

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Education for Liberation: Malcolm X Liberation University

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In February 1969 fifty Duke University students occupied the Allen Administration Building and renamed it Malcolm X Liberation University. Among their list of twelve demands were: the establishment of an Afro-American studies program, an increase in the enrollment of Black¹ undergraduate students, and the reinstatement of Black students who had left the university because of poor treatment they had previously received. The students threatened to burn the school records if their demands were not met, or if the police attempted to force them out.² In the following months many Black students were not satisfied with the attempts of the Duke administration to comply with their demands. Instead of continuing their education at Duke, many of these students decided to establish a new, all Black, university, which was open until 1973. They did this because they realized that, “The existing system of education does not respond to the needs of the Black community; it does not provide an ideological or practical methodology for meeting the physical, social, psychological, economic and cultural needs of Black people. Malcolm X Liberation University is a direct response to this vacuum.”³ The vacuum referred to was the failure not only of historically Black colleges and universities but also Black studies. Black colleges and universities wanted to educate Blacks so they would be contributing members of society, not only Black society, but American society. Black studies wanted to educate Blacks about their own history to instill a sense of pride in their racial identity. It had once been the goal of Black colleges and Black studies programs to educate Blacks in

¹In all of the documents from MXLU the word ‘Black’ was used when anyone of African heritage was referred to. To stay consistent with the people and events discussed anyone of African heritage will be referred to as ‘Black’ in this paper, unless situated in a quote.

²Allan Korberg and Joel Smith, “It Ain’t Over Yet,” in *Black Power and Student Rebellion: Conflict on the American Campus*, ed. James McEvoy and Abraham Miller (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 107

³ “Malcolm X Liberation University: Fact Sheet,” May 14, 1969. Folder 3, Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

order to liberate them. Unfortunately, the goal of liberation was forgotten when a small victory such as establishing a Black studies program was achieved.

Malcolm X Liberation University was founded in response to the bureaucratization and politicization of historically Black colleges and universities and also the Black studies programs. The students at Duke had seen what happened at schools such as Howard University and what happened to Black studies programs that were established at white universities. They realized that they would not get the kind of education they truly desired unless white involvement was limited. If only those involved were students who desired an education that focused on revolution and the liberation of all Blacks, the goals of the school would not be changed in order to be politically correct. An article in the Greensboro Daily News referred to a 1969 television interview, in which Owusu Sadaukai, (Howard Fuller), who was the equivalent to the president of MXLU, said that the school's two main goals were to teach the history of Black people, and to offer technical training to Blacks.⁴ Howard Fuller said of MXLU, "We are beginning to build a nation. In order to fulfill the needs of a nation, the university will produce food scientists, tailors, architects, engineers, organizers, teachers, leaders, Black expressionists, artists, medics, communications technicians, physical development specialists and linguists."⁵ However, he also made it a point to say, "this isn't a 'back-to-African' thing."⁶ MXLU was to provide all Blacks with the tools to run their own communities instead of having their communities run and dominated by whites. Those involved at MXLU believed this combination enabled Blacks to know the history of their people, but they would also have valuable skills to help in the liberation

⁴ Ronald P. Topping, "Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes," *Greensboro Daily News*, June 28, 1973, sec. D.

⁵ James T. Wooten, "Malcolm X Univeristy to Open in Durham as Militants' School," *New York Times*, October 28, 1969.

⁶ Wooten.

and uplifting of all African people. The founders were radical because they had their same goals in other programs and schools and they refused to let those goals be changed. The need for radical ideas came about due to the bureaucratization and compromises made by administrators of Black colleges and leaders of Black studies programs. MXLU was established so that the original goals of historically Black colleges and universities and especially the Black studies movement could be realized.

