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The First Black Faculty Members at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges
Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 45 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 107-111

Published by: [The JBHE Foundation](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4133630>

Accessed: 03/01/2012 10:00

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The First Black Faculty Members at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges

For nearly 200 years the nation's prestigious and selective liberal arts colleges enrolled only a token number of black students. And it was not until the nation entered the civil rights era in the late 1960s that most of these colleges hired a black person to their faculties.

THROUGH MOST OF the history of our country, black people, almost without exception, were not considered educable at the college or graduate school level. Driven by strong and prevailing shared values about the biological and mental inferiority of the Negro, virtually all institutions of higher learning in the United States adopted a universal rule of racial exclusion. Education of the Negro was essentially limited to industrial training.

Before the end of the Civil War, a total of about 40 blacks had graduated from colleges and universities in the United States. All of these colleges were in the northern states. With few exceptions these blacks received their degrees from small liberal arts colleges such as Amherst, Bowdoin, Middlebury, and Oberlin. In many cases, the admissions policies of these racially pioneering colleges were governed by strict religious charters that compelled them to view all men as being created equal under the eyes of God.

Furthermore, in almost every case this small cadre of liberal arts colleges was governed by strong abolitionist sentiments held both in their faculties and administrations. Indeed, a number of these small colleges served as important stops on the Underground Railroad.

The rule of racial exclusion also had a firm grip on most large universities. The so-called nameplate research institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Duke, and the University of Chicago, as well as even the most racially open liberal arts colleges, steadfastly declined to hire blacks to their faculties until well into the twentieth century. Of course, it was acceptable that the few black students at these colleges be taught by white professors. But it was totally unacceptable for these institutions to permit their predominantly white students to be taught by a Negro. Due to the almost universal academic mindset that blacks were intellectually inferior to whites, it was beyond imagination that one of these prestigious institutions would risk its academic reputation by hiring a black faculty member.

It followed that in the early years of the twentieth century

distinguished black academics such as Carter G. Woodson, Alain Locke, E. Franklin Frazier, Ernest Just, and Rayford Logan were not received as scholars at America's great institutions of higher learning. When W.E.B. Du Bois, the most influential intellectual black figure of the twentieth century, was persuaded to leave his post at Wilberforce University,

the historically black college in Ohio, to undertake his sociological study of *The Philadelphia Negro*, he was assigned a nonfaculty post of "assistant in sociology" at the University of Pennsylvania.

It was not until 1947 that an African American was hired to a tenured faculty position at a major predominantly white university. That year, the distinguished anthropologist and social psychologist W. Allison Davis was awarded tenure at the University of Chicago.

JBHE surveyed the nation's 25 highest-ranked liberal arts colleges requesting information on the first black scholar appointed to their faculties. Twenty of the 25 institutions were able to identify their first black faculty member. Smith College hired its first black faculty member in 1945. Haverford and Oberlin hired blacks to their faculties in 1948. Wellesley College hired a black sociologist in 1949. Vassar College engaged a black psychologist in 1954. The remaining 15 liberal arts colleges did not bring a black scholar to their faculties until the 1960s or later. Five prestigious liberal arts colleges hired their first black faculty member in the 1970s. Bates College and Washington and Lee University did not have a black person on their faculties until the 1980s.

The women's colleges seemed more willing to consider the hiring of black scholars than the men's or coeducational institutions. Perhaps the trustees of these women's colleges, many of whom were white men, held both the sexist and racist opinion that Negroes were acceptable holding teaching posts where women students were receiving the instruction. Women's higher education in the first half of the twentieth century was considered unimportant and most certainly not expected to be held to the standards of higher education for men.

In 1947 he became the first African American to be tenured at a major white university.



W. Allison Davis

Following is a brief biography of the first black faculty members at the nation's highest-ranked liberal arts colleges (listed in chronological order). Archivists at Bowdoin, Claremont McKenna, Grinnell, Macalester, and Middlebury could not determine the identity of those colleges' first black faculty member.



Smith College: Adelaide Cromwell, a 1940 alumna of Smith, was hired to the faculty as an instructor of sociology in 1945. Her aunt, Otelia Cromwell, was the first black graduate of Smith College in 1900. Adelaide Cromwell

earned a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania and then taught at Hunter College in New York City before coming to Smith. In announcing her appointment to the Smith faculty in 1945, the *Boston Herald* noted, "An auspicious circumstance attending this precedent is the fact that [the decision of Smith] was at least in part motivated by the demand of the student newspaper for a Negro faculty member to refute the fallacy of racism. The elders on the board of trustees were wise to heed the wishes of the youth, who are facing 'the beam of day.'"

Cromwell later earned a Ph.D. at Radcliffe and taught at Boston University for more than 30 years. She was a co-founder and director of the black studies program at Boston University. In 1971 she was promoted to full professor. She is currently a professor emerita.

