Bailey (Thurman) was a student at Spelman College during these years where she shared a close friendship with Alberta Williams, the future Mrs. King, Sr. The four of them would enjoy decades of friendship and fellowship. After Morehouse, Nabrit earned a law degree from Northwestern University in 1927, served as a senior administrator for close to 20 years at Howard University, and played a lead role on the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* legal team. In 1960, Nabrit succeeded Mordecai Johnson as president of Howard University (Logan, 1967).

Thurman and Nabrit became high achievers at Morehouse. Thurman (1979) stated, "Jim Nabrit and I undertook to read every book in the library. He started at the top shelves and I at the bottom, and we worked our way across. We did in fact read every one" (p. 35). During their sophomore year, they earned the honor of joining the debating team coached by new faculty member, Benjamin Mays. Traditionally only seniors were allowed to join the team to compete against other Black collegians throughout the South. These interactions along with their classroom relationship resulted in Thurman and Mays becoming close lifelong friends and colleagues (Mays, 2003). They would both serve for many years at Howard University under the leadership of another Morehouse manóMordecai Johnson, Thurman as Dean of Chapel and faculty member, Mays as Dean of the School of Religion. Under his Morehouse presidency, Mays mentored numerous national Black leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr., and the first Black mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson (Jones, 1957). The legacy of what a Morehouse man was and is might best be understood in the transformative power of teaching and mentoring the next generation of Black men who fully values that legacy and implicitly commits to passing on the spirit of high expectations, achievement, and commitment to the Black community.

Thurman's undergraduate years fit a pattern of deep engagement and intentional leadership development. Studies on higher education students have shown that engagement and close involvement with curricular and co-curricular activities result in college student success (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1993). Thurman exemplified

the engaged successful college student long before empirical studies supported that phenomenon as critical to student success. He concentrated on his studies, maintained connection to the campus community, and immersed himself into co-curricular activities such as the debate team, the college's literary society, and even serving as the editor of the first senior yearbook in Morehouse history, *The Torch* of 1923 (Thurman, 1979). By the time of his graduation in 1923, Thurman had received all available honors, prizes, and was ranked either first or second in general scholarship every year (*The Torch*, 1923, Morehouse College Archives). Morehouse maintained a strict policy regarding student activities and behaviors (Sisk, 1958), and Thurman benefited from the disciplined structure and active involvement. These factors, among others, contributed to his success as a college student and fit the pattern of his influence on future college students to pursue excellence in their course work and professional lives (Giles, 2003). Morehouse was an educational institution that served a full range of students, literally taking them from boys to men. A panoramic photo on the wall of the Morehouse Archives building taken in 1916 shows the Morehouse student body, and visually depicts the age range and curricular range of the institution. The 1919-1920 College Bulletin refers to its three levels of instruction, Elementary, Academy (high school), and Collegiate which included a classical course of study.

Thurman shared a basic truth and powerful statement regarding the educational philosophy and the purpose of a college education for the young men at Morehouse, and for all Black college students of his generation. It represents a deeply ethical and morally responsible sentiment and expectation grounded in the African-American educational tradition regarding the purpose of education for generations of Blacks, past, present and future. Thurman (1979) stated:

I was profoundly affected by the sense of mission the college inculcated in us. We understood that our job was to learn so that we could go back into our communities and teach others. Many of the students were going into the ministry; many were the sons of ministers, which accounted in some measure for the missionary spirit of the place. But over and above this, we were always inspired to keep alive our responsibility to the many, many others who had not been fortunate enough to go to college. (p. 35)

That same sense of mission and purpose was later described at the Ninetieth Anniversary ceremony of the college in 1957, when President Mays referred to "five abiding values" which were central to the success of the institution and that shaped student success. The summary of those values are: promotion of critical thinking, character development, the development of a critical spiritual consciousness, community responsibility, and high personal and professional expectations (Jones, 1957). The power of the Morehouse experience inspired Thurman to become a minister and serve others in higher education settings. And it conveyed his thinking regarding the responsibility of those who are fortunate enough to earn a college