Many scholars have addressed how Black studies came about, what the purpose of a Black studies program was, and why Black studies were important. In his book, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, Fabio Rojas explored the evolution of the Black Power movement into an academic discipline. Rojas' focus was on how a radical movement such as Black Power evolved into an academic program widely recognized in academia. Rojas claimed that Black studies, "can be fruitfully viewed as a bureaucratic response to a social movement."⁷ Hence, Black studies developed out of a compromise between the Black Power movement and education administrators. Black Power wanted to preserve Black culture and cultivate young Blacks into leaders of the movement who would be able to liberate and uplift the Black community. Rojas focused more on how Black Studies became a legitimate academic discipline, and not how the programs began. Rojas claimed that Black studies was viewed as an integration tool by the Ford Foundation, a group that donated millions of dollars to universities to found Black studies departments and programs, because it brought Black and white students together.⁸ He did not

⁷ Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 4.

⁸ Rojas, 130-131.; Noliwe M. Rooks, *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 31. Rooks also states that the students at San Francisco State College, which was actually the first to have a Black studies department, believed if the school accepted Black studies it would lead to interracial progress.

discuss what was done to try to achieve the original goals of Black studies once it was realized that the concept had been politicized.

Brent Belvin wrote a masters' thesis entitled, "Malcolm X Liberation University: An Experiment in Independent Black Education." In his thesis Belvin studied MXLU as a case study of Black Universities. He claimed that "its origins in black student protests at Duke University and its grounding in Black Power ideology place it squarely at the forefront of the late 1960s push for alternative educational institutions for African Americans."⁹ Belvin, however, did not address the reason that these Black Universities were founded. He did not explore why the need for Black Universities came about.

In his article "What Happened to Black Studies," St. Clair Drake focused more on what Black studies became rather than what Black studies were meant to be. Drake discussed the original goals of Black studies and stated, "the black studies movement during its early stages was to utilize the classroom as well as extra-curricular activities for raising the consciousness and heightening the group pride of black students so that they would be transformed from 'Negroes,' anxious to be integrated, into 'blacks,' convinced that 'black is beautiful' and ready to struggle for Black Power."¹⁰ A goal of both Black studies programs and Black colleges and universities was to use education and community involvement as a way to give Blacks pride in who they were, but once established they lost sight of that goal. At the time of Drake's article there were a large number of schools that had very active Black studies programs, but their focus

⁹ Brent H. Belvin, "Malcolm X Liberation University: An Experiment in Independent Black Education" (Master of Arts thesis, North Carolina State University, 2004), 19.

¹⁰ St. Clair Drake, "What Happened to Black Studies," in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 265.

was not on the struggle for Black Power. These programs developed into graduate and doctoral programs in some cases.

Scholars have not explored the connection between changes of historically Black colleges and universities and Black studies programs at the end of the 1960s and the founding of Malcolm X Liberation University. By examining primary sources it becomes evident that there was a feeling among the students who left Duke that there was nothing available to them that would give them the kind of education they desired. That education had to involve not only the history and culture of African Americans, but it also had to focus on liberating and uplifting everyone in the Black community. By showing how historically Black colleges and universities changed and also how the original goals of Black studies were compromised at the end of the 1960s the beliefs of the students who left Duke can be understood. This belief was that they could only get an education specifically for their goals, if the school was founded by them, for those goals.

In the conversation about Black studies the question of why a school such as MXLU was founded has not been discussed. The students who left Duke to continue their education at MXLU did so because they believed that Duke, even with a Black studies program, was not going to give them the tools to make a difference in Black communities. Once they realized that their goals were to help Blacks everywhere and uplift them as a people, they had to establish a school that would enable them to achieve those goals. That school was MXLU and its primary goal was to make Black education relevant to all Black people, everywhere, and to use that education to aide in the struggle for liberation.¹¹

¹¹ Malcolm X Liberation University Curriculum Plan, 1970-71. Folder 6, Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, 1.

