

EXHUMING E.E.O.

Part three of four

The Takeover

1971-1975

Macalester was in its greatest financial crisis and the EEO (Expanded Educational Opportunities) program was the recipient of a significant budget cut. EEO students reacted by engaging in the most well-known act of civil disobedience in the college's history. In the end, though, their efforts were all for naught as the trustees would get the last word.

By DAN GEARINO

After the resignation of President Arthur Flemming, Macalester did not help its troubled situation when the presidential search committee selected James Robinson. Robinson was a political scientist and former provost at Ohio State University. He was 39 years old, making him unusually young for a college president and younger than most of the faculty.

Robinson acted with a level of formality that was not very compatible with laid back Macalester. He wore mostly grey suits and wingtip shoes and drove a bright blue Mercedes that was eventually readily identified as "the president's car." Charles Norman, who is currently director of the Learning Center, was on the English faculty at the time of Robinson's arrival. "I never saw him take his coat off," Norman said.

The search committee found Robinson to be an attractive candidate because he had experience with budgets and seemed eager to reinvigorate a sense of enthusiasm about academics. Also, the committee did not have many qualified candidates to choose from because budget woes deterred potential applicants.

Robinson quickly built a fairly negative rapport with many students, faculty and staff. "People always mistrusted him," one faculty member remembers. "I don't think he had a chance of doing anything right here. Everything he did was viewed with suspicion." Kathy Angelos Pinkett '75, a non-EEO (Expanded Educational Opportunities) student of color recalls Robinson's inability to communicate effectively. "He did not know how to relate to [students]," Pinkett said.

Robinson's poor communication skills exacerbated suspicion about his agenda, a feeling that would culminate several years later when it would be widely believed that he was the trustees' "hatchet-man," entrusted with eliminating EEO and other programs. Contrary to this popular sentiment, "he wasn't brought in to slash programs," said Assistant to the President Sandy Hill '57. "He was brought in to balance the budget. He had to get the college back on firm footing, and that was a difficult thing to do. He had to look at all of our cost centers." Hill worked in the Alumni Office during Robinson's tenure.

The first three years of Robinson's ten-

ure were a time of faculty and staff layoffs, declining enrollments, and cuts to various programs. Through this period, EEO was still so central to the college's identity that there were few significant cuts and any small cuts had to be handled delicately. Instead of anticipating budget reduction, EEO was scheduled to return to its initial 75 scholarships in the 1973-74 academic year after the two-year "voluntary recession" which had reduced the number to 40.

In September of '72, before the rash of layoffs, Robinson announced that due to

president, meaning Warfield could bypass much of the college bureaucracy. Potential EEO cuts were difficult to do subtly because Warfield was not a traditional administrator; he was a staunch partisan, who fought hard in advocacy of EEO, using local and national connections and sheer will to repeatedly stave off cuts.

While EEO's budget was relatively unscathed, layoffs were destroying faculty and staff morale. From 1972-74 over 30 faculty and 60 staff would be laid off. Their colleagues were left to teach larger classes



Melvin Collins '75 is interviewed by WCCO television through the window of the Business Office. Collins and other EEO students occupied the office for 12 days in protest of cuts to the EEO budget.

continuing budget difficulties, the number of EEO scholarships would remain at 40 and not return to 75. Following the announcement, Robinson was interviewed in *Imani*, the newspaper produced by and for students of color. The interview asked what he thought of the EEO program. "I don't know why people always ask that question," he said. "In my opinion it's one of the best programs of its type in the country. Federal agents who pass through here say EEO is a model program."

In '72, EEO was still very strong. Due to the administrative structure which former President Flemming had set up, EEO Coordinator John Warfield answered only to the

with nearly nonexistent departmental budgets, all while hundreds of students of color paid little tuition or had full rides. Faculty were reluctant to criticize EEO, though, because to do so would mean being branded as racist.

Warfield left Macalester in the summer of 1973 and was succeeded by Charles Hollins, who had previously served on Warfield's EEO staff. Hollins did not have Warfield's political shrewdness or willingness to fight hard against cuts.

Also, many members of the first EEO class graduated in 1973. Several completed their degree in three years and several more took more than four. The graduation rate of

the first EEO class was 49.3 percent compared to a 54 percent mark for all students.