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education toward those who are less fortunate. Thurman felt that the private results of the collegiate experience were the most profound, meaning that self-development, self-actualization proved most lasting. In a speech delivered at Morehouse in 1967 at the Centennial Banquet, Thurman noted the importance of how John Hope made them feel special, important, and protected by addressing them as "Young gentlemen" (Fluker & Tumber, 1998, p. 235). The significance of this must be viewed in the context of the times. Black men were rarely referred to as "mister" or with the modicum of respect any citizen should deserve. By addressing them in that way, Hope planted mental seeds that they deserved respect and that he would hold them to high standards of behavior. Thurman states, "And this was symbolic of the emphasis that surrounded the college like a gentile climate, to protect us from the anonymous violence of the Atlanta environment . . ." (Fluker & Tumber, p. 235). That sense of obligation and duty represented an ethos of service rather than elitist privilege. Thurman's career as a campus minister reflected those values and was a way to promote a sense of self-agency and collective responsibility along with a profound spiritual message to future generations of college students. Morehouse had a profound affect on his life philosophy and professional skills.

Morehouse History and Critical Mentors

Originally organized in 1867 in Augusta, Georgia, as the Augusta Institute (Brawley, 1970; Sisk, 1958), in 1879 the future Morehouse was relocated to Atlanta and incorporated as the Atlanta Baptist Seminary. In 1897, under the leadership of President George Sale, amendments to the institution's charter granted college powers and a name change to Atlanta Baptist College. In 1906, President Sale resigned and was succeeded by John Hope.

In 1913, under President Hope's leadership, the name changed again, from the Atlanta Baptist College to Morehouse College. The college was named in honor of Reverend Henry L. Morehouse, D. D., who served as the Corresponding Secretary of the Atlanta Baptist Home Mission Society. The American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) was a primary funding and sponsoring agency for many Southern Black colleges. It administered Morehouse College along with other Black colleges such as Spelman College, Virginia Union, Shaw, and Benedict (Anderson, 1988). James Anderson (1988) credited Henry Morehouse with first using the term "talented tenth" in 1896, and that W. E. B. Du Bois proceeded to use it poignantly to advance similar educational policies in his early writings. Anderson (1988) cited Reverend Morehouse as stating:

In all ages the mighty impulses that have propelled a people onward in their progressive career, have proceeded from a few gifted souls. The "talented tenth" should be trained to analyze and to generalize by an education that would produce thoroughly disciplined minds. (p. 243)

At Morehouse, Thurman encountered several Black men who deeply influenced his life and who, in many respects, reflected the notions of the talented tenth. Born to a biracial union (Davis, 1997), John Hope exemplified the college educated nineteenth century Black man who held deep religious convictions and a full commitment to the uplift of his race. W. E. B. Du Bois reportedly stated, "He was at once White and glad to be Black" (Davis, 1997, p. 28). Hope did not shy away from progressive thought and social movements and involved himself with his close friend Du Bois for the historic 1906 Niagara Movement which laid the ideological foundation for the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Biographer Leroy Davis (1998) noted that as a student at Brown University, Hope refused to conceal his identity and heritage as a Black (Negro) man. He was therefore, not able to join the Greek letter fraternities which maintained unwritten segregationist policies. After graduating from Brown, Hope began a career on the faculty at Roger Williams College to give back to his race and play a role in their collective improvement. His work as educator and in Southern education leadership positions locates him as a progressive race man and proponent of liberal arts (Davis, 1997). Noted historian John Hope Franklin was named after John Hope. Franklin's parents took classes from Hope at Roger Williams College in Nashville, Tennessee, and thought so highly of their former teacher, that they proudly named their son after him.

Davis (1998) commented on Hope's place in African-American educational history, "He could very well be the least known major figure in the annals of African-American history between Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet John Hope meant as much to the development of Black higher education as Washington meant to the development of Black industrial education" (p. xxiv). Hope aligned himself with Black progressives of that era such as William Monroe Trotter, Ida Wells-Barnett, and his friend W. E. B. Du Bois. This philosophical leaning caused a degree of distance between Hope's leadership and some White Northern philanthropists. He advanced the classical/liberal arts direction of the Morehouse curriculum, and the institutional mission of preparing leaders for the Black community (Davis, 1998; Torrence, 1948).

Hope's stature as a Black leader and teacher influenced Thurman, as did his personal approach to shaping the character of the Morehouse students. Hope's leadership and high standards might also be credited for setting the institutional tone for developing a sense of pride and honor for future Morehouse men. Thurman (1979) stated, "He . . . talked to us in chapel every Tuesday morning. This constituted perhaps our greatest single course of instruction in the four undergraduate years. His talks spanned the entire field of contemporary life. Although a layman, John Hope was an important churchman" (p.36).

