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FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
BROWN UNIVERSITY-TOUGALOO COLLEGE
PARTNERSHIP

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The Partnership: An Unprecedented Step In Higher Education

Remarks by Peter Bernstein,
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I'm delighted to be here to be celebrating the partnership Tougaloo and Brown entered into 40 years ago—almost to the day, as the agreement was announced on May 18, 1964.

My task this afternoon is to briefly describe some of the history of the last 40 years. And I will start at the beginning when the partnership was born.

It was a pivotal period in the history of the civil rights movement and of Tougaloo College, in particular. As the sole black college in Mississippi not under state control, Tougaloo was playing a vital role in the civil rights movement. Tougaloo students and faculty conducted the first sit-ins in Jackson.

The writer Anne Moody in her classic autobiography, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, described a civil rights sit-in at a lunch counter staged by Tougaloo students and faculty:

“I was dragged about thirty feet towards the door by my hair when someone made them turn me loose... We started back to the center of the counter... Lois Chaffee, a white Tougaloo faculty member, was now sitting [next to another student.] There were now four of us, all women. The mob started smearing us with ketchup, mustard, sugar, pies, and everything on the counter. Soon (we) were joined by John Salter, but the moment he sat down he was hit on the jaw by what appeared to be brass knuckles. Blood gushed from his face and someone threw salt in the open wound.... We sat there for three hours taking a beat.”

As a center of that sort of consciousness and bravery, Tougaloo posed a grave threat to the racist Mississippi establishment of the time.

During the terror of 1963-64, the Tougaloo campus represented the only place in the state in which white and black activists could meet together without fear for their physical safety.

Tougaloo's importance to the civil rights movement was not lost on white officials, including the notorious State Sovereignty Commission. Authorities accused the school of foster "agitation" rather than education and demanded the expulsion or firing of students and faculty activists, beginning with the college's president, Daniel Beittel, a white Northerner known for his support of black civil rights.

By the beginning of 1964, Tougaloo's fate hung in the balance. A bill introduced in the Mississippi legislature threatened to bar the school's graduates from sitting the required state teacher's exams. Another bill proposed to revoke the school's charter entirely.

It was at this inauspicious moment that Brown entered the picture. As it happened, Tougaloo's board of trustees included several individuals with links to Providence and to Brown. One of them was Irving Fain, a wealthy, philanthropic Providence businessman, whose wife, Macie, a charming, savvy, cosmopolitan woman, was born and raised in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Another was the Rev. Larry Durgin, minister of Providence's Central Congregational Church, who had become a member of the Tougaloo Board through his work with the American Missionary Association.

Interestingly, the AMA traces its origins back to the Amistad Committee, a group of abolitionists, including John Quincy Adams, who banded together in 1839 and succeeded in getting the 53 African slaves who led the mutiny on the ship freed and returned to their homes in Africa instead of being turned over to the two Cuban planters, who claimed they owned them. After the Civil War, the AMA established more than 500 schools in the South, one of which was Tougaloo—a Native American word roughly translated as "at the fork of the stream."

In their quest for funds for Tougaloo, Fain and Durgin—along with Charlie Baldwin, Durgin's former assistant minister who recently had been appointed Chaplain of Brown University—formed the Rhode Island Friends of Tougaloo. In April 1962, they approached Barnaby Keeney, a member of the Central Church and President of Brown, for help with their effort. Keeney, who has recently attended a conference of the nation's leading educators at which President Kennedy asked for a redoubling of efforts to expand educational opportunities for African-Americans, was receptive to the approach because he saw it as a way for Brown to play a useful role in black higher education.

After further investigating the situation, on May 18, 1964—the 10th anniversary of the epochal *Brown v. Board of Education* decision—Keeney announced a new "cooperative relationship" between the two schools, supported by a grant of a quarter of a million dollars from the Ford Foundation. (Revealingly, Ford entrusted the money to Brown, rather than Tougaloo.)

The cooperative project initially included pre-freshman and post-baccalaureate "bridging" programs for students entering and leaving Tougaloo; a system of faculty exchanges; and, most enduringly, a student exchange program.

Newspapers around the country hailed the union portraying it as a continuation of the *Brown v. Board* decision, the next great step on the road towards an integrated America—though there were different perspectives apparent in different papers. The New York Herald Tribune, then a great liberal paper that rivaled the New York Times, ran the story with the headline “Brown University Adopts Southern Academic Waif.” While black papers, like the New York and Pittsburgh Couriers, carried headlines like “Tougaloo Boasts Assets No Money Can Buy” and “Tougaloo’s Unique Plan Explained.”

The partnership quickly became a model for other cooperative relationships between northern, historically white universities and historically black colleges and universities in the South. It also became--most importantly--the template for Title II of the 1965 U.S. Higher Education Act, which remains the most important source of federal funds for historically black colleges.

Yet, from the beginning, the Brown-Tougaloo relationship was also the focal point for many of the racial and political tensions overtaking the civil rights movement. The first scholarly project launched under the auspices of the partnership was a Rockefeller Foundation-funded grant to use the techniques of teaching English as a second language to train Tougaloo students to speak standard English—sort of a “My Fair Lady” comes to Mississippi experiment. As with the Ford grant, the money was not given to Tougaloo but in this case to the Brown Linguistics Department. Tougaloo students and faculty objected to the notion that their spoken English was inferior to standard English and wondered out-loud if they would have to learn to speak with “Yankee” accents. George Owens, Tougaloo’s new president, complained about paternalism but decided to take the money anyway, reasoning that if the money would benefit students at Tougaloo, it was worth accepting.