Haverford College: In 1948 Ira de Augustine Reid was appointed to the faculty of Haverford College in Pennsylvania. He had been a visiting professor at Haverford for the preceding year, on leave from Atlanta University. Reid remained on the Haverford faculty until his retirement. He died in 1968.

Dr. Reid was a native of Philadelphia. He was a graduate of Morehouse College and later served on its faculty. At Morehouse, one of Professor Reid's students was Martin Luther King Jr. Reid went on to earn a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University. He did pioneering research on economic and social differences between native-born African Americans and immigrants from the Caribbean basin.

Oberlin College: Mathematician Wade Ellis was the first black faculty member at Oberlin College in Ohio. He was hired in 1948 more than a century after the first black students attended the college.

Professor Ellis was a native of Chandler, Oklahoma. As a young boy he worked in the cotton fields, yet he made his

The First African-American Graduates at the Nation's 25 Highest-Rated Liberal Arts Colleges

Institution	First Black Graduate	Year
Washington and Lee Univ.	John Chavis	1799*
Middlebury College	Alexander L. Twilight	1823
Amherst College	Edward Jones	1826
Bowdoin College	John B. Russwurm	1826
Oberlin College	George B. Vashon	1844
Bates College	Henry W. Chandler	1874
Grinnell College	Hannibal Kershaw	1879
Wesleyan College	Wilbur Fisk Burns	1860
Mt. Holyoke College	Hortense Parker	1883
Colby College	Adam S. Green	1887
Colgate University	Matthew W. Gilbert	1887
Wellesley College	Harriet Alleyne Rice	1887
Hamilton College	Joseph L. Spurlarke	1889
Williams College	Gaius C. Bolin	1889
Vassar College	Anita F. Hemmings	1897**
Smith College	Otelia Cromwell	1900
Pomona College	Winston M.C. Dickson	1904
Bryn Mawr College	Enid Cook	1931
Swarthmore College	Gloria E. Clement	1947
Carleton College	Alvis Lee Tinnin	1949
Trinity College	Kenneth Higginbotham	1950
Haverford College	Paul Moses	1951
Claremont McKenna	Larry Moss	1966
Harvey Mudd College	Paul B. Vitta	1966
Davidson College	Wayne E. Crumwell	1968

*It is not known if Chavis earned a bachelor's degree. After Chavis, no black student attended the university until 1966.

**Vassar College did not know that Anita Hemmings was an African American when she was admitted. The first student to graduate from Vassar who openly acknowledged her African-American heritage was Beatrix McCleary in 1940.

Source: Information obtained from colleges and other sources by the JBHE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT.

way to Wilberforce University in Ohio. There he double majored in mathematics and chemistry. Ellis then taught at the State Training School of Negro Boys in Boley, Oklahoma, while working toward his master's degree at the University of New Mexico. He then went on to the University of Michigan for his Ph.D. in mathematics. He taught at Oberlin for 20 years and also served on the city council. After retiring from the college in 1967 he became a professor of mathematics and associate dean of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan. He later served as vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and as president of Mary-



grove College in Detroit. Ellis died of a heart attack in 1980 at the age of 71.

Wellesley College: Sociologist William Cousins was hired to the Wellesley College faculty in 1949. He taught at Wellesley for three years and then had a long career with the American Friends Service Committee. Although retired from field work, Professor Cousins still writes and remains active in foreign aid work administration.

Cousins was a graduate of Fisk University and earned his master's and Ph.D. at Yale. His doctoral dissertation at Yale was titled, "New Haven and the Negro."

Vassar College: The last of the Seven Sisters colleges to admit black students, Vassar graduated its first student who admitted she was black in 1940. (At least two other African Americans who passed for white graduated from Vassar before 1940.) Only five years later, the renowned poet and Howard University scholar Sterling Brown was hired as a visiting associate professor of English. Sterling Brown was a graduate of Williams College and earned a master's degree at Harvard. Unable to land a teaching post at a predominantly white college or university, Brown taught at several black colleges before settling at Howard in 1926. He remained on the Howard faculty while at Vassar. Brown died in 1989.

In 1954 psychologist Henrietta Smith became the first black scholar to win tenure at Vassar.

Mount Holyoke College: Frances Mills Kerr was the first black faculty member at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. In 1961 she was engaged as an assistant professor of psychology and education. She later served as director of the Gorse Child Study Center, a working nursery school where Mount Holyoke students can study early childhood education. Professor Kerr was a native of Atlanta but grew up in Charlotte. She was a graduate of Livingstone College and earned a master's degree at the University of Iowa.

Kerr retired from Mount Holyoke in 1985. She died in 1996. She is buried in Arlington National Cemetery next to her husband Oliver. Oliver Kerr was one of the famed Tuskegee Airmen.