The graduation of the first EEO class coupled with the reduction of EEO scholarships for the classes which entered in '71 and '72 meant that Macalester's student of color population had peaked. The shrinking population along with anti-EEO sentiment created by layoffs and the lack of a dynamic figure like Warfield meant that EEO was more vulnerable than it had ever been.

After a year of rumors that a gigantic EEO cut was on the way, the summer of 1974 brought a new and different budget crisis as 125 expected students decided not to enroll, meaning a \$450,000 shortfall in an already tight budget. Robinson immediately moved to slash \$250,000 from the operating budget, including \$78,000 from EEO meaning a loss of funding for several office staff and several counselors. The EEO cuts were the most substantial since the voluntary recession and played into the popular belief that EEO would continue to be whittled away until it was gone.

Many EEO students lived in St. Paul over the summer and kept abreast of what was going on at Macalester. "The word was that they were cutting again and this time it was big," Melvin Collins '75 remembers. "It was the beginning of the end for EEO." Collins was president of BLAC (Black Liberation Affairs Committee) and an EEO student.

"This was a continuing pattern of cuts over a four or five-year period," Collins said. "And then when you looked at the cuts in proportion to what was happening on the rest of the campus, it just didn't make sense for a component that was as small as that to take such a big hit."

Collins and other students of color quickly organized to fight the cuts. A letter was sent to Trustee Donald Garrettson asking for an emergency board meeting to discuss the cuts. The next day, Community Council (Student Government) President Michael Lee '75, a non-EEO student of color, called a press conference to discuss the budget cuts and further demand the trustee meeting. Garrettson organized a trustee open forum which took place the day after Lee's press conference. A full board meeting was scheduled for the following week.

Robinson was having a very difficult time. Many had been urging him to reduce EEO for years. Now, he had reduced EEO and a public relations nightmare was brewing. To top it off, freshmen and their parents were arriving for orientation.

On August 30, new students and parents arrived on campus to be met by students of color chanting and picketing in the sidewalks along Grand near Turck and Bigelow Halls. Their signs had slogans like, "\$\$\$ = An Excuse for Intellectual Genocide!" and "I Brought you Federal Money and You Gave Me the Finger!"

In the afternoon, new students and parents filed into Weyerhaeuser Chapel for President Robinson's welcome convocation. Students of color also filed in, still carrying their signs. President Robinson stepped to the microphone and began his speech. He welcomed everyone and began to talk about the history of the college when Collins interrupted him.

"President Robinson, I'd like to issue a question, sir," Collins recalls saying. Robinson continued, ignoring Collins. Collins repeated, "President Robinson, I'd

EEO administrator addresses racial conflict at Macalester

The following is an excerpt from John Warfield's column in the September 28, 1972 issue of Imani, the newspaper produced in the Black House by and for students of color. Warfield was the EEO coordinator from 1968-73.

The Admissions Office is starting to recruit EEO students for the 1973-74 school year. This is a crucial year because this is the year that Expanded Educational Opportunities has its first graduating class.

These are the students who came to Macalester College during the summer of

1969. The projected graduating class contains 33 blacks, four Indians and two Hispanics. With a graduating class of this size, are we to become satisfied with the number of EEO admissions remaining at 40 for the academic year 1973-74? I would think not.

We have allowed racism to run rampant without being checked. Black students here allowed white liberals to insult their intelligence in the classroom without speaking out against those teachers. We have many students in the education department, yet we have done nothing to combat the racism that exists there.

We have allowed the white liberal Irwin Rinder in sociology to insult minority students on this campus. There are racist comments from the economics department stating that they don't want black students over there. After four years, the line must be drawn. There is a systematic effort to decrease the number of minorities on this campus. After four years on this campus, your presence is still a problem to this institution.

We welcome new black students to our house and ask you to understand the "fam-

ily affair." From our conflict must come resolution. There is much to be done and you are greatly needed.

Like all of us who struggle, our commitment is to bring something new into being. Until we understand what that "new" thing is, we are susceptible to pitfalls which act to detract from our learning and destroy our unity. I say this because most of our pitfalls are so petty, the only reason to fall into them must be a lack of understanding.

Yours in our struggle,
John Warfield

like to issue a question, sir." Then Robinson stopped his prepared speech and grudgingly turned the convocation into a forum to answer questions about the EEO cuts.

