

Article

“We Are Doing Everything That Our Resources Will Allow”: The Black Church and Foundation Philanthropy, 1959–1979

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Abstract: Contemporary wealth inequality has prompted a renewed and increased interest in the role that external funding plays in civil society. While observers frequently consider how big philanthropy influences education, politics, and social services, few historical treatments of the postwar era have addressed the interaction between foundation philanthropy and American religion. Black Christianity stands as one clear example of this oversight. Numerous studies of black life in the twentieth-century have engaged the tensions between internal prerogatives and external influences without applying those questions to black churches. This article begins that exploration by focusing on Lilly Endowment, Inc.—the most consistent twentieth-century source of foundation support for religion—and analyzing its interactions with a series of summer seminars for black ministers hosted at Virginia Union University. Though contextual changes in the latter twentieth century altered the nature of Lilly Endowment’s relationship with its recipients, two decades of collaboration reveal how black Christians exerted substantial influence over the trajectory of Lilly Endowment’s growing program in religious giving.

Keywords: philanthropy; Lilly Endowment, Inc.; black Christianity; Virginia Union University; civil rights; seminary education; Seabury Consultation; National Council of Churches

1. Introduction

The early twenty-first century has proven quite conducive to big philanthropy. An ascending cohort of tech billionaires, an increasing public faith in the power of big data, and a privatizing neoliberal state all have combined to form a moment ripe for intervention by external donors with seemingly limitless means. The trend has not escaped notice, and commentators have adopted differing postures toward this upstart class of philanthropists. Some have celebrated their initiative and innovation, detecting in it a new philanthropic dispensation that promises to transform the world in unprecedented ways (Bishop and Green 2008; Fleishman 2007; MacAskill 2015; Singer 2015). Other observers have followed recent scholarship on the broad history of capitalism by adopting a more skeptical posture. At root, their critical assessments have largely shared an emphasis on systems and structures over the role of individuals. Whether written for popular or scholarly audiences, these analyses have tended to accentuate the whims and preferences of the ultra-rich, identifying the antidemocratic influence of big philanthropy in sectors including politics, foreign relations, and public education (Callahan 2017; Mayer 2016; McGoey 2016; Parmar 2012; Reich et al. 2016; Russakoff 2015). Indeed, in another article, I have described the powerful influence exerted by external monies on one popular movement in twentieth-century lay religious revitalization (Byers forthcoming).

Such emphases have been appropriate, even essential, in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Yet perhaps more than others, scholars of religion should be wary of tendencies to elevate either

the impersonal system or the individual agent to the exclusion of the other¹ (Brekus 2015, pp. 93–100; Johnson 2003, pp. 113–24). Numerous religious traditions encourage the private cultivation of an unmediated relationship between the human and the divine, but many, perhaps most, of those same traditions recognize that religion also involves public, corporate manifestations. And in its public expressions, faith requires funding. In the twentieth century, money facilitated full-time ministry; it subsidized the journals and periodicals by which religious actors dialogued; it underwrote the construction and upkeep of facilities in which religious communities gathered to worship; and it enabled religious leaders to travel and convene across boundaries both local and international. At a moment of decreasing religious affiliation and increasing wealth inequality, the historical role of external monies in organized religion demands ever more careful attention. This article takes an initial step in that direction by examining one source of external money, twentieth-century foundation philanthropy, and considering its application to one subset of religion, namely black Christians in the postwar United States. It draws together literatures on the history of civil rights, higher education, and twentieth-century Protestantism by analyzing the influence of foundation philanthropy on training initiatives for black Christian ministers.

2. Philanthropy and Religion in the Twentieth Century

For scholars interested in these topics—especially the influence of outside donors and the vitality of organized religion—few twentieth-century subjects prove more compelling than the Indianapolis-based philanthropic foundation, Lilly Endowment, Inc. Lilly Endowment began its philanthropic work modestly. Founded in 1937 with gifts of stock from the family pharmaceutical firm, Eli Lilly and Company, the foundation did not publish an annual report until 1950, and its annual payouts across all program areas failed to breach the \$10-million mark until 1972. From their first public declarations, however, Lilly Endowment leaders expressed a special commitment to religion. Investments in religion by major foundations were far from unprecedented. For example, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., launched the Sealantic Fund in 1938 in order to support projects in Protestant theological education, but after his death in 1973, his heirs absorbed Sealantic into the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the interest in religion diminished rapidly (Zinsmeister 2016, p. 772). In a similar vein, the Pew Charitable Trusts supported a range of conservative religious projects through the 1950s and 1960s but moved away from religion in increasing measure in the decades following J. Howard Pew’s death in 1971 (Zunz 2012, pp. 189ff, p. 262). Like Lilly Endowment, the Danforth Foundation funded major projects in church-related education in the 1960s; but the comparison ends there, as Danforth had largely abandoned such initiatives by the 1970s in favor of support for local institutions of higher education, such as Washington University in St. Louis² (Pattillo and Mackenzie 1965, 1966; *The Danforth Foundation Annual Report 1971/1972* 1972, p. 32; *The Danforth Foundation Annual Report 1973/1974* 1974, pp. 91, 99–100; Thomas 1995, p. 50). In sum, twentieth-century foundation giving to religion ebbed and, mainly, ebbed.

Over eighty years, however, Lilly Endowment exhibited a commitment to religion both steady in its intent and increasing in its capacity. This commitment yielded support for a wide range of religious projects: seminary education, academic scholarship on religion, ecumenical initiatives, and religious

¹ My approach here draws most directly from historian of religion Catherine A. Brekus, who argues that agency “should be understood as relational and not simply as individual” (Brekus 2015). Likewise, the social historian Walter Johnson has influenced my approach. I have sought to avoid the pitfall he describes, in which invocations of “agency” often signal merely that subjects “acted in ways that the author recognizes as the ways that human beings would act” (Johnson 2003).

² On the Danforth Foundation’s investments in church-related higher education, see (Pattillo and Mackenzie 1965, 1966). By the early 1970s, Danforth materials still mentioned a commitment to supporting scholars who prioritized “the relation of ethical or religious values to their disciplines,” but in 1973 the foundation initiated a \$60-million matching grant for Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL) that some viewed as a break from prior practice and a naked conflict of interest, since foundation board chair William Danforth, Jr., was also WUSTL’s chancellor; foundation president Merrimon Cuninggim resigned in protest (*The Danforth Foundation Annual Report 1971/1972* 1972, p. 32); for details of the WUSTL gift, see (*The Danforth Foundation Annual Report 1973/1974* 1974, pp. 91, 99–100); on Cuninggim’s resignation, see (Thomas 1995).

humanitarian work all received Endowment funding. Yet the foundation's practices and policies have likely worked against the aims of those interested to tell this story: Lilly Endowment leaders have consistently favored discretion in their giving, and the foundation maintains a private archive for internal use only. Thus, historians eager to analyze the Endowment's influence on American religion have little choice but to work from an improvised archive comprised of data available in published annual reports, contemporary news accounts, and holdings in the archives of recipient organizations and institutions.

Despite these limitations, available material is ample enough to demonstrate the foundation's consistent commitment to religion. Establishing that consistency, however, does little to foreclose questions of influence and agency. In fact, Lilly Endowment's relative isolation as a major foundation interested in religion has likely amplified its capacity to influence the field³ (Jenkins and Halcli 1999, pp. 229–56). One subset of Lilly Endowment midcentury grant initiatives proves especially illuminating with regard to questions of big philanthropy and personal agency. Beginning in the late 1950s, the foundation engaged in modest efforts related to seminary education at predominantly black colleges and universities. The first program of this kind commenced in 1959 and continued until 1970, as Lilly Endowment provided the funding for an annual summer seminar for black ministers conducted by leaders at Virginia Union University (VUU) in Richmond. Over the following decades, the Endowment sponsored similar initiatives at other institutions. In the mid-1970s, for example, the foundation committed substantial funds to Shaw University (Raleigh, North Carolina) to launch a "Seminary without Walls" that would employ the latest technologies to train ministers unable to relocate for full-time, residential study. Around the same time, the Endowment began a relationship with the Princeton, New Jersey-based Fund for Theological Education that lasted through the 1980s, and in 1975 they commenced a series of grants to the Harlem-based Ministerial Interfaith Association. Indeed, by the late 1970s, new staffers at the Endowment had even articulated the rationale and laid the groundwork for an entire program area focused on "the Black Church."

However, the decade-long collaboration with VUU deserves special attention for at least two reasons. First, unlike these subsequent programs that emerged as part of a growing trend at the foundation, the VUU grants represented an anomaly compared to other Endowment giving in the 1950s and 1960s. The actors and priorities that defined the VUU summer seminars have not featured prominently in recent secondary literature, so attention to this program promises to provide insights into a cast of largely overlooked midcentury religious actors⁴ (Best 2006, pp. 195–226; Savage 2008; Gaines 1996; Connolly 2014; Farrington 2016; Fortner 2015; Rigueur 2014). Second, the documentary record the summer seminar program left behind in the VUU archives and in contemporary news accounts casts new light on the negotiations that take place between donors and recipients, a topic especially relevant for discussions of black Christianity. The tension between external funding and internal prerogatives has driven numerous studies of black life in the twentieth-century, with special attention committed to higher education, anti-poverty programs, and community development initiatives⁵ (Avery 2013; Gasman 2007; Rooks 2006; Clegg 2003, pp. 341–62; Raynor 1999, pp. 195–228; Ferguson 2013). Given the importance—whether real or just perceived—of the church as a social institution in midcentury black communities, applying this same set of questions to twentieth-century black religious life seems especially necessary⁶ (Savage 2008, pp. 112–13; Higginbotham 1993, p. 1).

³ J. Craig Jenkins and Abigail Halcli have described this phenomenon as a "channeling effect," in which the introduction of external monies ultimately directs the development of subsequent projects and programs (Jenkins and Halcli 1999).