Hope left a lasting mark on his students in another practical way. One requirement for graduation consisted of writing and memorizing an original speech each year to be delivered in the chapel in front of the student body. If a student failed

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to complete one speech per year, they would have to deliver all four in their senior year. This method of preparing and perfecting the students' public speaking proved essential for either preaching or teaching. Thus, Thurman's oratory skills were developed and sharpened through that systemic process.

In the example of John Hope, we see an embodiment of the model of educational excellence and religious practicalities found in many early twentieth century Black educators who were fully committed to influencing the next generation of Black American leadership. The seeds of what a Morehouse man could and should be were firmly planted under Hope's leadership and advanced further during Mays's tenure. Thurman noted the important mentoring role that Hope played in students' self-perception and identity development:

He always addressed us as "young gentleman." What this term of respect meant to our faltering ego can only be understood against the backdrop of the South of the 1920s. We were Black men in Atlanta during a period when the state of Georgia was infamous for its brutality. Lynchings, burnings, unspeakable cruelties were the fundamentals of existence for Black people. (Thurman, 1979, p. 36)

Thurman (1979) continued,

No wonder then that every time Dr. Hope addressed us as "young gentlemen," the seeds of self-worth and confidence, long dormant, began to germinate and sprout. The attitudes we developed toward ourselves, as a result of this influence, set Morehouse men apart. It was not unusual, for example, to be identified as a Morehouse man by complete strangers, because of this subtle but dramatic sense of self. (p. 36)

Hope understood that if Blacks were to advance themselves they needed to work cooperatively with Whites who wanted to help. During Thurman's senior year in 1923, he accompanied Hope to an interracial meeting at the "Colored" Butler Street YMCA. The issue at hand centered on the segregated seating arrangements for a concert by the famous Black singer, Roland Hayes.

Blacks usually sat in the balcony or in the very rear of the auditorium on these mixed race occasions. Some of the liberal Southern Whites proposed to city leaders to allow the line that separated the races to be drawn vertically rather than horizontally. Using the center aisle as the point of separation, Blacks would sit on one side and Whites on the other in both lower and upper levels. The political haggling over the maintenance of racial separation upset Thurman and he abruptly walked out of the meeting. Hope followed him and offered the following advice: "Thurman, I know how you feel about what is going on in there, but you must remember that these are the best and most liberal men in the entire South. We must work with them. There is no one else. Remember" (Thurman, 1979, p. 37). Thurman added, ". . . his advice helped me grow in understanding" (Thurman, 1979, p. 37).

Thurman wanted something that was simply not possible in that era, equal treatment and full racial integration at a public event. Hope understood that social change happened slowly, but would eventually happen through the collective

efforts of people of good will regardless of race. This strategy of challenge and compromise guided Thurman's future work in higher education race relations.

Two other significant Morehouse role models for Thurman were Samuel H. Archer and Benjamin Mays. Archer served as a faculty member and Dean under Hope's leadership and later succeeded him as president. He earned an A. B. from Colgate University in 1902, became a professor at Morehouse in 1905, and followed Hope as president in 1929 serving in that capacity until 1938. Mays joined the faculty in 1921 and returned as Morehouse president in 1940.

Thurman (1979) summed up his view of Hope and Archer, "If Dr. Hope was the guiding mentor of Morehouse, Dean Archer was the wise supportive father. He stood over six feet tall and exuded vitality, tempered by a glowing warmth of spirit. The men honored and liked President Hope. They revered and loved Dean Archer" (p. 38). Yates (1964) acknowledged the influence of Dean Archer on the young men at Morehouse. She wrote, "As Dean of the college, he was friend and inspiration to all and the students' idea of a real man even in a men's college" (Yates, 1964, p. 53). Archer and Thurman would remain close friends long after Thurman's undergraduate years.

Multiple letters in the Howard Thurman Collection at Boston University reveals a close connection between the two men. In 1935, Thurman received a letter from Archer regarding the Morehouse Board of Trustees decision to bestow an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Thurman's reply on April 18, 1935 states:

I need not say to you that I am exceedingly happy that my own college has seen fit to confer this honor upon me. I have never been interested in window-dressing and in titles, etc., but my attitude toward this is very different for it says to me that my college is willing to put its stamp of collaboration upon its own handiwork. (HTC, Box 1, 1933-38 A)

In 1936, Archer wrote to Thurman to suggest that he consider the presidency at Shaw University. Archer states, "There are so many fine possibilities connected with Shaw that could become realities under your administration that I am inclined to advise you to consider it prayerfully" (HTC, Box 1A, Howard University, 1933-38). Thurman did not pursue the Shaw presidency nor did he find serving as a college president appealing in later years. He felt strongly that his best role in life was that of spiritual guide and wanted to remain true to his calling despite the opportunities to serve as an administrator.

