

“Narratives of Social Solidarity”, Excerpt from the Virtual Meeting of the Dartmouth Club of Sarasota-Manatee, Florida, November 20, 2020

Several key moments of my life and professional career can be traced to Dartmouth College. One of the books I consulted before this event is *The Dartmouth Experience*.¹ It is a collection of official statements by John Sloan Dickey, Dartmouth’s 12th president, 1945-1970. There are important aspects of this *Experience*, however, that are not reflected in this volume.²

Narratives of Social Solidarity is inspired by a document, accompanied by a petition, issued by a group of Black Dartmouth Faculty, Staff, and Students on July 14, 2020.³ Much rethinking has taken place within the Dartmouth Community, especially since the slaying of Mr. George Floyd on May 25. Mirrors are being held up, as elsewhere, to examine what institutions have done, are doing, and what more should be done regarding equity, diversity, and access.

My “early decision” application to the College in fall 1960 was one of the most significant decisions in my life. I described my experiences since arriving in Hanover, N.H. in September 1961 as getting onto a set of stairs that turned into an escalator – a life-long one. For every step I took, I was carried further upwards.⁴ Alongside my academic pursuits, I have had many opportunities to engage in promoting social justice and social solidarity. They continue today.⁵

Several statements were issued by the Dartmouth College leadership and concerned groups in spring and summer 2020.⁶ The one mentioned above coincided with my thinking, so I signed the attached petition. My life as a scholar-activist began with a visit to the Dartmouth Office of Admissions. I was one of five Black students in my undergraduate class of over 800.⁷ At one point, there were twelve African-American students in the entire student body. When I was told that Dartmouth did not discriminate but few Black students applied, I knew – from my personal experiences – that this was far from the full story. I had not been recruited by Dartmouth. No one associated with the College came to my Brooklyn high school to speak to members of the senior class.

¹ John Sloan Dickey, *The Dartmouth Experience* (Addresses and Valedictories), edited by Edward Connery Latham (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1977). Dickey had been president for sixteen years before I matriculated at the College, and he continued in that position five years after I graduated in 1965.

² Jim Bopp has related how a meeting was arranged with President Dickey to request that Civil Rights leaders, Fannie Lou Hamer and John Lewis, be awarded honorary degrees at a Dartmouth Commencement. The delegation was not successful. Just think, Mr. Bopp has said, what it would had meant if Dartmouth had honored these two individuals. They went on to become legendary figures in the Civil Rights Movement. In the interviews by Mary Donin for the Dartmouth Oral History Project, I shared a few reflections about the Dickey presidency: https://www.dropbox.com/s/uynk4eyd3dzh8i2/doh-31_001_001_01.pdf?dl=0.

³ Open Letter to the Board of Trustees of Dartmouth College, President Philip J. Hanlon & Members of the Senior Leadership Team, July 14, 2020.

⁴ The mantra often heard that a Dartmouth undergraduate education is a four-year investment for a life-long return is borne out in my case. Renewed engagement with the College during the past decade, and particularly on the initiative of the Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association (BADA), the Afro-American Society, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, has enabled me to hear a wide range of views on the College experience.

⁵ See <https://www.cfr.org/blog/will-lekki-toll-gate-atrocity-change-nigeria>.

⁶ Thanks to the Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association (BADA) for collating these statements and disseminating them on July 23 via a message by the current BADA president, Karim D. Marshall (D’03).

⁷ There was an equal number of African students. At that time, there was minimal interaction among members of these different groups.

Much of my academic and policy work has concerned Africa. Most countries in contemporary Africa are at an impasse. Two in particular, Nigeria and Ethiopia – the first and second largest in population – mostly command my attention. A book I wrote on Nigeria while on the Dartmouth faculty (1979-1988) has had a considerable impact. Indeed, it has influenced Nigerians own understanding of their country's government and politics.⁸

I have studied, taught, and been affiliated with a number of institutions here and abroad. Of them, two are particularly significant: Dartmouth College and Oxford University. At Oxford, I was affiliated with New and Nuffield Colleges. The relationship with New College is unique. I first experienced Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar at New College; read deeply during my years there (1966-69) across several disciplines; was married in the New College Chapel; and re-established a connection via its current Warden (President) Miles Young and his associates.

Going forward, I would like to bring the core aspects of my life's work to Dartmouth and Oxford, in association with other institutions with which I have been involved.⁹ The next phase of this work can be summarized as A, B, and C: Archives, Books to write and donate, and Collaboration on democratic and developmental governance.

⁸ See the just published John Campbell, *Nigeria and the Nation-State: Rethinking Diplomacy with the Postcolonial World*

⁹ In this regard, I commend Dartmouth for the recent creation of the Susan and Jim Wright Center for Computation and Communal Justice. Jim Wright was my colleague on the faculty (he in History and I in Government). He subsequently served the College well, and courageously, as President during a period of great challenge. As his predecessors, notably John Kemeny and James Freedman, he helped keep Dartmouth faithful to the core values of a liberal education (which embodied a social purpose). I also knew Susan Wright, his gracious wife, when she served in the College Administration.