⁴ The clearest exceptions include (Best 2006, pp. 195–226; Savage 2008). Outside the realm of religion, some scholars have begun to reconsider other black actors who lie outside traditional narratives of the civil rights movement. For a classic work in this vein, see (Gaines 1996). For more recent examples, see (Connolly 2014; Farrington 2016; Fortner 2015; Rigueur 2014).

⁵ On higher education, see (Avery 2013; Gasman 2007; Rooks 2006). On anti-poverty programs, see (Clegg 2003, pp. 341–62; Raynor 1999, pp. 195–228). On community development initiatives, see (Ferguson 2013).

⁶ Barbara Savage discusses debates about the social role of the church (Savage 2008, pp. 112–13; Higginbotham 1993, p. 1). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham opens her renowned study of black Baptist women with the claim that they helped "broad[en]"

In that light, a close reading of Lilly Endowment's investments in postwar seminary education at VUU reinforces other ways of interpreting the relationship between black communities and white philanthropists. Without question, Lilly Endowment's substantial coffers afforded the foundation obvious social leverage, and VUU officials felt constrained by financial realities. They believed they were already achieving all that their resources could reasonably "allow" and that economic circumstances left them "no other choice but to appeal to a foundation." But for all these declarations, black university administrators exerted substantial influence. VUU administrators first won foundation support by framing longstanding priorities within the black community in terms that addressed Lilly Endowment's present concerns about the general state of theological education. They then shaped the subsequent development of the summer seminar program and the application of Lilly Endowment's monies. And perhaps most surprisingly, they arguably helped alter the foundation's long-term orientation as well. The Lilly Endowment that existed in the mid-1970s, after a decade-plus of close interaction with VUU administrators, little resembled the foundation that had first collaborated with black church leaders in the late 1950s. This transition leaves room for the conclusion that the eventual eclipse of programs like the VUU summer seminars may have resulted in part from the overall success of their engagement with a body of white philanthropists.

3. Assessing a 'Crisis'—The Seabury Consultation of 1959

3.1. Seabury Consultation Precursors

For visitors to the Virginia Union University Special Collections and Archives, the documentary record begins abruptly, belying the prior ecumenical experiences shared by VUU and Endowment representatives. In early 1959, Lilly Endowment executive director G. Harold Duling wrote a brief, one-page letter to VUU President Samuel DeWitt Proctor. VUU professor of religion Allix James had informed Duling that a contingent from the college planned to be in Indianapolis later that month for a meeting of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). The foundation officer wondered if Proctor might make time to visit the Endowment office in the Merchants Bank Building, "in order that we may have a conversation about your reflections on the recent Consultation on the Negro in the Christian Ministry" (Duling 1959a).

The eventual decade-long collaboration between VUU and Lilly Endowment issued largely from this seemingly ambiguous "recent Consultation." Convened by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (popularly, the NCC), the "National Consultation on the Negro in the Christian Ministry" endeavored to grapple with what one NCC staffer identified as "the peculiar urgency of the problems surrounding the Negro in the Christian ministry." While NCC leaders contended that those problems had grown especially urgent, they acknowledged that their convictions on the matter owed largely to prior analyses from other denominational and ecumenical organizations (Savage 2008, pp. 52–55). As early as 1950, for example, a study commissioned by the Home Missions Council of North America had outlined ministry challenges for black communities in the rural south (Felton 1950). In 1951, the Joint Survey Commission of the Baptist Inter-Convention Committee published its own study under the authorship of the renowned African American sociologist, Ira De Augustine Reid (Reid 1951)⁷. In 1955, H. Richard Niebuhr had identified similar concerns on behalf of the staff for Theological Education in America⁸ (Niebuhr et al. 1957; Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1958, p. 6).

the public arm of the church and [made] it the most powerful institution of racial self-help in the African-American community (Higginbotham 1993, p. 1).

⁷ The Joint Survey Commission included some representatives who would later contribute to the Seabury Consultation: American Baptist Convention representative Milton C. Froyd and National Baptist Convention representative Benjamin E. Mays.

⁸ These concerns eventually took published form as an appendix titled "The Theological Education of Negro Ministers" in (Niebuhr et al. 1957). Incidentally, that volume was a favorite of Lilly Endowment, receiving regular mention in the foundation's annual reports; e.g., (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1958, p. 6).

A 1956 Presbyterian Church (USA) assessment had concluded that improving national ministerial training would likely require “serious inter-denominational planning,” and in 1957 the Association of American Theological Schools (AATS) had called for a national assessment of the training of black ministers. Drawing on this momentum, the NCC applied to Lilly Endowment for a grant to fund an interracial retreat of approximately seventy Protestant ministers who would address questions of “enlistment, theological education, and placement of Negroes in the Christian ministry” (NCC 1959, pp. i–ii). The Endowment board approved the proposal, paving the way for an interdenominational summit at Seabury House, the national conference center of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Located just minutes north of the famed Merritt Parkway in the Round Hill district of Greenwich, the ninety-nine-acre, sixteen-building estate occupied valuable real estate on Connecticut’s tony Gold Coast. The Episcopal Church first purchased the complex of buildings—formerly the estate of one-time Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Herbert L. Satterlee—in 1947 at the behest of presiding bishop Henry Knox Sherrill, who hoped the location might become “the spiritual capital of the Protestant Episcopal Church around the world what Lambeth, the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, is to the Church of England” (New York Herald Tribune 1947, p. 19; New York Times 1947, p. 44). While Sherrill and those presiding bishops who succeeded him would reside in a smaller cottage on the grounds, the jewel of the estate was Seabury House, a three-story, thirty-five-room house in the Colonial style that Sherrill intended to serve as “a spiritual and hospitality center” for the denomination (Gardner 1947, p. 7). If Sherrill’s original design for the estate emphasized Episcopalian concerns, by 1949 Seabury House had already begun to host interdenominational organizations whenever the Episcopal schedule allowed (Folsom 1949, p. 27). That trend only increased after Sherrill became the inaugural president of the NCC one year later, and Seabury House quickly assumed an ever more prominent role in intra-Protestant politics (Preston 2012, p. 497). Thus, sixty-five men gathered at Seabury House from March 6 to 8, 1959, in what one NCC observer called “the first conference across denominational lines on a national scale” to address challenges to ministry in the black church (McClellan 1959, p. 1). Black leaders comprised sixty percent of the attendees, and the group included representatives of nineteen denominations. Seminary professors, local pastors, denominational executives, college administrators, philanthropists, and missionaries—with Duling, Proctor, and James among them—convened under the chairmanship of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) representative Sherman L. Greene, Jr., and the group waded through a range of topics both philosophical and practical. At least four notable themes emerge from a reading of the summary document composed by several of the gathered consultants: (i) structural challenges to cross-racial unity, (ii) the ultimate reality of spiritual unity, (iii) obstacles within black Christian communities to an educated ministry, and (iv) the necessity of improved education for the flourishing of the black church.

3.2. Christian Unity: Structural Obstacles and Spiritual Realities

First, Seabury participants recognized the substantial racial challenges facing Protestant communions in North America, intending to grapple directly with “the problems of a harassed segment of the church.” Still more significant, they even acknowledged at times that those issues exceeded the bounds of the individual and spiritual, extending instead into the realms of the corporate and structural; the black ministry’s challenges represented the rotten fruit of “an unrighteous social system” (NCC 1959, p. 1). Whether via references to “sociological pressures within church and community” or socioeconomic realities that discouraged young black men from attending college, Seabury consultants identified structural factors militating against widespread seminary training (NCC 1959, pp. 1–2). Foremost among these structural factors, of course, was the continued prevalence of racial segregation in midcentury America. In a subsequent report for the organizational periodical *National Council Outlook*, NCC staffer Graydon E. McClellan recounted the participants’ discussions on segregation: “... it was observed by the group at Seabury that the very existence of ‘Negro churches’ and ‘Negro ministers,’ with all of the attendant problems arising out of an underprivileged status, is the result of segregation” (McClellan 1959, p. 3). The report claimed that Seabury consultants “[were] unanimous in the belief that integration

should come about,” and they “assumed that the inevitability and moral necessity of integration must be basic to all our planning.” Still, the topic “was more assumed than discussed” as the gathering “was not fundamentally a race relations conference”; unsurprisingly, this avoidance proved “disappointing for some” (NCC 1959, p. 5).

This attention to structural obstacles included references to specific policy options for American Protestant bodies. The report gestured, for instance, toward the unfulfilled ambitions of some consultants who had hoped the gathering might “speak more fully ... regarding fair employment practices in the church” (NCC 1959, p. 5). If fair employment practices received less attention than some participants desired, however, the topic did make its way into a discussion regarding potential changes to seminary training at predominantly white seminaries. Those institutions, the report claimed, should “deliberately involve themselves in the hurt and pain of trying to recall the churches to a fair employment practice” for church staffs. Seminaries could model such concern, in fact, by attending to their own problems of racial underrepresentation. The challenge called for nothing less than an “intensive effort ... to face and discuss such questions as direct and indirect racial quotas and full integration of Negroes into their student bodies” (NCC 1959, pp. 10–11).

Underlying all these matters was a tacit acknowledgement of slavery’s legacy even one hundred years after emancipation. McClellan’s article quoted Seabury consultant and Morehouse College president Benjamin Mays, whose commentary invoked allusions to the people of Israel—a trope that identified black Christians in America with the persecuted Hebrews and, by implication, compared at least certain white Americans with the persecuting rulers of Egypt⁹ (Savage 2008, pp. 205–37). “As great prophetic preaching came from suffering Israel, and not from the nations that held them in bondage,” Mays reminded the gathering, centuries of persecution in America “may be fertile soil for the Negro in the Christian ministry to give greater spiritual depth” to the country’s religious life (McClellan 1959, p. 3). If far from radical in orientation, the policy discussions and rhetoric that marked the consultation prepared Seabury participants to consider solutions that involved changing systems and structures, distinguishing them from some of their midcentury peers who considered racial prejudice entirely a matter of individual hearts¹⁰ (Miller 2009, pp. 9–10).