Close in age, Thurman first met mentor and life-long friend Benjamin E. Mays in 1921. Considered the "schoolmaster of the civil rights movement," Mays's administrative leadership and personal example modeled for students what he preached, namely "that their minds and their determination to do right would prevail" (Wilkins, 2003, p. 27). Thurman (1979) characterized the impact of his Morehouse teachers and mentors and the high ideals of academic, moral, and ethical excellence as follows:

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There were many seasoned men who were also inspiring teachers, touching us at a place in ourselves beyond all our faults and all our virtues. They placed over our heads a crown that for the rest of our lives we would be trying to grow tall enough to wear. This was a gift far greater than the imparting of information and facts. (p. 41)

In his autobiography, *Born to Rebel*, Mays (2003) writes:

We [he and his wife Sadie] wanted to be in the thick of the fight as long as there was a glimmer of hope that we could help ameliorate the racial problem by even the slightest degree, could change the Southern pattern of society by one whit. We believe that during our 27 years we helped instill in many a Morehouse student a sense of his own worth and a pride that thereafter enabled him to walk the earth with dignity. We believe that long before the current emphasis on pride in being Black, the Morehouse student had already found his identity. (p. 194-195)

This comment is a powerful testament to the institutional spirit and leadership, teaching, and learning at Morehouse, and is a reflection of the African-American educational model of "excellence despite adversity" that Black schools and colleges instilled into its students (Siddle-Walker, 1996). In addition, it might be considered a sound description of an inspirational vision of excellence for the student-centered goals of higher education in the twenty first century. Carrying forward the traditions and legacy of Morehouse and John Hope, Mays ensured that Morehouse men gained more than a technical or liberal arts education, Morehouse men developed their identities, dignity, and place in the world. This is a major factor that separates predominately White institutions from HBCUs in regards to educating Black students. Morehouse emphasized the development of its students on personal, interpersonal and intellectual levels, which resulted in large measure the making of Morehouse men.

High achievement, nurturing relationships, high aspirations, and a diverse set of intellectual and professional developmental experiences filled Thurman's undergraduate life. His intellect developed from taking courses from top scholars such as sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. Frazier had graduated from Howard University and began his distinguished teaching career at Morehouse during Thurman's senior year (1922-23). Thurman recalled that Frazier was an honest, outspoken man who did not participate in the religious activities of the college (Thurman, 1979). Frazier, a no-nonsense teacher, taught him valuable lessons in respect and humility. Apparently, Thurman had developed an inflated ego due to earning an "A" the previous summer in a philosophy course at Columbia University. Frazier reminded Thurman who was in charge in the following manner:

Howard Thurman, if Dean Archer wanted you to teach this course, you would be standing where I am and I would be seated where you are. Since he has not made such a decision, I am the teacher and you are the student. From this day forward you are not to speak a word in this course, not even to answer "present" when the roll is called. Understand? (Thurman 1979, p. 41)

After gaining that new perspective, Thurman proceeded to excel in the class and earned an A in the course. Years later, he and Frazier became good friends and served together at Howard University in the 1930s; however, they never spoke of that incident again.

A Culture of Brotherhood and Success

At Morehouse the students shared all of their meals together in the campus cafeteria. This act of eating together was more than the simple consumption of food; it symbolically reinforced the communal nature of family, mentoring, and a . . . building of relationships that sustain community (Wells, 2002, p. 45). Seniors would sit together at a separate table and engage in conversations worthy of their level of maturity and campus experiences. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who would watch, listen, and later follow the more mature example of their senior level colleagues occupied other tables. This process allowed for social reproduction of the Morehouse men, yet it promoted a deeper sense of belonging to something greater than the individual, it was an act of belonging to a community of shared beliefs, values, and behaviors. Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960) described the activity of eating meals as a group as a form of rite of passage, "The rite of eating and drinking together . . . is clearly a rite of incorporation, of physical union, and has been called a sacrament of communion" (p. 29). For the men of Morehouse, meal times represented an opportunity to form bonds, provide examples of desired behavior, and a time to reinforce the spirit of the institution.