Wesleyan University: In 1961 Edgar Frederick Beckham

The First Black Scholars Appointed to the Faculties of the Nation's Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges

College	Name	Department	Year
Smith College	Adelaide Cromwell	Sociology	1945
Haverford College	Ira de Augustine Reid	Sociology	1948
Oberlin College	Wade Ellis	Mathematics	1948
Wellesley College	William Cousins	Sociology	1949
Vassar College	Henrietta Smith	Psychology	1954
Mt. Holyoke College	Frances Mills Kerr	Psychology & Ed.	1961
Wesleyan University	Edgar F. Beckham	German	1961
Amherst College	James Denton	Mathematics	1964
Carleton College	Vannie W. Wilson Jr.	Biology	1966
Pomona College	Elwood Peterson	Music	1966
Williams College	Joseph E. Harris	History	1969
Colgate College	H. George Henry	Economics	1969
Harvey Mudd College	Arthur S. Cary	Physics	1969
Swarthmore College	Kathryn Morgan	History	1970
Bryn Mawr College	Robert Washington	Sociology	1971
Trinity College	William T. Bowie	Chemistry	1971
Davidson College	Charles D. Dockery	French	1974
Hamilton College	Germina Lubega	Economics	1974
Bates College	Charles Carnegie	Anthropology	1982
Washington and Lee Univ.	Ann Wortham	Sociology	1989
	Jarvis A. Hall	Political Science	1989

Source: JBHE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT.

was appointed to the faculty at Wesleyan University. An alumnus of the university, he was hired as a lecturer in German and remained on the faculty for nearly three decades. He also served as associate provost and dean of the college. Dean Beckham told JBHE, "I once told Kay Butterfield, widow of Wesleyan president Victor Lloyd Butterfield, who presided over my admission to Wesleyan and hired me 10 years later, that I thought of my Wesleyan education as an extension of the education I had received from my mother. 'What a wonderful tribute to your mother,' she replied. 'What a wonderful tribute to Wesleyan,' I thought."



Beckham retired from Wesleyan in 1990 and later served as director of the Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity Initiative. He was also appointed to the Connecticut State Board of Education. He currently resides in North Haven, Connecticut.

Amherst College: James Denton, the first black member of the Amherst College faculty, remains at the college today as professor of mathematics. Denton recalls, "When I came to interview here in 1964, the president left me with the impression that I was a pioneer."



Professor Denton is a native of Lincoln, Nebraska, but graduated from high school in Santa Barbara, California. He earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from CalTech in 1951 and went on to earn a master's and Ph.D. from the University of Oregon.



Carleton College: In 1966 Vannie William Wilson Jr. joined the faculty of Carleton College in Minnesota as an assistant professor of biology. He was promoted to associate professor in 1969 but left Carleton in 1971 in order to accept a position on the faculty of a leading medical school.

A native of Mount Olive, Tennessee, Wilson graduated summa cum laude from Morgan State University in Baltimore. He earned his master's degree at the University of Chicago and a doctorate in biology from the University of Illinois. Before teaching at Carleton, Wilson was an assistant professor of biology at Denison University. His research was primarily focused on the influenza virus.



Pomona College: Elwood Peterson first came to Pomona College in Claremont, California, as a visiting professor of music in 1966. He was soon offered a full-time faculty position as an assistant professor. He stayed on at Pomona, retiring as a full professor in 1986.

A native of New York City, he attended public schools. He was accepted for admission to Morehouse College but his family could not afford the \$17 per month tuition that was required. He took part-time jobs and later enlisted in the Army. He did not take voice lessons until the age of 24. His first public concert was in 1950. He then went to Europe to study and perform for the next 15 years under the name Emil Peters. Professor Peterson is now retired and lives in the Los Angeles area.

Williams College: Blacks have been attending Williams College since the 1880s and today the college has one of the largest black enrollments of any of the nation's highest-ranked liberal arts schools. But it was not until 1969 that Williams College hired its first black faculty member. That year Joseph E. Harris was named professor of history at Williams. He had been serving as an associate professor of history at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Professor Harris was a graduate of Howard University where he also earned a master's degree in history and African studies. He earned a Ph.D. in African history at North-

western University with a dissertation titled, "The Kingdom of Fouta Diallon." He also taught at Howard, Morgan State University, and Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. In 1975 Harris returned to Howard as chair of the department of history.

Colgate University: In 1969 H. George Henry was appointed associate professor of economics and director of the urban and Afro-American studies program and the Caribbean studies program at Colgate University. Henry was tenured three years later and promoted to full professor in 1981. He retired from Colgate in 1990.

Immediately prior to coming to Colgate, Henry was a senior economist for the Jamaican government. He previously taught at Lincoln University, the historically black institution in Pennsylvania. Professor Henry is a graduate of London University. He holds a master's and Ph.D. in economics from Cornell. There his doctoral dissertation was on the subject of the economy of the Basutoland region of South Africa.