While those gathered at Seabury House acknowledged that social systems played a role in contemporary race relations, a second notable theme from the consultation report worked against the vigorous pursuit of structural solutions. Compared to the eternal reality of their spiritual union, Seabury participants viewed the temporal experience of racial differentiation as insignificant. The NCC, according to McClellan, “had been urged from several quarters to call a conference on ‘The Negro Ministry.’ Its response was to call one on ‘The Negro in the Christian Ministry’” (McClellan 1959, p. 1). To accentuate that spiritual union, the Seabury report’s introduction bore the consciously underscored title, “The Concern of the Church,” and its opening paragraph quoted approvingly the remark of participant and VUU professor Allix James: “There is no ‘Negro ministry,’ only the ‘Christian ministry’”. No other motivation to address the issue could exceed “the Christian reason of our solidarity in the church of Jesus Christ,” a solidarity that would “gover[n] our attitudes toward our shortcomings, our hopes, and our future planning.” Indeed, nothing beyond their experience of regeneration in Christ could explain their ability “to transcend the restrictions of cultural, socio-economic, denominational, and personal differences” (NCC 1959, p. 1). Report authors capped a practical, implementation-focused conclusion with the commitment to add spiritual work to their policy pursuits—participants agreed to reflect daily on the “constant reminder of our solidarity in the Christian church” (NCC 1959, p. 1).

⁹ Barbara Savage identifies Mays as a paragon of “Southern black racial liberalism,” in her assessment “the prevailing political and religious ethos of the civil rights movement”; see (Savage 2008, p. 16). For an elaboration of the theme, see (Savage 2008, pp. 205–37).

¹⁰ For example, historian Steven P. Miller has termed Billy Graham’s approach to postwar politics as “evangelical universalism,” a “social ethic” that viewed the “individual soul [as] the primary theological and political unit of society” and that favored “relational solutions” over legislative or legal remedies for social problems (Miller 2009, pp. 9–10).

3.3. *The Black Church: Cultural Flaws and Educational Solutions*

Thirdly, Seabury consultants evinced a fairly low opinion regarding the spiritual state of both the untrained ministers and the lay people who comprised the congregations of many of the nation's black churches. In this vein, they typified a longstanding tension within black communities, one Barbara Savage has described elsewhere as "turn[ing] on differences between the religious beliefs and practices of the educated and those of the uneducated" (Savage 2008, p. 7). Some untrained and unemployed ministers, they contended, passively discouraged potential new seminarians merely by virtue of their unattractive example. Others actively contributed to the poor image of Christian ministry by what they preached. Too many young black men associated the ministry with "anti-intellectualism, and resistance to change," a problem stemming from the fact that black ministers were "not changing as fast as the rest of the Negro community"¹¹ (Lagemann 1987, pp. 441–70; Morey 2017, pp. 155–66; Morey 2015, pp. 3–28; 2012, pp. 686–92). Savage describes the prevalence of these views among certain midcentury black religious leaders, including Benjamin Mays; his discomfort with small storefront churches of the Holiness and Pentecostal varieties stemmed from a persistent "belief that the leadership and proliferation of those churches somehow played a part in holding the race back" (Savage 2008, p. 223). In both its passive and active manifestations, this poor image served as a point of unanimous, unchallenged consensus among the consultation participants. McClellan quoted one participant at length, who argued that young black men "have not been much impressed by what they have seen in their local churches. They regard their untrained preachers as back numbers!" (McClellan 1959, p. 2). These negative assessments sometimes involved accusations of actual malintent, especially regarding a perceived backlog of ordained but untrained ministers. In search of work themselves, these older ministers would supposedly resist any measures that might increase and amply qualify their competition. Even certain employed ministers contributed to the problem, however, by virtue of their selfish interests. Seabury consultants desired for young seminarians to gain more chances for field work during their training, but many "pastors do not want young theological students on their staffs because of a fear of developing rivalry." Others supposedly felt a sense of ownership over their pastorates and were unwilling to open them to pastors-in-training (NCC 1959, pp. 12, 14).

As much as the consultants seemed inclined to disdain the quality of many ministers in the black church, they conveyed little more confidence in the insights of the churches' lay people. The problem of an undertrained ministry would persist, the report claimed, "until the majority group among the Negro churches, the Baptists, embark on a vigorous endeavor to educate congregations to the need" (NCC 1959, p. 4). Contrary to recognizing that need, the consultants surmised, many black churches possessed "prejudice ... against 'too much education'." A major obstacle to increased ministerial training thus lay in the reception it might receive from a home congregation. One conferee even recommended undertaking a study to survey seminary-trained ministers with ten years or more experience regarding whether their degree and training had proven "a handicap or an asset in securing a pastorate" (NCC 1959, pp. 14, 16). Several participants, such as VUU chancellor John M. Ellison, promoted the idea of "in-service" training sessions for entire congregations. The "need for educating Negro congregations as to the mission of the church and its ministry" was as urgent as that of training new pastors (NCC 1959, p. 13). If consultants agreed with Mays that "in the Negro Christians the churches have a rich spiritual resource," the report often obscured that richness by emphasizing the perceived backwardness of black congregations (McClellan 1959, p. 3).

¹¹ One Ministry, p. 4, quoted Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* regarding the pace of change. That book—and its sponsorship by the Carnegie Corporation—has inspired a vibrant, transnational scholarly conversation about the relationship between philanthropic foundations, the social sciences, and civil rights. e.g., see (Lagemann 1987, pp. 441–70; Morey 2017, pp. 155–66; Morey 2015, pp. 3–28; 2012, pp. 686–92).

Finally, consultants articulated ambivalence about the continuation of historically-black institutions in an age marked by an ascendant preference for integration¹² (Savage 2008, pp. 43–44). To be sure, most of the consultants remained in favor of historically-black colleges (HBCs), and some seemed almost wistful for the educational environment that had grown up in the post-Reconstruction era. This sentiment emerged most clearly in the report's section on present deterrents to entering the ministry. Post-emancipation, nearly all black colleges had been church-related, an environment in which NCC staffer McClellan claimed students "could not help but imbibe favorable ideas regarding the ministry" (NCC 1959, p. 6). Preston N. Williams, an assistant chaplain at Pennsylvania State University, extended this analysis by linking it to broader trends in secularization¹³. Prior generations of black students had witnessed ordained ministers in key roles throughout their colleges along with a generally favorable treatment of religion. Even more importantly, their interests in the ministry had been reinforced by "the limited number of professions which Negroes could enter." By 1959, however, religious leaders represented "the stereotype of the old Negro and the secular servant of science was the new Negro"; religious leaders "linked to a past that wanted to be forgotten" (NCC 1959, p. 5).

For all the report's claims about the unanimous desire for integration, remarks such as these revealed a disquietude with at least some of the attendant qualities that marked this new educational dispensation. Indeed, many attendees demonstrated a fairly straightforward commitment to the educational models they knew. Two of the sixty-five participants, Yorke Allen and Walter D. Wagoner, represented the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a philanthropic foundation created in 1940 by the five sons of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.; in keeping with their father's practice, the Rockefeller brothers had regularly directed grants to the UNCF, and they had recently begun supporting the AATS as well (Rockefeller Brothers Fund n.d.). Few would have expected Allen and Wagoner, then, to promote the obsolescence of two educational federations they represented, and Lilly Endowment's history of support for both organizations meant the same could be said for Duling. Likewise, Colgate-Rochester Divinity School professor Milton Froyd responded to calls for the closure or merger of certain struggling institutions by arguing for maintaining "enough seminaries ... to prevent other types of institutions from emerging which would vitiate our concept of the ministry" (NCC 1959, p. 12). When Yale Divinity School professor H. Richard Niebuhr suggested the implementation of a UNCF-style fundraising federation to deal with financial shortfalls for predominantly black seminaries, some consultants wondered whether that initiative might only harm the UNCF by diluting its donor pool¹⁴ (NCC 1959, p. 2; McClellan 1959, p. 13; Savage 2008, p. 221; Mays 1971, pp. 192–93).

Still, a minority group dissented from this main thrust, worrying that, good intentions aside, working to strengthen HBCs and seminaries might counterintuitively "perpetuate segregated theological education." Amidst a wider society making strides toward integration, what role might remain for a black seminary¹⁵? This question, the report claimed, "haunted much of the discussion

¹² Again, these feelings had deep roots in black communities. Savage recounts how W. E. B. Du Bois confronted the matter in the periodical, *The Crisis*, following his 1934 resignation from the NAACP. If establishment race leaders "equated discrimination and segregation," Du Bois contended instead that "building strong black institutions not only would benefit black communities but would defeat the very doctrine of inferiority" (Savage 2008, pp. 43–44).

¹³ Williams enjoyed a distinguished career, the final thirty years of which he spent at Harvard Divinity School—see his faculty profile at <https://hds.harvard.edu/people/preston-n-williams>.

¹⁴ For UNCF discussion, see (NCC 1959, p. 13); for Niebuhr quote, see (McClellan 1959, p. 2). Though his voice does not emerge in the report of this debate, one can safely assume that Benjamin Mays featured prominently: only one year before, he had commenced a three-year stint as the UNCF's president (Savage 2008, p. 221). Even twelve years after the Seabury gathering, concern about the fate of HBCs marked Mays's autobiography. Mays identified a "subtle move afoot to abolish black colleges," a bitter if unintentional legacy of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling. He rued a "thinly disguised racism," in which "colleges that were good enough for brilliant Negro students prior to May 17, 1954, ceased to be so immediately after." Mays contended that "the Negro's image in education will be blotted out" if HBCs disappeared as viable, thriving institutions." See (Mays 1971, pp. 192–93).

¹⁵ Some midcentury fundraisers and donors were asking the same question; why give money to a segregated school that might be made redundant with segregated education on the wane? e.g., see (Talbot 1954). Note that Talbot sent this letter to Pew only months after *Brown v. Board* had been reargued before the U. S. Supreme Court in December 1953 and only weeks before the Court announced its unanimous decision on 17 May 1954.