"Then the parents were very interested in what was going on," Collins remembers. "That was what we counted on. That was an extreme measure. That was scary."

Over the next 12 days, the trustees met and students had a chance to voice grievances. The budget cuts took effect, but the trustees agreed to further review the status of minority education, a resolution that was wholly unsatisfactory to EEO supporters. Instead of discussing more substantive issues or making long-term commitments to EEO, the administration went to great pains to articulate the reasoning for the cuts and the future of financial instability that made long-term commitments difficult.

"They didn't treat us like people,"



President James Robinson (1971-74), an embattled man whose tenure was marked by budget deficits and controversy.

Pinkett said, in reference to how administrators acted toward EEO advocates in these early talks. "Maybe it's because they believed that if they were giving a lot of money to somebody, then they have no rights, a plantation kind of mentality."

EEO students felt as though they were getting nowhere and went to various community groups and other campuses to get the word out as to what was going on. Part of engaging the community was to set up support for the possibility of a dramatic act of civil disobedience.

Shortly after, the decision was made by a core group of EEO students and EEO supporters to occupy the Business Office in an attempt to force the administration to enter into serious negotiations about the EEO budget and the college's commitment to EEO.

"It was decided a couple days before it actually happened," Collins remembers. "We had talked about all kinds of things that we would do as a form of protest. Somebody suggested, 'Let's hit them where it hurts.' The more it got discussed, the more it sounded like a viable option."

The Business Office—housed at 77 Macalester Street—was home to Admissions, the Registrar's Office, Payroll, Billing and the Bursar. The college would in

many ways come to a screeching halt without access to those offices.

On the morning of September 13, approximately 22 EEO students—including Collins—woke up at before the crack of dawn, hours before any office staff would arrive, and walked to the doors of the Business Office where an unknown person let them in. To this day, Collins will not say who unlocked the door.

The students stepped into the building holding sleeping bags and coolers of food, unaware of how long it would be until they would leave and unaware of whether their actions would result in expulsion or arrest. They placed chains on every door and placed a sign at the front door informing those outside that the occupiers were engaging in a peaceful protest of the EEO cuts.

After an hour or two, the first staffer arrived for work, walking up the cement stairs to open the door that had always been unlocked at this time. According to Collins, she shook the door several times and then saw the sign and walked away. Soon, the administration sent someone to talk to the students, but the students said they would only talk to Robinson, who was on a two-day trip to Chicago.

For the first couple days there were over a hundred picketers—both white and students of color—supporting the occupiers. Students stayed outside the building 24 hours a day, especially a small group of football players who were entrusted with deterring security or the St. Paul Police from forcibly entering the building.

The administration was in a lose-lose situation. They didn't have the financial resources to keep EEO at its early-1970s spending level and virtually every other financial center within the college had already shouldered immense financial cutbacks. EEO had to be reduced somewhat. The mistake was the vague reasoning for specific cuts and the lack of trust between students and Robinson. Any cuts by Robinson were seen as precursors to the elimination of the program, just as past temporary cuts only led to more and deeper temporary cuts.

The EEO students wanted Robinson to say, "Macalester supports EEO. I promise that the cuts are temporary." However, even if Robinson had been willing to say just that, few would have trusted him. Out of this distrust came the will for the takeover, an event that quickly went from a campus disruption to a media event, reaching alumni and donors and many of the people who thought EEO was a mistake from the get-go. "It was clear we were in complete financial trouble," Sandy Hill said. "That doesn't give encouragement to donors and others in the community."

Local television and radio were filled

with stories of the racial unrest at Macalester. Collins was interviewed multiple times through an opened window of the Business Office. Robinson and the college's financial officers held press conferences attempting to get their side of the story out.

Events seemed to turn violent on September 15, when someone called police claiming they had heard gunshots in the vicinity of Macalester Street. Police arrived on the scene and soon left when it became clear that the report was a false alarm. That evening, Robinson—who was now back in town—declined an invitation to begin negotiations at 11:30 p.m. in the Black House. Instead, the negotiations would begin the following day and take place in the James Chapel on the third floor of the Union, a space which now houses the Dean of Students Office.



John Warfield, the staunchly partisan EEO coordinator who helped stave off budget cuts until his departure in 1973.