The YMCA represented a major campus organization, and the student president of the YMCA served as a student religious leader. The role of religion permeated many of the activities at Morehouse. The 1919-1920 *Morehouse College Catalogue* states, "This is emphatically a Christian school. The faculty keeps constantly in mind the fact that it was founded by a missionary organization, and is sustained by the contributions of Christian people for the Christian education for young men . . ." (p. 12). Students attended daily chapel, several informal religious meetings during the week, and maintained a strict routine of behavior. Clearly, Thurman's career goal found a nurturing and supportive environment at Morehouse and shaped his future skills as a preacher.

The students participated in campus religious services and attended Black churches throughout Atlanta, often working with the youth at the local churches (Thurman, 1979). Thurman eventually formed a close long-term working relationship with the Student Christian Movement and become a top speaker on its nationwide speaker circuit. He advocated and supported the holistic approach to religion (mind, body, spirit) that the "Y" organization represented.

Thurman read voraciously and possessed an ambitious intellect. One example of this quest for knowledge explains what led Thurman to seek summer courses at Columbia and is an example of his life-long pattern of seeking knowledge beyond

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what was convenient or traditional. Mays awakened Thurman's interest in philosophy and Thurman decided to pursue this interest at another institution in the summer between his sophomore and junior years. Morehouse did not offer courses in philosophy but offered courses in logic and ethics.

In an effort to advance his intellect, he sought out and found two available philosophy courses at Columbia University. The courses were Reflective Thinking and An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy. He developed a plan to live in New York for the summer and enroll in the courses. For his plan to succeed, Thurman needed money. He decided to win cash prizes made available from Morehouse for exceptional academic performance. He won the Edgar Allen Poe short story prize and the Chamberlain prize for a literary interpretation of Biblical scripture (Yates, 1964). There is no record of the amounts of those prizes, but these funds helped him meet his learning goals in New York.

In preparation for these courses and as part of his strategy to live in New York for the summer, Thurman lived with a cousin in Cleveland, Ohio, from May to July doing chores to earn his keep. While in Cleveland, Thurman went to the public library every day and asked the librarian to help him research topics in philosophy. This independent study in preparation of summer classes is a great example of Thurman as a high achieving student and the ethos of academic excellence promoted by Morehouse.

The summer in New York and at Columbia proved critical to Thurman's intellectual development and was a testament to his drive and determination. Thurman (1979) stated, "Perhaps the most significant single course I ever took, certainly during this critical period of my life, was the course in reflective thinking, taught by . . . E. A. Burt (p. 44). Thurman's love of learning prepared him for his life of service. The intellectual development he experienced from the course on reflective thinking made a critical difference in his life and work and is an example of a college student finding practical use for information learned in the classroom.

Thurman modeled academic excellence at Morehouse. Twice named president of his class, he ranked number one or two in scholarship in each of his four years (Yates, 1964). Alexander Astin's student involvement theory might be used to understand Thurman as a college student. Astin (1993) explained, ". . . a highly involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 297).

In 1923, Thurman graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and academic honors and the college offered him an opportunity to join Morehouse as an instructor. As part of this offer he would get a chance to have his Bachelor of Arts degree "validated" at the University in Chicago. During that era, it was common practice for graduates of Black colleges to immediately enroll in a White college or university to have their degrees validated, or in other words, made legitimate by the so-called higher standards, accreditation associations, and prestige of a White

institution. In many cases Black colleges did not have regional accreditation. For most Black graduates of Black colleges, this involved taking one additional year of coursework. The bachelor's degree would then be fully acceptable at other White institutions in case the student wanted to pursue graduate level work. Thurman declined this offer and set his sights on attending a seminary to become an ordained minister.