... and is a disturbing factor in every attempt to contemplate and plan for the future," and the consensus among consultants seemed to be that HBCs "must move toward integration" if they hoped to survive (NCC 1959, p. 2). However, Harry V. Richardson envisioned another approach. Only months before the Seabury gathering, the president of Gammon Theological Seminary had joined his United Methodist institution with other Atlanta seminaries to launch a new consortium of theological schools, the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) (Savage 2008, p. 224; Mays 1971, pp. 174, 236–37). In one of the consultation's three delivered papers, Richardson contended that black seminaries would never attract white students until they became academically competitive, and proactive institutional cooperation and consolidation provided the best means to attain that end (McClellan 1959, p. 2). "Anything," Richardson contended, "which promises to upgrade the educational level, deepen the maturity and sharpen the responsibility of the Negro ministry means better, maturer and more responsible leadership for the whole Negro community"¹⁶ (quoted in Hart 1959, p. 474).

For all that the Seabury consultants invoked the language of "consensus," the report that emerged from the gathering contained far more diagnosis than it did prescription. This hardly surprised McClellan, who contended after the fact that the challenges in question were "so complicated by the sinfulness of the church and the limited resources of the predominantly Negro denominations ... as to forbid quick answers" (McClellan 1959, p. 2). The few "action" steps in the report relied mainly upon the consultants employing their own influence to initiate change in their individual networks. Seabury consultants agreed to "explain the nature and focus of the Consultation to the key persons in his own denomination" and to publish accounts of the gathering in their denominational journals (NCC 1959, pp. 17–18). Perhaps most practically, they seemed to concur that denominations should explore the type of in-service training sessions that VUU chancellor Ellison recommended as a method for augmenting the education of those ministers already with access to a pulpit (McClellan 1959, p. 2). Most predictably, the consultants applied the immutable logic of all administrators, concluding that their experience at Seabury House called for "a continuation or advisory committee that could assimilate the report and suggest a priority list for implementation." The NCC Department of Ministry intended to convene a follow-up gathering later that June¹⁷ (NCC 1959, pp. 19–20).

4. Addressing the Crisis—Lilly Endowment and the VUU Summer Seminars

4.1. Conception: 1959–1960

Virginia Union University administrators believed their institution, an HBC located just two miles from the state capital in Richmond, was uniquely suited to make the kinds of interventions that Seabury consultants envisioned. Proctor and James laid out an early iteration of their case in a draft version of a grant application, titled "The Problem of the Untrained Ministry in the Negro Church." VUU possessed historic ties to both the American Baptist Churches and the National Baptist Convention (NBC) along with contemporary standing as an associate member of the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS). These Baptist roots situated VUU nicely, for H. Richard Niebuhr had "verified the generally accepted belief that over two-thirds of the Negroes who hold membership in churches of a major denominational affiliation belong to the Baptist church"¹⁸ (n.a. n.d., p. 2). Those very same churches emblemized the challenge VUU leaders sought to address, with two-thirds of Baptist congregations being led by ministers lacking any seminary training. Along with its accreditation and its denominational ties, VUU's geographical location also mattered, for commentators frequently identified the South as the region most in need of educational improvements¹⁹ (Felton 1950, p. 68).

¹⁶ Here, Richardson echoed sentiments aired by Du Bois twenty-five years prior; see (Savage 2008, pp. 43–44).

¹⁷ After conducting research in NCC holdings at both Union Theological Seminary (NY) and the Presbyterian Historical Society, I have yet to find any record that this follow-up gathering ever occurred.

¹⁸ The draft's original title, "Training Ministers for the Negro Church," had been crossed out with pencil.

¹⁹ For example, the Drew Theological Seminary study *These My Brethren* focused explicitly on black churches in the rural south, and the body of that document—by its posture of translating for northern audiences—repeatedly implied a stark

Combined, these factors positioned VUU to make “a unique contribution in furnishing leadership to churches, especially in the South, that otherwise might not be so fortunate” (n.a. n.d., p. 4). Yet, for all these positive assets, VUU’s leaders still believed “that we cannot move successfully alone during the next four years, even though we are doing everything that our resources will allow” (n.a. n.d., p. 6). Drawing on several decades of commentary, of which the Seabury Consultation represented only the most recent instance, VUU leaders demonstrated their preparedness to build on that gathering’s momentum by cooperating with any willing financial partners.

Harold Duling’s aforementioned April 1959 letter to Samuel Proctor arrived less than a month after the Greenwich confab. The VUU president unsurprisingly accepted the foundation officer’s invitation, and the meeting apparently went well. On April 15, Proctor wrote Duling to commend the reception that UNCF leaders had enjoyed in Indianapolis, acknowledging the array of public figures—including Governor Harold Handley, Mayor Charles Boswell, members of Congress, and Eli Lilly—who had greeted them. Dispensing with pleasantries, Proctor moved quickly to a grant proposal distinct from draft mentioned above but with similar ambitions. Referencing the discussions at Seabury House, Proctor identified a set of worthy black institutions “which would cover the major denominations served by the Negro ministers and which reach the Negro population,” namely Hood Theological Seminary (Salisbury, NC, USA), Howard University (Washington, DC, USA), the ITC, Johnson C. Smith University (Charlotte, NC, USA) and VUU. Proctor’s plan involved funds for faculty hiring, student recruitment, and scholarship aid, with grant totals exceeding \$80-thousand annually over a four-year period. If that request seemed substantial, Proctor contended the monies expended would pale in comparison to their influence, as such a program “would change the face of the Negro church in the United States.” Such an investment would represent “the most tremendous thrust that the Negro ministry every [sic] received because it is functional money that goes to work immediately” rather than vesting in endowments or physical plant. Most significantly, and in keeping with the tone of Seabury, the grants would come “at a crucial moment when the Negro people need leadership the entire country over” (Proctor 1959).

Despite Proctor’s hard sell, Duling made no commitments in his reply. Promising to request additional institutional information from Howard, Hood, and Johnson C. Smith, Duling committed to “giving the whole package a study and hope that, after a plan has been reconciled, it will be of interest to the Lilly Endowment board” (Duling 1959b). After another exchange of letters, however, Duling wrote again to Proctor in late May to deliver bad news. The board had decided to take no action on Proctor’s proposal, preferring to delay a decision until more investigation could be completed on the five institutions in question. This type of institutional caution marked Lilly Endowment practice from the beginning, resulting at least in part from what biographer James H. Madison has identified as Eli Lilly’s predilection to “focus his philanthropy on people and institutions he knew personally” (Madison 1989, p. 189). From Seabury, Duling possessed a fairly strong grasp of developments at VUU and ITC, but the other three institutions remained less familiar to Endowment leaders. Thus, while the board’s decision did not constitute a hard “no,” Duling aimed to tamp down Proctor’s expectations, predicting “that there will be no further developments along this line insofar as grant making is concerned until the latter part of 1959” (Duling 1959c).

Following a lull in the correspondence, in July 1959 Allix Bledsoe James became Duling’s new conversation partner. The dean of VUU’s School of Religion and another Seabury consultant, James had ministered at several Richmond-area churches before returning to teach at his alma mater in 1947. While the dialogue between Proctor and Duling had carried some of the sterile hallmarks of an administrative tête-à-tête, the conversation that ensued between Duling and James bore traces of personality and even a tone of mutual warmth. James initiated the correspondence from the site of

contrast with life in the northern United States: “In every community in the South they live on an isolated island which we in America call ‘segregation,’” p. 68.

a conference training lay leaders for service. Returning to the “problem” that Seabury consultants had considered and that VUU grant proposals had elaborated, James regretted that “lay leaders may have a better grasp of the meaning and purpose of the church than the clergy,” a possibility he found especially likely “in our racial group with the larger denominations where a trained clergy is still a rarity.” In James’ assessment, “the best method to give the ministers some training so that they will furnish better leadership” would involve annual two- or three-week seminars. Still, implementation inevitably ran headlong into the problem of cost. “Many of the men, who need it most shun [such a program] because fees are involved,” James regretted in a tone reminiscent of the class-based criticisms so evident at the Seabury gathering. “They are not college or seminary men,” he continued, “therefore, they have little or no appreciation for what appears to be a regulated study program.” The problem, it seemed to James, lay entirely with the ministers: “Our major job is to get them to come to the program. After getting them there, we know that they will be helped” (James 1959a).

In his reply, Duling suggested alternative models that might prove more cost-effective, including weekly gatherings that would require less overhead than a continuous summer seminar. As was always the case with Lilly Endowment, Duling voiced a concern for sustainability; if scholarships or subsidies proved necessary to get a program off the ground, in the long-run the ministers or their host congregations would need to prove willing to foot the tuition fee. Ultimately, however, Duling agreed with James that the educational background of VUU’s target audience would create a challenge for the model that James had in mind (Duling 1959d). James proved amenable to Duling’s suggestions but likewise doubled down on his concerns about the caliber of minister serving the black church. One of VUU’s chief goals, James contended, involved

improv[ing] the present image of the Negro in the Christian ministry. As the image changes, the entire church benefits and the ministry becomes more attractive to men with unusual ability. One of our big problems is to interest men with high I.Q.’s. Too many of them look down on the profession and become interested in other fields that appear to be more respectable. (James 1959b)

The documentary record does not reveal if James tailored these comments to fit Endowment priorities, but whether he knew so or not, his letter’s sentiments did more than advance the Seabury narrative—they touched on a perennial theme in Lilly Endowment literature. In the foundation’s 1958 annual report, organized around the theme of “religion,” one of the Endowment’s express concerns involved the quality of American theological and pastoral leadership. Rising educational standards and a postwar population boom created a crisis for the church: “If . . . we are to have sixty million more Americans in 1970, we shall need more leadership, more churches, and more educational facilities” (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1958, p. 9). One year later, the Endowment announced its efforts to subsidize the training necessary for leadership development via a program of grants delivered to the AATS, an initiative that would enable the Endowment to “extend its aid to all accredited seminaries through a central organization” (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1958, p. 33).