The occupiers decided that Collins would be their representative at the negotiations. Pinkett, who was not one of the occupiers, would also be one of the four students to participate in the negotiations. The students would be assisted by several adults from the community who had more legal background and would act as advisors. There were a total of 17 people in the closed-door sessions.

Pinkett has bitter memories of Robinson's behavior toward her and the other students in the negotiations. "He treated us with such disrespect," Pinkett said. "Forget the age difference, I'm just talking about basic human respect. That was a very educational process for us. Hurtful, yet educational."

"The main thing was the dirty politics and the tricky talk. We were college students. We were intelligent and idealistic and we're sitting at this negotiation table. And he keeps talking about agreeing in principle, all of this lawyer double-talk, and the adult advisors are whispering to us, 'ask this, ask this,' and I would just get frustrated because [the administration] just wouldn't say the truth. I knew they were lying. I wanted to say, 'Why don't you just say the truth?'"

After a couple days of unproductive negotiations, it became clear that the stu-

dents would not back down easily. The crisis was escalating every day and the stress was taking a visual effect on Robinson. "I remember we used to take pleasure at the end of the day, just because of the way he treated us," Collins said. "We would look out the window as he was leaving negotiations and he could barely walk. We took pleasure in that because how dare he not respect us as human beings."

A week into the negotiations, the two sides were finally having more productive discussions. Then, someone walked into the room and handed Robinson a yellow flier that was being circulated on campus. The flier described Robinson as a professional hatchet man who had been hired by the trustees to eliminate EEO. The flier also made allegations about Robinson's mental health.

Pinkett recalls Robinson becoming red with anger and saying, "These negotiations are over." Robinson then stood up and walked out. The adult advisors suggested that now it was time to find a mediator to bring Robinson back to the table.

It is unknown who created the flier, but both Collins and Pinkett have strong suspicions that it was a specific non-EEO student of color who was on student government at the time. Due to this unfortunate piece of paper, the students in the Business Office feared that their stay might be much longer than they ever thought possible.

The talks were stalled for several days while the students and adult advisors sought out a mediator. During this time, various community groups provided moral support and food. Fewer and fewer students picketed outside the office as it became clear that nobody would forcibly enter.

During this immensely distracting time, classes went on and college business was conducted as best it could be. Admissions operated from the Development Office in Old Main, the Bursar called vendors and explained the reasoning for various late payments, and the Registrar was unable to do any formal drop/adds or provide transcripts.

Earl Craig was agreed upon by both sides as the mediator. Craig—an African American—was a professor at Carleton College with experience in conflict resolution. He arrived on a Friday, the eighth day of the takeover. In just three days immense progress was made and the two sides began to draft a settlement. The students in the Business Office made it clear to their negotiators that amnesty from disciplinary action had to be part of any settlement.

On the evening of Tuesday, September 24, an agreement was signed by Robinson and the student negotiators. According to the agreement, the EEO budget would only be cut \$14,000 instead of the original projected cut. The new funds would fill a secretarial vacancy in the EEO office and provide for

a half-time Puerto Rican counselor and a half-time Mexican-American counselor. Robinson also pledged to continue EEO at its current level of 40 full-tuition scholarships per year for another five years. The final negotiated point was full disciplinary amnesty for the students who occupied the Business Office.

After 12 days of sleeping on concrete floors and wondering what their academic future held, the occupiers unchained the Business Office doors and walked into the glare of television cameras and the applause of hundreds of students and community supporters. Despite the thrill of success, the haggard EEO students had two weeks of missed schoolwork to complete. According to Pinkett, most professors were very accommodating and extended paper deadlines and allowed re-takes of missed exams.

The moment the students exited the building, a group of administrators entered it to investigate for signs of vandalism. Finding none, they turned out every light and had security lock up until the following morning when staff would return to their offices to catch up on two weeks work.

James Robinson was now in a tremendously weakened state, with students, faculty, staff and the trustees in doubt of his ability to lead. Robinson's awful September was almost over as was his time at Macalester.

The EEO students had seemingly won a tremendous victory, but once they left the Business Office, they lost the only substantial leverage they had and re-entered a college environment where promises meant little. Less than two weeks after the settlement, the board of trustees met for its regular meeting. It scolded these who participated in the takeover, citing immediate negative financial consequences in the form of lost donations. The board also voted to reject Robinson's settlement, claiming that Robinson did not have the authority to make many of the promises he had made.