He settled his vocational choice by his senior year and graduated as valedictorian. Thurman's pursuit of and commitment to higher education and making a positive impact on society was echoed by many Blacks of this era. Yates (1964) stated:

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that he should go on to do graduate work. For Howard Thurman that meant Seminary to prepare for the ministry . . . no matter what persuasions to stay in the South might be given him, Seminary for him was to be in the North. The letter Mordecai Johnson had written to him seven years ago was worn thin from much handling. Howard read it again: "Prepare yourself. . . ." (p. 61)

In the fall of 1923, Thurman enrolled into Rochester Theological Seminary and graduated in at the top of the class in 1926. After graduating from Rochester, he worked as a Baptist minister in Oberlin, Ohio, and completed intensive independent study with Quaker mystic Rufus Jones at Haverford College. In 1929, Morehouse and Spelman became the undergraduate members of the newly configured Atlanta University system. John Hope accepted the appointment to the presidency of the system which led to Archer becoming Morehouse president. That same year, Thurman accepted an invitation to return to his Alma Mater as Professor of Religion and Director of Religious Life at Spelman (Thurman, 1979). In 1932, he accepted an invitation from Mordecai Johnson to join the faculty at Howard University and assume the leadership for its institutional spiritual life as Dean of Chapel and Professor of Religion. In 1944, Thurman left Howard University and higher education to co-found and lead the interdenominational and interracial Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples in San Francisco (Fellowship Church). Through this work, Thurman and his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman exercised their expanding vision for interracial and spiritual relationship building, diverse faith traditions as integrated community, and the need to find common ground across cultural and international barriers. Thurman consistently preached the notion of unity of all life. In 1953, Thurman returned to higher education, accepting the position of Dean of Marsh Chapel and Professor of Spiritual Disciplines and Resources in the School of Theology at Boston University. This new role broke a color barrier at White institutions and established Thurman as the first African American to hold the title of dean at any predominately White college or university. He retired from Boston University in 1965 and, with the help of many supporters, founded the Howard Thurman Educational Trust: a philanthropic organization dedicated to helping needy college students and distributing many of his sermons, books, and essays.

Conclusion

The role of Black colleges must never be overlooked in the process of providing post-secondary education to Black students and the positive influences of Blacks who committed to the uplift of their race through formal education should also receive due credit. Morehouse served students from all walks of life and from all levels of preparation. It maintained an academy division until approximately 1930. The collegiate level curriculum reflected what was being taught at many White liberal arts colleges. And several Morehouse graduates of that era continued on to earn graduate and professional degrees at northern White institutions. One overlooked aspect of Morehouse history is the role of women in the building Morehouse men. There were several women on the academy level faculty, yet there is limited mention of them. The college bulletin of 1919-1920, lists the names of the entire faculty including: Gertrude R. Anderson, Professor of Latin and German; and Mrs. Maggie Rogers Howard, Principal of English Preparatory Department, and Mrs. H. R. Watson, Instructor of English. Hope's wife, Lugenia Burns Hope played an active role in the life of the college and in the Atlanta community. This is an area for further study.

In addition, HBCUs offered a different training ground for resistance to the racial hate and segregation that was commonplace across the country. The year Thurman enrolled into Morehouse is known as the "Red Summer" of 1919 because of the approximately two dozen race riots. The earning of a college degree in 1923 placed Thurman in a small but growing group of Blacks earning college degrees in America and stood in critical contrast to what many other Southern Blacks experienced that year. For example, 1923 was also the year of the Rosewood, Florida massacre. The opportunity for Blacks to attend school and college and contribute to their communities during this time period should be understood within the context of Jim Crow America.

According to historian Henry Bullock (1967), from 1915 to 1924 approximately 5,000 Blacks earned undergraduate degrees. This reflects a significant upward trend: approximately 8,000 Black students earned degrees from 1925 to 1938, and approximately 67,000 from 1939 to 1952.

This data reflect the range of years prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, court ordered racial desegregation, and the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights movement. The overwhelming majority of these degrees were conferred at Black colleges and the students were taught predominately by Black educators. Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann (2001) documented the primary significance of Black colleges in educating Black students, "In 1950, prior to the Brown decision, about 90 percent of Black American college and university enrollment was in historically Black colleges, public and private." Understanding HBCUs, Black educational aspirations, and Black students prior to and soon after Brown, one must consider the importance of Black self-agency and positive environments. For Thurman, Morehouse College provided the nurturing soil for his identity development as a

Black man with intrinsic worth and dignity, and his future success and influence on others through his preaching, teaching, and writing.

Note

¹ Conducting historical research is often a collaborative process between the researcher, archivists, librarians, special collections, and funding sources. I wish to thank to Herman Skipf Mason for granting access to archival materials at Morehouse College and staff members at the Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University and the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History (a special library of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System). A special note of appreciation goes to the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University, and the Heanon Wilkins Faculty Fellowship for providing funding for this and other research projects.

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