A program committed to raising the standard of ministerial leadership thus aligned perfectly with Lilly Endowment’s priorities, and Duling’s subsequent reply to James indicated that foundation leaders might be warming to the project. Duling linked VUU’s challenge to that faced by the discussants at the Seabury Conference and suggested that James consider alternative tracks for ministers depending upon their prior level of education. Training ministers with no prior higher education would likely demand “even more skilled leadership because it would require additional translation and interpretation of the subject matter.” One could hardly describe Duling’s tone as bullish—on the contrary, he still suspected that such a program would entail unintended consequences. And in his own homage to the Seabury Consultation’s class-based assumptions, Duling worried that too much education threatened to “scale this group [of ministers] up too high,” in turn alienating them “from people who very much need their services.” Still, the correspondence likely encouraged James. Without getting ahead of the board and committing the Endowment to any program, Duling implied as much. Since charging fees would

likely inhibit many ministers from taking part, the foundation officer noted, “it will, therefore, require either foundation or denominational subsidy” (Duling 1959e).

While James’s reply to Duling lagged by more than a month, the professor applied some of the boldness that would eventually make him an able president and fundraiser. He concurred that it made sense to separate ministers according to their prior training and then seized on Duling’s statement about funding. VUU had no denominational access to sufficient funds, so its leaders had “no other choice but to appeal to a foundation that might have interest in this direction” (James 1959c). When Duling replied to James a month later, he continued to hedge the Endowment’s bets, asserting that because the two parties’ “ideas have not been completely reconciled I cannot give you an immediate response to your specific request.” Indeed, Duling’s message made clear that the Endowment board would view any eventual grant program through the lens of national religious trends and needs as outlined by the Seabury consultants (Duling 1959f). And once again, James proved more than conversant in the foundation’s language. Replying only days later, the assertive professor agreed that the summer seminar idea the Endowment preferred matched VUU’s own Seabury-inspired plans to improve ministers in black congregations: “well-planned, stimulating lectures and discussions should make quite an impact on the thinking of men who have grown lazy in thought” (James 1959d). Though the correspondence record dries up at this point, the eventual outcome of this long dialogue proved favorable for VUU. Lilly Endowment’s 1959 annual report included a line item noting the approval of an \$11-thousand grant to the university for a summer seminar for ministers (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1959).

4.2. Implementation: 1960–1970

The successful grant application received great attention in VUU materials. The February 1960 edition of the *Virginia Union Bulletin*, a quarterly published by the registrar’s office, devoted a special feature to the planned seminars, and the student newspaper, *The Panther*, likewise publicized the major external gift (Virginia Union Bulletin 1960a, pp. 14, 24; The Panther 1960, p. 1). The clearest indication of VUU’s attitude toward the grant, however, lay in President Samuel DeWitt Proctor’s 1960 annual report to the board of trustees. Proctor had recently accepted the position as president of the Agricultural & Technical College of North Carolina (popularly, North Carolina A & T), located in Greensboro, and the annual report thus served as a sort of valedictory for his tenure in Richmond²⁰ (Proctor 1995). Proctor called the award “the most significant grant of the year.” Giving credit to James for shepherding the proposal to acceptance, Proctor claimed the summer seminar program would “bring considerable recognition to our School of Religion and will render incalculable service in terms of raising the standards of the pastors who may be selected to attend.” The subsidy would enable participation by ministers of any means, “without regard to their financial competence.” If James deserved plaudits for winning the grant, leaders at Lilly Endowment merited thanks “for manifesting continued interest in our program.” With initiatives like the summer seminars, the School of Religion would help VUU fulfill its “historic role” as a “training center for . . . church leaders” for a denomination “in dire need of trained leadership” (Proctor 1960, pp. 4, 29, 31).

Some of the themes that marked the Seabury gathering and that filled the correspondence between Proctor, James, and Duling remained in the eventual summer seminar program. For instance, Chancellor Ellison’s in-service model carried the day, as the summer seminars focused on those already filling a pulpit rather than on the rising generation. Of the models that Duling and James had discussed, VUU leaders opted to focus on ministers with prior educational background, stipulating that participating ministers would possess at least five years of ministerial experience since receiving

²⁰ Along with his tenure at VUU and his subsequent stint at North Carolina A & T (1960–1964), Proctor filled varied and distinguished posts: associate director of the U. S. Peace Corps (1963–1964), president of the National Council of Churches (1964–1965), professor of education at Rutgers University (1969–1984); pastor at Harlem’s famed Abyssinian Baptist Church (1972–1989); and adjunct faculty status at various universities. For details, see (Proctor 1995).

their undergraduate degrees. Seminar sessions would emphasize topics with practical application to a life in ministry, including sermon preparation, pastoral care, and church administration ([Virginia Union Bulletin 1960a](#), pp. 14, 24; [The Panther 1960](#), p. 1). The seminar sessions also emphasized what one Lilly Endowment annual report proudly labeled “biracial leadership,” especially as measured by the identities of the invited keynote speakers and workshop leaders who would hail from both church and academy ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1960](#), p. 34). Sometimes, VUU used these positions to highlight the college’s own resources, with professors such as William Jerry Boney, Edward D. McCreary, and Richard N. Soulen participating regularly in the latter half of the 1960s. Yet national figures featured prominently as well. The second summer seminar, in 1960, included appearances by Earlham College professor and former United States Information Agency administrator D. Elton Trueblood and Howard University luminary Mordecai Johnson, fresh on the heels of his retirement after thirty-four years as the institution’s president ([Virginia Union Bulletin 1960b](#)). A prominent AME minister from St. Louis, G. Wayman Blakely, Sr., participated in both 1961 and 1962, and Margaretta Keller Bowers, a New York-based Episcopalian psychotherapist, joined several seminars ([The Chicago Defender 1962a](#), p. 15; [Tri-State Defender 1963](#), p. 9). In perhaps the biggest coup for the seminar leaders in the program’s entire eleven-year run, Howard Thurman headlined the final two summer seminars, in 1969 and 1970 ([The Chicago Daily Defender 1969a](#), p. 23; [The Chicago Daily Defender 1970](#), p. 24). On the whole, the seminars garnered regular mention in the nation’s African American newspapers and generally satisfied the aspirations of VUU’s senior administrators; in his memoir, self-published in 1997, Allix B. James included the Endowment-sponsored summer seminars among the highlights of his tenure as dean of the School of Religion ([James 1998](#), p. 27).

For all the ways that seminar themes reflected the correspondence between James and Duling, however, other traits departed noticeably from those initial brainstorming sessions. Without question, the most notable change involved gender. In their letters, Duling and James never referenced women; the focus of their correspondence lay entirely with the male ministers who had been the focus of the Seabury consultation and whose lack of formal education so concerned James. From the very first announcement of the seminar series, however, gender featured prominently in all public descriptions of the program. In February 1960, the *VU Bulletin* described a “unique feature” of the upcoming seminar, namely “that the wives of the pastors will be invited to share the morning sessions with their husbands.” Inclusion in the program would “enable them to have a greater understanding of, and a deeper insight into the role of a pastor of a local parish.” The published schedule even foregrounded this aspect of the program, with its subtitle including the phrase “Forty Ministers and Their Wives” ([Virginia Union Bulletin 1960a](#), pp. 14, 24). Nomenclature in Lilly Endowment annual reports followed suit, with the line item description of the VUU grants frequently listing the program as devoted to “Negro ministers and their wives” ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1960, 1963](#)). The emphasis even made its way to press accounts of the program. One *The Chicago Defender* article in 1962 outlined goals for the seminars, including the hope that participation “will seek to help the wife better understand the husband’s involvements and the spirit of dedication in which they must be met.” If the language had evolved slightly in a 1964 *Pittsburgh Courier* article, the point remained the same, with the wives attending “so that as a team they might understand their mutual concern in the work of the church” ([The Chicago Defender 1962b](#), p. 15; [Pittsburgh Courier 1964](#), p. 13; 1962, p. 16; 1965, p. 15; [Los Angeles Sentinel 1966](#), p. C11; [New York Amsterdam News 1966](#), p. 27; [The Chicago Daily Defender 1969a](#), p. 23).

The documentary record leaves little indication of what inspired this emphasis. To be sure, gendered tropes undergirded much of the conversation that had occurred at Seabury House—concerns about the “image” of Christian ministry all drew upon assumptions about the necessity of male action and the dangers of male listlessness. Barbara Savage once again proves instructive here, as her scholarship highlights in midcentury black Christianity the abiding presence of “gendered and classbound notions of racial leadership,” convictions that yielded a “near-obsession with the need for male leadership” among prominent figures such as Benjamin Mays ([Savage 2008](#), pp. 12, 16). While those concerns thus informed consultants’ perceptions of the ministerial crisis, the attendees

devoted almost no explicit attention to the role of women in the practice of ministry. Rather, the most notable mention of women in the report involved a self-conscious admission of their exclusion from the weekend's conversation: "The section reporter summarizing the insights on theological education made bold to note an omission in almost all of the conversations: 'No consideration has been given to female divinity students'" (NCC 1959, p. 13). If the summer seminars inherited from Seabury their general orientation toward the need to equip male ministers, their commitment to training "the wives" as well found little precedent in the ecumenical gathering²¹ (Savage 2008, p. 183).