More troubling—but unclear from the historical record—is the role Brown may have played in the dismissal of President Beittel, who was white, and the subsequent hiring of George Owens, who was black. The facts are murky but Beittel’s sacking was consistent with the thinking of Brown administrators who viewed civil rights activism as a distraction from the real priority of building Tougaloo into a first-rate liberal arts college. As Harold Pfautz, a Brown sociology professor who became the first director of the cooperative program and moved into Tougaloo’s presidential mansion after Beittel’s firing, said: “If you’re running a voter registration center, you’re not running a college.”

Paternalism continued to be an issue—especially with the rise of the Black Power movement as a growing number of blacks questioned the value of integration.

Stokely Carmichael memorably declared in a speech in this very chapel (Woodworth Chapel) that Tougaloo was once a proud black university but now it had been reduced to a “Brown baby.” When I arrived at Tougaloo as an exchange student in the Fall of 1970, those sentiments were very much in evidence. Within a few weeks of my arrival as I was walking alone in front of this chapel on my way to the dining hall, someone shouted “Honky, get off this motherf***ing campus.”

As time has passed, the partnership, while not exactly flourishing, has endured. There have been periodic attempts to extend the ties between the two schools—especially in the early years. Then in 1991, when the partnership was 25 years old, Vartan Gregorian, Brown’s president, and Adib Shakir, Tougaloo’s president, signed a basic understanding that pledged both institutions to expand their engagement with each other. And while the boards of trustees at both schools endorsed that document, not much came of it.

What has endured and sometimes flourished, however—largely because of the dedication and enthusiasm of small groups on both campuses—have been the student and faculty exchanges.

In 1972, Dr. Stanley Aronson, then dean of the newly formed Brown Medical School, and Richard McGinnis, a professor at Tougaloo, initiated the Early Identification Program. Under this program, The Brown Med School admits two sophomore pre-med students from Tougaloo. One participant in this program, Dr. Galen V. Henderson, director of neurocritical care and emergency at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, a part of Harvard University, was recently elected an alumni trustee of Brown.

All told, over the last 40 years, over 200 Tougaloo students have studied at Brown, while somewhere over 100 Brown students have attended Tougaloo. Over the same period, about 65 faculty members and administrators have participated in the exchange program—about two-thirds of them traveling from Brown to Tougaloo. Brown faculty have taught a variety of subjects at Tougaloo but the majority have been in the sciences or pre-med.

One thing that has definitely been a positive legacy of the partnership is the impact these exchanges have had on the lives of the individuals who have participated. The archives are full of poignant reminiscences from Tougaloo and Brown students and faculty about how the experience has changed their lives—sometimes in dramatic ways.

As for myself, the semester I spent at Tougaloo certainly enriched my life and continues to do so today. I haven’t gone back and read the almost daily letters I wrote recording my experiences, though I have promised Professor Campbell that I would dig them up and contribute them to the archive he and other students and faculty have been assembling. But the memories of many of those experiences—some raw, as I already mentioned, but most warm—are still fresh. Living in Room 18 ½ in Galloway Hall. Retreating to Kincheloe Hall, the only air-conditioned building on campus, to escape the oppressive August and September heat. Touring the Jackson Municipal jail for my criminology and penology class, the first integrated group to do so. Sitting in my course on slavery as the teacher rhetorically says “I don’t see why we don’t slit every white throat we see.” And then there was the discussion in the course on “The Mind of Nazi Germany” about how bad it was, the blacks or the Jews. Driving up to the Delta one Sunday with Professor Werner Hofmeister and his wife, Donna, and seeing cotton fields for the first time. And much more.

The courses I took that semester were some of the most memorable of my formal education. My teachers—the unforgettable Ernst Borinski, Lou Holloway, Jim Brown, Jim Loewen and Claire Morse—were all as good or better than the professors I had at Brown and

later at Cambridge University in England. And the friendships I made still endure—especially with Isaac Byrd, then a fresh, precocious, opinionated, big-mouthed, eccentric kid from Shaw, Mississippi and now, a bit older but very much the same. He welcomed me then and he still welcomes me. We both have fond memories of our friendship—“integrating” a country club in Westchester County, New York, where I grew up, Isaac coming to visit Scarsdale for Thanksgiving and much more. I find I learn something new every time I come down to Mississippi, whether it’s attending a board meeting or going to the Jackson State-Southern football game, as I did last fall.

So what lessons have been learned over forty years as the Brown-Tougaloo partnership endured? To paraphrase the great sociologist Margaret Mead, a few dedicated, committed people working together can change the world. Indeed, that is the only way it can happen.

The Brown-Tougaloo partnership has been sustained and prospered over the years because of the efforts and commitment of a few people who have continued to believe that these two educational institutions have a lot to offer each other and society, in general. I personally think the potential for doing good and fostering change is even greater now than in 1964 and that there is even more to be done. Fifty years after *Brown vs. Board*, though there have been great strides, integration has not come to America. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen. There is much that can and should be done. And I’m heartened by the commitment of Presidents Hogan and Simmons in embracing these challenges and confident that the two of them, working together, will move us and this great partnership forward.

Thank you.

Acknowledgements:

These remarks were drawn primarily from the following three sources:

- 1) Prof. James Campbell, Memo to Ruth Simmons, June 29, 2003;
- 2) Jessica Brooks, A History of the Brown-Tougaloo Relationship prepared for the Corporation Committee on Relations with Tougaloo College, October 9, 1993;
- 3) Anthony Walton, The Tougaloo Connection, Brown Alumni Monthly, September, 1997.

Also consulted:

- Albert Schleuter, How Tougaloo Changed my Life, George Street Journal, February 23, 2001;
- Norman Boucher, The View from Century’s End, Brown Alumni Monthly, December, 1995;
- Sheryl Shapiro, Exchange fosters partnership between Brown, Tougaloo College, Brown Daily Herald, February 16, 2001;
- Tougaloo-Brown Basic Understanding, November 6, 1991.

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