The board claimed to be committed to minority education, but this commitment would only be on its own terms after a thorough self-study could be conducted. The person responsible for the self study would be trustee Mary Hoffman. EEO students and EEO supporters were saddened by the rejection of the settlement, but not surprised at what they perceived as yet another in a long line of broken promises and double dealing.

Several days after the board meeting, Robinson resigned as president of Macalester. He had accepted an offer to become president of the University of West Florida in Pensacola. After hearing of Robinson's resignation, a student government representative jokingly told *The Mac Weekly* that a motion would be introduced to pay for Robinson's cab fare to the airport. When asked about the financial situation at West Florida, Robinson told *The Weekly*, "They don't know what a deficit is down there."

Similar to Flemming's resignation, many believe that Robinson was pressured to leave by the board. As to the nature of Robinson's departure, a faculty member said, "We've done that an awful lot here, where we unload an administrator and everyone thinks it's copasetic but in reality, there's rumbling behind the scenes." Hill would only say, "It is the trustees responsibility to hire and remove presidents."

Robinson's tenure at West Florida would last over a decade and be marked

by increased enrollment and larger budgets. When interviewed in 1985 for a Macalester history book entitled *A Century and Beyond*, Robinson recalled the takeover. "There had been similar takeovers on many campuses, so it was not, in and of itself, an unanticipated event," Robinson said. "What one regrets most about them is not the takeover *per se*, but that it is indicative of the breakdown in communications or failed communications. You've got to be especially empathic, especially understanding."

Financial Vice-President Charles McClarnan was named interim president for the remainder of the 1974-75 academic year and a search committee began the all-to-familiar process of accepting applications for the college presidency.

The next few months were relatively event-free. Many of the EEO students were seniors and working hard to complete their graduation requirements. Some felt that the activism and optimism that had marked the early 70s was virtually gone, replaced by a cynical feeling that it would be a waste of time to try to change Macalester.

In April, Hoffman submitted a document which would come to be known as the "Hoffman Report." Through a series of specific cuts, including a reduction in annual EEO scholarships from 40 to 25, Hoffman outlined a plan to cut the EEO budget by 40 percent. Along with budget cuts, EEO would be placed lower in the college reporting line. Instead of only answering to the president, the EEO coordinator would answer to a dean, either the provost or dean of students.

Hoffman envisioned an EEO program that catered more to students who did not need as much counseling and academic tutoring. The new EEO students would have taken college-prep courses and have academic qualifications similar to white Macalester applicants.

Hoffman was not trying to gut EEO. In fact, she was trying to get as much funding as the trustees would allow. Hoffman was an EEO advocate on a board that was extremely unhappy with EEO's cost and the negative publicity of the takeover. The board unanimously approved Hoffman's recommendations and told students that any protests would change nothing and only make things worse.

A month after the Hoffman Report, Collins and Pinkett graduated. Despite the questionable gains of the takeover, Collins still believes he did the right thing. "It was the principle," Collins said. "The fact that you don't just stand there and take it lying down. We knew we were fighting an uphill battle from the beginning."

There were only 22 EEO students in the class entering in the Fall of 1975. The program was evolving out of existence, becoming something completely different from what Flemming had envisioned. Despite an ongoing pattern of cuts to minority programs and significantly reduced recruitment of underprivileged students of color, Macalester would continue to call diversity one of its core values throughout the 80s and 90s.

Collins and Dennis Banks photos courtesy of Macalester Archives, Robinson photo by Rohn Engh, Warfield photo from Imani, both picketer photos courtesy of Melvin Collins.



Top: Local Native American activist Dennis Banks gives moral support to the students occupying the Business Office.

Middle: Students of color picket along the sidewalk of Doty Hall as freshmen and their parents arrive for orientation. Melvin Collins '75 is on the far left. Kathy Angelos Pinkett '75 is fourth from left.

Bottom: Protesters at President Robinson's Welcome Convocation in Weyerhaeuser Chapel. After repeated interruptions, Robinson ended his prepared remarks and answered questions about EEO cuts.

Next Week:

The conclusion. EEO goes through several name changes as it fades away. The Wallace funds return and with them prosperity. Today's Macalester grapples with the legacy of EEO.