Denominational context likely played at least a part in VUU's stilted approach to gender. In her classic monograph, *Righteous Discontent*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham surveys forty years of NBC history and illuminates how the denomination relied upon women as mobilizers while simultaneously marginalizing them from positions of official leadership (Higginbotham 1993, pp. 1–18). Combined with the assumptions prevalent among Seabury participants, this denominational legacy provided a strong basis for the summer seminars' eventual approach to gender roles in the ministry. Allix James, the VUU figure with the greatest influence on the decade-long program, may also have influenced the gendered framing. For example, the language he used to mark his retirement in March 1994 echoed the seminar advertisements, as he paid tribute to his wife for her role as his "equal partner": "... Sue has not been behind me, she has been at my side all the way providing full support in everything that I have attempted" (quoted in James 1998, p. 59). Still, that similarity—separated by thirty years—could be coincidental, or one could reasonably question whether the causal stream ran in an opposite direction; perhaps James's perspective in 1994 resembled the seminars because of his long participation in them. Likewise, Lilly Endowment may have promoted the usage of such language. Again, the documentary record does not support a direct link. Duling's correspondence with James featured no mention of this eventual aspect of the summer seminars, nor did the Seabury consultation that Lilly Endowment originally sponsored. But similar emphases did crop up in other Endowment-funded programs from the late 1950s and 1960s. A contemporaneous Lilly Endowment-sponsored movement in lay religious renewal, called the Yokefellows, often emphasized that its retreat centers facilitated space for "wives"; one manuscript touted the willingness of men to "stay home and take care of the children while the mothers would be away" at their spiritual retreats (Trueblood n.d., p. 9). Given the documentary record presently accessible, however, confident conclusions about this feature's origin remain elusive.

While the seminars deserve consideration for the topics they chose to highlight, they should likewise pique our interests for a topic they largely avoided: race. VUU conducted these Endowment-sponsored summer seminars for eleven consecutive summers from 1960 to 1970, and that timing and context make the exclusion of such matters especially stark. For instance, Samuel DeWitt Proctor left VUU for North Carolina A & T only months before the inaugural summer seminar. That gathering commenced on July 25, the same day that Woolworth's manager Clarence Harris finally served a meal to three black employees at the store's lunch counter, effectively ending the six-month protest first launched by the "Greensboro Four"—all students at Proctor's new institution²² (Wolff [1970] 1990; Morgan and Davies 2012).

The coming decade would, of course, witness a surge of iconic moments, from the Freedom Rides and the March on Washington to the passage of civil rights legislation and the assassinations of several pillars of the black freedom struggle. VUU's denominational context again helps explain the minimal influence of such developments on the seminars' content. In 1953, the NBC elected Chicago minister Joseph H. Jackson as the denomination's president, a tenure that would last for nearly thirty years. Wallace Best has complicated reductionist narratives of Jackson's leadership that depict him as no

²¹ Perhaps the emphasis reflected deeper discomfort with the prominence of women in many black churches. Savage locates the roots of this tension in a "dispute over the power of men and women within black Baptist churches where women were the primary fundraisers and organizers but were denied access to positions of authority and governance (Savage 2008, p. 183).

²² Proctor could hardly have chosen a more charged time to arrive in Greensboro. The famed "Greensboro Sit-Ins" began on February 1 of that year and were still underway when Proctor arrived to assume the presidency. For the classic work on the sit-ins, see (Wolff [1970] 1990); for a recent edited collection of essays, see (Morgan and Davies 2012).

more than a foil to Martin Luther King's civil rights activism (Best 2006). Yet Jackson unequivocally promoted a midcentury vision of life that never ignored racial injustice but sometimes subordinated it to other concerns, such as worldwide Christian witness and nationwide patriotic fidelity. For example, in a 1956 document titled "The Negro's Declaration of Intention," the NBC Executive Committee acknowledged a "new wave of terror sweeping the Southland" and declared their intention to work for justice, "reject[ing] that doctrine of gradualism." But the question they set out to answer and that informed the first four "points" of the declaration involved whether or not black Americans might "turn communist." To this matter, the statement proffered a resounding "no" and an assurance of the NBC's commitment to the rule of law. NBC members would "support" the U. S. Constitution, "obey" all laws, and "avoid contempt of courts"; they would oppose the country's enemies and teach their children about American greatness; they would "participate in the total cultural life of the nation" (Pelt and Smith 1960, pp. 212–16). Likewise, in a 1959 address, Jackson framed the achievement of civil rights as a way of fulfilling America's destiny. While striving towards full equality, NBC members should "make a full and creative use of the freedom already acquired" (Pelt and Smith 1960, pp. 249–51). At the denominational level, then, VUU would have faced little pressure to accentuate civil rights issues in the summer seminars.

Nor would such matters have emerged naturally from the predilections of VUU's leaders. While Proctor certainly worked for racial reform and developed an early and influential relationship with a young Martin Luther King, Jr., he evinced a preference for establishment-led, top-down, integrationist approaches to racial justice, a reform style that one scholar has called "diplomatic rather than confrontational"²³ (Levy 2008, vol. 9, pp. 261–63; Proctor 1995, pp. 75, 91–92). Chancellor John Malcus Ellison, the university's fourth president from 1941 to 1955 and still a consistent presence in Richmond after his retirement, sometimes prioritized other factors over race. In a September 1961 address delivered at the university's opening exercises, Ellison contemplated the role and potential of the "church-related college." The speech expounded upon secularizing forces that threatened religion on campus, the unique insight that religious faith afforded scholarship, and the community that religious faith promoted (Ellison 1961, p. 9). In the entire address, however, Ellison never questioned how a church-related college might engage the contemporary political struggle for civil rights. Nor was Allix James inclined to accentuate racial injustice. In his self-published memoir, James included select anecdotes about encountering and resisting racial prejudice, implying that he had eschewed the visible front lines of the protest movement in favor of visiting "board rooms or corporate offices trying to negotiate or reason with executives about the unfair practices of current policies of discrimination" (James 1998, p. 17). Even as he thus acknowledged the hurdle of such policies, James still seemed to see racial injustice through a lens more individual than systemic. When James favored hiring the white coach of a local high school team to lead VUU's men's basketball program, some constituents resisted what seemed like a continued reliance upon white leaders at an HBC. James, though, "had been victimized by bigotry, prejudice and racism . . . [and] would not join sides with (James 1998, p. 43). VUU's administrative class thus seemed unlikely to favor making race or civil rights a central feature of the summer seminars. Rather, in language evocative of the spiritual orientation that informed much of the Seabury gathering, VUU leaders often emphasized their "pan-Protestant" identity (n.a. n.d., p. 1).

Unsurprisingly then, even halfway through the 1960s the seminar topics appeared so anodyne as to defy their placement in a decade marked by turbulence. The 1965 seminar, for example, included lecture series devoted to "The Nature of the Minister and the Church," "Present Theological

²³ For the quotation and a brief scholarly recap of Proctor's life, see (Levy 2008, vol. 9, pp. 261–63). In his autobiography, for example, Proctor speaks admirably about working with "the white establishment"; see (Proctor 1995, p. 75). While Proctor supported the civil rights movement and spoke at King's rallies whenever asked, he viewed his primary task in the 1960s as "trying to develop a faculty and an academic program strong enough to propel black students into a demanding future," (Proctor 1995, pp. 91–92)—for Proctor, top-down reforms via education and his subsequent work with the government (the Peace Corps, the Office of Economic Opportunity) seemed the most promising avenues to justice.

Tendencies,” and “Christian Ethics”; this gathering convened only four months after the series of marches from Selma to Montgomery and at the very moment that unrest was breaking out in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles ([Pittsburgh Courier 1965](#), p. 15). Admittedly, VUU leaders publicized in 1966 how the Endowment-sponsored seminars would adapt to changing times, with a “new program...designed to bring together an equal number of selected white and Negro ministerial couples for creative communication and Christian communion” ([Los Angeles Sentinel 1966](#), p. C11). Yet this ambition remained tepid compared to separatist elements emerging simultaneously, from the Black Power movement growing among Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leaders to the Black Panther Party that would be founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton later that year.

4.3. Evolution: 1969–1970

By 1969, the VUU seminars finally began to manifest these changing times for race relations. To be sure, public relations materials still emphasized a proudly integrationist model; the appearance of Howard Thurman was celebrated expressly for his work as a “pioneer in the field of active church participation *that cuts across racial and denominational lines*” ([The Chicago Daily Defender 1969b](#), p. 21). To the extent that VUU materials commented on the contemporary world explicitly, their words seemed to connote discomfort: pastors attending the seminars would engage “the many complex problems facing the church as it seeks to be relevant” in a world marked by “fast moving change” ([The Chicago Daily Defender 1969a](#), p. 23; [1969b](#), p. 21). Yet that year’s seminar included the first gestures toward a critique of unjust systems rather than individual hearts. Along with hearing the lectures from Thurman, seminar participants joined workshops conducted by leaders of the Task Force for Research and Urban Strategy (TRUST). The TRUST staffers encouraged ministers to pursue a new mission. While the church had “hitherto majored in healing the hurts” that issue from harmful “social systems,” the church of the 1970s should aim to “change the system to prevent hurt.” Thurman provided the spiritual fare that had typically marked these summer seminars—attention to matters such as “Commitment, Prayer, Growth and Suffering”—while TRUST provided a way for participants to apply those spiritual virtues to practical policy concerns. TRUST’s commitments involved

the harnessing of power, mobilization of influence ... to give spiritual leaven to season community structures; viz, Social Welfare, Culture, Economy, Government and Education that have to do with the life and destiny of the community’s people so that barriers that prevent people from growing up to be fully human are removed. ([The Chicago Daily Defender 1969b](#), p. 23)

If much of that language reads as self-evident or unsurprising in the twenty-first century, its apparent familiarity belies how radically it differed from the emphases of prior seminars.