Harvey Mudd College: Arthur S. Cary was the first black faculty member at Harvey Mudd College. Appointed to the physics faculty in 1969, he left the college shortly thereafter to take a faculty position at California Polytechnic Institute in San Luis Obispo.

Professor Cary is a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville. He holds a master's degree in physics from Fisk and a second master's degree from the University of California at Riverside. He earned his Ph.D. in elementary particle physics at Riverside. Before teaching positions opened up to black scholars at predominantly white colleges and universities, Professor Cary taught at Dillard University and Tennessee State University. Today he remains on the faculty of Cal Poly.

Swarthmore College: When Kathryn Morgan interviewed for a position on the Swarthmore College faculty in 1970, she told the history department chair, "I am not a white person in a black skin. I am a black woman. OK?" She was hired and she stayed at Swarthmore for more than two decades. But it was not without a fight. In 1976 she was denied tenure and joined in a class action sexual discrimination lawsuit. She won and currently is the Sara Lawrence Lightfoot Professor Emerita of History.

Morgan holds a master's degree from Howard University and a second master's and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.



Trinity College: William Thompson Bowie became the first black faculty member at Trinity College in 1971. He had first come to the college in 1960 as an undergraduate. He struggled through four years of undergraduate work in chemistry. But the chair of the department suggested he apply to the graduate school at Howard University. He was accepted and earned a Ph.D. four years later with a dissertation titled, "A Kinetic Study of the Chromous Ion Reduction of Some Stable Organic Cations." Soon afterward, the same professor who recommended he apply to graduate school called to offer him a faculty position at Trinity. "Upon returning to the college, I found my situation to be rather unique," Dr. Bowie told JBHE. Everyone in the department, save for one, had taught me just a few years earlier."

Professor Bowie is currently a chemist working for the city of Milford, Connecticut.



Bryn Mawr College: In 1971 Robert Washington became the first black faculty member at Bryn Mawr College. He was hired as a lecturer in sociology. He received tenure in 1978 and was named a full professor in 1991 and remains on the college's faculty.

Washington served in the Peace Corps in Africa before completing his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago. His current research includes a project examining color prejudice among Africans.



Davidson College: In 1939 Charles D. Dockery was born in the segregated town of Shelby, North Carolina. His father arranged for his three sons to room with a physician in Richmond, Indiana, so they could attend a quality high school.

Dockery stayed in Richmond and enrolled at Earlham College. He spent his junior year abroad in France and fell in love with French culture. Returning to the United States he graduated from Earlham College in 1961 and enrolled in the graduate program in French at the University of Iowa.

After earning his master's and working for his Ph.D., Dockery was offered a teaching post at the University of Maine. In 1974 he returned home to North Carolina to finish his dissertation and was offered a post on the faculty of Davidson College. The president of the college told him that as the first black faculty member life might be difficult. But Dockery later reported that he had never experienced any

overt racism at Davidson. Dockery has now retired and lives in French-speaking Quebec.

Hamilton College: Author Alex Haley was a visiting lecturer in speech and creative writing at Hamilton College in the late 1960s. But it was not until 1974 that the college made its first appointment of a black scholar to its permanent faculty. That year Germina Lubega, a native of Uganda, was named instructor in economics. She was a graduate of Vassar College and held a master's degree from Duke. She remained on the Hamilton College faculty through 1977.

David Owen Butcher was appointed to the post of instructor of philosophy at Hamilton College in 1978. He was the first African-American faculty member at the college. In 1979, after completing his doctorate at Stanford University, he was named assistant professor. He left Hamilton in 1983.



Bates College: It was not until 1982 that Bates College in Maine hired a black scholar to its faculty. That year Charles Carnegie was named assistant professor of anthropology.

A native of Jamaica, Carnegie is a graduate of Cornell University where he was elected Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. His dissertation was titled, "Human Maneuver, Option Building, and Trade: An Essay in Caribbean Social Organization."

Dr. Carnegie is currently an associate professor of anthropology at Bates and chair of the African-American studies program.

Washington and Lee University: While black students have been attending many of these prestigious liberal arts colleges for nearly two centuries, blacks were denied admittance to Washington and Lee University until 1966. Thus it is not surprising that this selective liberal arts college is the last among its peers to have hired a black faculty member. In 1989 the color barrier was finally broken at the university when it hired two blacks to its faculty.

Anne Wortham was appointed assistant professor of sociology. She taught at Washington and Lee for only two years. She currently is an associate professor of sociology at Illinois State University.

Jarvis A. Hall was named assistant professor of political science at Washington and Lee in 1989. He taught at the university until 1995. He currently is chair of the department of political science at North Carolina Central University, the historically black institution in Durham.

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