Some of this evolution surely stemmed from larger cultural context. While aforementioned developments in the black freedom struggle exerted surprisingly little influence on the content of the summer seminars, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968 surely changed terrain even for leaders at Virginia Union. But local developments may have mattered even more for the seminars’ change in tone. Only six days before James Earl Ray murdered King in Memphis, Tennessee, VUU students had joined the wave of campus protests at HBCs across the country ([Rogers 2012](#)). The *Washington Post* reported that VUU students had seized control of several university buildings and the campus switchboard, all to gain leverage for a list of fifty-two demands they had presented to college administrators. Students passed the afternoon “congregated inside and on the lawn,” as “‘soul music’ was played over a loudspeaker.” According to Allix James, by then the university’s vice president, students sought “unlimited class cuts and abolition of special examinations, graduation examinations and senior English essay tests” ([Washington Post 1968a](#), p. B2). These demands typified what scholar Ibram Rogers has described in the black campus movement as a commitment to overturning the “standardization of exclusion,” in which white experts controlled the mechanisms for gaining entry to college (standardized tests) and the policies and standards that students encountered

once they arrived. By advocating for an overhaul of the grading system, participants in the black campus movement sought to realize “standardized inclusion” (Rogers 2012, pp. 4, 104, chp. 5–6).

The protest continued, with the *The Chicago Daily Defender* reporting on April 4 (the day of King’s assassination) that more than three hundred students “danced and sang their defiance into the night to dramatize their grievances” while also “warn[ing] whites to keep away.” Stokely Carmichael, in Richmond to attend a bond hearing for H. Rap Brown, visited the protestors in solidarity, and one student promised, “As it stands now ... we’ll be here a long, long time” (*The Chicago Daily Defender* 1968, p. 10). On April 6, protestors added “amnesty pledges from the administration” to their list of demands, with one student identifying “reprisals and retaliation” as the chief impediment to resolution: “She said the students wanted a promise from the administration that students would not be punished for taking part in the boycott” (*Washington Post* 1968b, p. B1). The VUU protest gained steam even as demonstrations tailed off at other HBC campuses, such as Howard University, the Tuskegee Institute, and Bowie State College (Maryland) (Slack 1968, pp. 1, 47). After negotiations reached a stalemate on April 7, Allix James announced on April 9 that the school had secured an injunction against any further occupation of university buildings to “assure the interim integrity of the University against any unwarranted interference with either campus property or procedure.” Decisions reached by the administration, James believed, would be “acceptable to the overwhelming majority of the students” (*Washington Post* 1968c, p. A11). Even with the protest’s end, fallout from the experience guaranteed that it stayed in the news and, likely, at the forefront of administrators’ minds. In May, for example, VUU officials faced another wave of protests after Richmond officials sentenced Elliott Hatcher, Jr., to three months in prison for trespassing. A New York City native, the twenty-five-year-old Hatcher had been among the thirty VUU students expelled for their roles in the campus takeover, and when VUU officials encountered him outside a dormitory on May 6, they initiated legal action. Students staged a march in response, gaining support from peers at Virginia State College in Petersburg and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (*Washington Post* 1968d, p. A5). If planners for the VUU summer seminars managed to avoid political issues through most of the 1960s, this irruption of activism on campus likely helps explain why summer seminar topics finally began to engage issues of race and systemic injustice. Might local unrest also account for the imminent end of the summer seminars and the changing nature of Lilly Endowment’s relationship with VUU?

5. Possessing the Crisis—Institutionalizing Philanthropy for the Black Church

One year after TRUST leaders challenged seminar participants to “give spiritual leaven to season community structures,” VUU convened its final summer seminar. Howard Thurman again headlined the event, and Dr. E. Theodore Jones lectured to the participants about his time as director of the Martin Luther King School of Social Change at Crozer Seminary (*The Chicago Daily Defender* 1970, p. 24). Neither records available in the VUU archives nor Lilly Endowment’s published annual reports include any indication of why the program ended, but several factors may have played a part. First, Lilly Endowment had undergone substantial staffing changes since the inauguration of the summer seminars in 1960. Despite his history of poor health, Harold Duling’s sudden death in 1964 surprised, and upset, many Endowment observers²⁴ (Whitman 1964, pp. 2–6). Any evaluation of Duling’s influence at the Endowment demands caveats; aside from any material held in Lilly Endowment’s private archive, no other repository of his personal papers exists to aid scholars in such an assessment. Still, the available evidence demonstrates Duling’s widespread engagement with projects ranging from local civic issues and national projects in higher education to world ecumenical projects (*Indianapolis Star* 1948a, p. 3; 1948b, p. 9; 1950, p. 6; 1952a, p. 1; 1952b, p. 30; 1953, p. 21; 1954, p. 16). Considering his

²⁴ Lauris B. Whitman paid tribute to Duling’s “creative career” in “Religious Research in Europe,” (Whitman 1964, pp. 2–6). The foundation officer, Whitman claimed, “understood our interests and made a major contribution to religious research ... We are deeply indebted to Harold Duling.”

role at the Seabury Consultation and his personal friendship with James, Duling's premature death surely altered interactions between the Endowment and VUU.

If it is fair to conclude that Duling's death in 1964 caused tremors in the relationship, 1969 surely represented a tectonic shift. That December, President Nixon signed the Tax Reform Act of 1969, a wide-ranging piece of legislation that included substantial reforms targeted at philanthropic foundations, several of which related directly to the Endowment's habits of practice. For instance, the Tax Reform Act mandated that foundations expend their entire annual income or not less than six percent of their total asset value. This mattered especially for outfits like Lilly Endowment which had exhibited meager expenditure rates; a 1972 study by Danforth Foundation president Merrimon Cuninggim found that the Endowment ranked fourteenth in total foundation expenditures despite ranking second by assets, and its one percent expenditure rate at that time placed it lowest among the nation's top thirty granting institutions (Cuninggim 1972, pp. 65–67, 70). Perhaps even more significant for the Endowment than the expenditure rate or a new four percent excise tax, however, were the legislation's initiatives against the use of foundations to exert control of a corporate board. Here, tax reformers sought to inhibit those who aimed to apply the wisdom emblemized in a *Business Week* column that encouraged readers to create foundations in order to maintain "control of wealth" until, eventually, "the foundation's holdings constitute firm control of a family's company (Business Week 1960, pp. 153–54). One *Indianapolis Star* editorial had recognized this aspect of the Endowment's function as early as 1967, noting that by owning slightly more than twenty percent of Eli Lilly and Company's stock, the foundation served as a "major force for the continued stability and tenure of the company's management. Any outsider who would try to take control of the company would have to contend with the voting power ... held by the foundation" (*Indianapolis Star* 1967, sec. 2 p, 1; Madison 1989, pp. 206, 219; Nielsen 1972, p. 171).

Moving forward, foundation shares of a corporation could not exceed twenty percent, so after maximizing every bit of the buffer period built into the 1969 legislation, Endowment leaders eventually had no choice but to reduce the foundation's corporate holdings. In May 1972, Morgan Stanley announced the imminent sale of three million new shares of Eli Lilly and Company stock, the proceeds from which Endowment leaders then diversified across nine investment firms (*Indianapolis Star* 1972; *Lilly Endowment Annual Report* 1972). Asset diversification and heightened payout requirements, both mandated by the legislation, meant the foundation would face rising expectations at the same time they possessed ballooning means. Predictably, Endowment staffing changed to reflect this new reality, beginning with a widespread hiring surge that increased Endowment staff from six to seventy-five employees (Madison 1989, p. 220). Endowment president John S. Lynn, who had first taken the foundation's reins in 1961 before proceeding to run its operations "almost singlehandedly," began a transition out that concluded with his retirement in 1972 (Ketchum 1973, p. 6). New hiring and new leadership helped to professionalize Lilly Endowment, instituting an ethos that favored long-term growth, stability, and even self-preservation²⁵ (Frumkin 1998, pp. 266–86; 1999, pp. 69–98; Chandler 1977).

Officials at Lilly Endowment were thus preparing for and then initiating revolutionary changes at the very moment that Allix James entered a new phase of his career at VUU, leaving his role as dean of the School of Religion in 1970 and accepting appointment as the university's seventh president (*Washington Post* 1970, p. D6). Combined with broader cultural shifts, these changes at both Lilly Endowment and VUU overdetermined a changing relationship between the two institutions. Yet it would be a gross overstatement to claim that changes at Lilly Endowment and VUU in the early 1970s estranged the two parties. Rather, after a brief hiatus that roughly mirrored the hiring and structural changes at the foundation, the two institutions soon undertook a new collaboration. In 1974, VUU

²⁵ On post-Tax Reform Act professionalization across the philanthropic sector, see (Frumkin 1998, pp. 266–86; 1999, pp. 69–98). On professionalization yielding an interest in growth and stability, see (Chandler 1977).

appeared once again in an Endowment annual report, this time receiving a \$75-thousand grant for “faculty development” in the School of Theology. In 1975, foundation leaders renewed that gift at a reduced amount of \$50-thousand while also pledging an additional \$50-thousand gift for the future development of a program in “education for leadership in black churches” ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1974](#), p. 61; [1975](#), p. 72; [James 1998](#), pp. 25–26). With the support of the Baptist Convention of Virginia and its president, Grady W. Powell, now-president Allix James wrote in January 1976 to program officer Fred Hofheinz, one of the new staffers to arrive at the Endowment following the Tax Reform Act. James celebrated the leadership program, one that “in all probability will make a tremendous impact upon the life of the church” ([Powell 1975](#); [James 1976a](#)). James was nothing if not bold, and on June 24, 1976—the very day after receiving the first installment on this newest grant program—he wrote to Hofheinz again, seeking to secure additional funding for the completion of a new campus worship center. Much like VUU’s initial grant draft in 1959, James’s letter to Hofheinz foregrounded VUU’s legacy as “an institution closely related to the goals and purposes of the church” ([James 1976b](#)).

This time, however, Endowment leaders did not approve the VUU proposal, and ensuing interactions between the two institutions began to evince the changes afoot at both the foundation and the university. VUU inquiries sounded increasingly precarious, reflecting widespread financial pressures that beset many private universities in the 1970s²⁶ ([Loss 2011](#), p. 16). Responding to a rejection letter from Hofheinz in November 1976, James referenced VUU’s “tremendous need” ([James 1976c](#); [Nichols 1977a](#)). By August 1977, VUU dean Paul Nichols wrote Hofheinz to relay the administration’s deepening concern, namely that the program initially subsidized by Lilly Endowment would inevitably fail without a renewal of the grant’s terms ([Nichols 1977b](#)). Meanwhile, Endowment communications bore the traces of increasing professionalization. After commending the VUU leadership development program on its merits, Hofheinz admitted to James in a March 1978 letter that Endowment leaders possessed a “secondary motive” for their grants: “From our vantage point, your activity provided valuable learning for us about an important issue in contemporary theological education.” James would maximize the impact of the grant, Hofheinz claimed, by filling out a final report according to a set of enclosed guidelines! Endowment leaders asked all seminary grant recipients to follow the reporting guidelines in the hope that they might, “by having similarly designed final reports, find ways of sharing what has been learned from the various programs to the wider theological education community” ([Hofheinz 1978a](#)). Three months later, Hofheinz wrote again with precise instructions regarding the necessity of a “very detailed budget” for any prospective grants, and in December of that year he wrote a polite but firm letter of rejection to Nichols’ latest grant proposal. Hofheinz acknowledged that VUU faculty members were “terribly underpaid” and in need of salary subsidy, but “it would not be keeping with our philanthropic style were the Endowment to alleviate this problem at a single institution while at the same time refusing to honor the request of other schools in similar situations” ([Hofheinz 1978b](#)). One final letter between the two institutions, from February 1979, included a clear warning from Lilly Endowment to VUU’s vice president for business affairs: “No checks will be sent until all due reports are in the office of Lilly Endowments [sic]” ([Lilly Endowment to Nathaniel Lipscomb 1979](#)). The professionalization rout was on. While VUU received a few more modest (typically \$10- to \$20-thousand) grants from Lilly Endowment in the coming years and would eventually win one additional major award in 1989, the regular collaboration between the two institutions had reached its end²⁷ ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1980, 1981, 1982, 1989](#), p. 59).

²⁶ Historian Christopher P. Loss argues that these financial pressures issued from a confluence of factors: the end of Depression- and war-era willingness to invest in higher education, a “rightward political shift,” and a simultaneous economic downturn across the country; as a result, “funding cuts and the introduction of market-driven student-aid policies altered the nature of college going for the rest of the century and beyond.” ([Loss 2011](#), p. 16).

²⁷ For smaller gifts, see ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1980, 1981, 1982](#)). For a description of a major award for “leadership education for clergy and lay ministers,” see ([Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1989](#), p. 59).

This record of correspondence and cooperation across two decades demonstrates both the limits and persistence of grant recipient agency. Without question, no amount of skill, creativity, or ambition at VUU could counterbalance the wider cultural changes at play. The world that Seabury consultants had surveyed in 1959 differed drastically—certainly in rhetoric and spirit, if not in *de facto* experience—from that faced by university and foundation leaders in the late 1970s. The midcentury integrationist model that seemingly informed many Seabury participants had waned through the decade, ceding ground to movements that prioritized direct action and cultural separatism²⁸ (Savage 2008, p. 227, chp. 6, pp. 238–69; Hall 2005, pp. 1233–63; Cha-Jua and Lang 2007, pp. 265–88). By 1978, the language that VUU leaders had deployed to such great effect in the immediate wake of the Seabury Consultation fell on ears less fluent in its dialect. Indeed, as the Seabury Consultants had foreseen, the very role of institutions such as VUU remained open for debate.

Yet the denouement of this relationship, and the ways in which Lilly Endowment officers framed it in the correspondence referenced above, revealed the surprising persistence of VUU's influence even after the direct partnership had concluded. For Lilly Endowment's waning commitment to programs at VUU did not indicate a diminished interest in the vitality of the black church. Rather, the end of the regular collaboration occurred at the very moment the Endowment began to devote increasing financial and human resources to the topic. This marked quite a turn of events at the foundation. When Endowment board members had first approved the VUU grant program in 1959, foundation investments in black communities had been, at best, anomalous. To be sure, Lilly Endowment had first invested in the UNCF in 1945, and that fundraising federation remained a favored recipient through the early 1950s (Madison 1989, p. 214; Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1950, p. 22). Despite this, internal communication in 1964 could still note without any apparent sense of embarrassment that in the prior ten years only three percent of total foundation grants had gone to “all Negro causes” (Lynn 1964).

As Endowment commitments to VUU waned in the late 1970s, however, their engagement with black communities was actually expanding. In 1973, the Endowment's annual report announced a \$400-thousand-dollar commitment to another HBC, Shaw University, for the establishment of a “seminary without walls” under the leadership of civil rights icon C. T. Vivian²⁹ (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1973, p. 67; Vivian 1976). In 1975, the foundation commenced a program with the Fund for Theological Education. Based in Princeton, New Jersey, the fund guided efforts “to encourage minorities and others to enter ministry and theological study” (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1975, p. 37). That same year, the Harlem-based ecumenical organization, the Ministerial Interfaith Association, won a \$100-thousand-dollar grant for “citizenship education through local churches” (Lilly Endowment Annual Report 1975, pp. 8, 54). Most significantly, in 1977, Endowment staffers developed an internal proposal for a new program emphasis on “the Black Church.” Foundation officers Jacqui Burton and George Wiley justified such a program by appealing to both past and present. “The historic role of the Black Church in the Black community,” they claimed, made the topic worthy of a sustained commitment by the Endowment. So too did the ongoing “debate about the Black Church's present significance: in the vanguard or struggling to catch up?” (Burton and Wiley 1976). By 1979, this initiative had spawned an “advisory committee” in black religion that involved prominent figures from both church and academy³⁰ (n.a. 1988). That group would meet with increasing frequency beginning

²⁸ Savage describes this transition as “marking the generational chasm separating Mays from younger, vocal advocates of black nationalism, those on black college campuses like Morehouse” (Savage 2008, p. 227, chp. 6, pp. 238–69). The concept of a generational shift gestures toward an important and persistent debate regarding the parameters of the civil rights movement. For a key revisionist article, see (Hall 2005, pp. 1233–63); for a key rebuttal, see (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007, pp. 265–88).

²⁹ For a subsequent assessment of the Seminary without Walls grant program, see (Vivian 1976).

³⁰ Under the chairmanship of sociologist C. Eric Lincoln, prominent advisory committee members throughout the years included: African Methodist Episcopal (AME) bishop John Hurst Adams; Endowment program officer Jacqui Burton; Larry Doss, a Detroit-based businessman and civic leader; Howard University administrator and professor of religion, Marshall Grigsby; Episcopal minister, Dr. Robert E. Hood; Lincoln's frequent collaborator and co-author, the sociologist Lawrence

in the mid-1980s and eventually yield a program of scholarship with substantial influence on the field of American religious studies³¹ (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Collier-Thomas 1997, 2010; Raboteau and Wills forthcoming).

From their realization in 1964 that approximately three percent of foundation giving had gone to “all Negro causes,” in fifteen years Endowment leaders had cultivated a more robust appreciation of what role foundation philanthropy could play in black religious life and the spirit in which such involvement should be pursued. American racial tensions were “far from resolved,” one internal memo acknowledged in 1978, and had at times been complicated by “ambiguous efforts by private foundations to serve the black community.” With this awareness, “the officers and directors of Lilly Endowment will . . . undertake [future investments] with caution and care” (n.a. 1978). This evolution continued through the 1980s, with AME dignitary John Hurst Adams “prais[ing] the Lilly Endowment for its strong commitment to institutional development of the Black Church and of the Black institutions of higher education” (n.a. 1981). By April 1989, the Howard University School of Divinity even hosted a reception to honor retiring Endowment Vice President Robert Wood Lynn. According to Howard’s dean Lawrence N. Jones, Lynn had helped establish Lilly Endowment as “the leading supporter of programs designed to strengthen the leadership of Black religious institutions” (Jones 1989). All these changes at Lilly Endowment commenced in the mid-1970s, at the very moment that the foundation’s leaders were, to quote Hofheinz, “find[ing] ways of sharing what has been learned from the various programs to the wider theological education community.” While the context of his original statement made clear that Hofheinz spoke of grant programs in general, the principle surely applied to Lilly Endowment’s relationship with VUU. Correspondence and collaboration over more than a decade had provided the foundation “valuable learning” about challenges in contemporary seminary education (Hofheinz 1978a). And the Endowment would apply that learning forthwith, even if the recipients of their largesse would increasingly dwell outside Richmond, Virginia.

Scholars of philanthropy and religion should consider whether, in one sense, VUU and its program of summer seminars might be considered casualties of their own success. To be sure, external variables eventually worked against the VUU leaders’ initial vision. New voices and priorities defined the black freedom struggle; new tax laws altered the philanthropic landscape; new personnel assumed key roles at both university and foundation. While Samuel Proctor and Allix James had worked at the Seabury Consultation to position their university as a key mediator between black churches and foundation philanthropy, factors beyond their control impeded the continuation of that role. Yet this story poses problems for any standard philanthropic narratives that situate all power with donors. Administrators like Proctor and James played a substantial role in this philanthropic partnership. Less an act of salesmanship or persuasion than one of translation, they identified a pre-existing Lilly Endowment value—theological education—and grafted it onto a longstanding priority within the black community. That initial act and the eleven summer seminars that followed from it would alone merit consideration. But scholars should attend as well to the potential ramifications that collaboration had for the long-term trajectory of Lilly Endowment giving to programs in black religion.

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Mamiya; Albert Raboteau, professor of religion at Princeton University; and Doris E. Saunders, a professor of journalism at Jackson State University. e.g., see (n.a. 1988).

³¹ Without question, the most prominent example here is Lincoln and Mamiya’s *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990); nearly thirty years later, new books in black religious history still cite Lincoln and Mamiya’s text. Other examples include (Collier-Thomas 1997, 2010); and the multi-decade collaborative effort (led at various points by scholars including Albert J. Raboteau and David W. Wills) tentatively titled *African-American Religion: A Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents* (Raboteau and Wills forthcoming).

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