To understand how Malcolm X Liberation University was founded in response to the bureaucratization and politicization of Black studies and historically Black colleges and universities there must first be an understanding of the original goals of these institutions and programs. The fight for Black studies programs first began as student protests. In an article called, "The Birth of Black Studies," Roger A. Fischer described the realization of students when they saw they could affect change. "They discovered the awesome secret of student power, that the university was pathetically vulnerable to the pressures that could be brought to bear upon it by a relatively small cadre of well organized, deeply dedicated student revolutionaries."¹² This wave of student demonstrations began after the example at the University of California, Berkeley in 1964 which spurred a four month long campaign called the Free Speech Movement. The campaign encouraged students to discuss how free speech, democracy, and the civil rights movement were related.¹³ More importantly however, the students realized they had power, and they could affect change. Every group of Black student protestors had demands, which were as varied as the names of the groups, but they all had one demand in common and it was at the top of almost every list. They demanded the creation of a Black studies program. Everyone favored the general idea of Black studies. It was when anyone tried to define what Black studies was that problems occurred. Academics, which included scholars and administrators thought of Black studies as, "subject matter relating to the Negro experience in Africa and the New World... a curriculum in black studies would consist of such courses as African and American Negro history, tribal anthropology, the politics and sociology of ethnic minorities and Negro music, art,

¹² Roger A. Fischer, "Ghetto and Gown: The Birth of Black Studies," in *New Perspectives on Black Studies* ed. John W. Blassingame (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 19.

¹³ Bret Eynon, "Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left," *The Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 40-41.

literature and theater.”¹⁴ This was the Black studies that existed at the end of the 1960s during the Allen Administration building takeover. The Black studies that the students wanted were drastically different. “Most militants see black studies not as a labyrinth of curriculum committees and degree requirements, but as a collegiate training ground with a single over-riding purpose, the advancement of the black revolution in every facet of American life.”¹⁵ It was this concept of the Black studies programs that motivated the students from Duke to found their own school. A school, which free of bureaucracy and politics, could stay true to their original goals. In his article, “The Battle for Black Studies,” Nathan Hare stated, “Black studies were to provide a working model and theoretics for both black and white colleges, correcting the “Negro” college’s fallacies and seizing equitable power and control at white colleges. [...] black education must be education for liberation, or at least for change.”¹⁶ This program was meant to prepare students to lead fellow Blacks in cultural revolution. Everything in the program was supposed to be taught from that revolutionary perspective.

Black studies did not evolve into a program whose goal was revolution. School administrators opposed the liberation aspect of Black studies and also the community involvement. St. Clair Drake addressed how the change of focus happened. He stated that Black studies became institutionalized and with that some of its values were accepted by the education system. He claimed that, “A trade off was involved. Black studies became depoliticized and deradicalized.”¹⁷ In order for Black studies to become a legitimate academic discipline it lost the

¹⁴ Fischer, 20.

¹⁵ Fischer, 21.

¹⁶ Nathan Hare, “The Battle for Black Studies,” in *Black Scholars on Higher Education in the 70’s*, ed. Roosevelt Johnson (Columbus, Oh: ECCA Publications, Inc., 1974), 67.

¹⁷ Drake, 267.

original goals of liberation and revolution for Black people. Instead of seizing power and control at white colleges through Black studies, white colleges seized Black studies and changed it. Black studies were originally meant to strengthen Blacks by giving them pride in who they were and where they came from.

This kind of compromise was not only seen in Black studies programs. Black colleges and universities also often compromised more radical goals in order to be viewed as more legitimate and similar to white schools. Nathan Hare stated, “By the mid 1960s, the Negro bourgeoisie administering Negro colleges had come so much to resent their multiplying lower class students they fell victim to an effort to ‘raise the quality’ of Negro colleges by making them predominantly white.”¹⁸ Hare used the example of Howard University where he taught for six years. The school, in order to lower the number of Blacks and attract white students, advised professors that each of their classes should have a minimum of six percent failing marks.¹⁹ Cleveland Sellers attended Howard University because he wanted to be surrounded by others who shared his enthusiasm for the movement. He found out when he first got to Howard it was not what he expected. He described the school saying that, “There was a great deal of interest among almost everyone on campus in *the Howard image*, which was designed to create the impression that there were no substantial differences between Howard’s students and those at elite white colleges.”²⁰ Schools that acted similarly to Howard gave into the idea of “raising their standards” while abandoning previous goals of educating and uplifting all Black communities. MXLU was one of the first Black Universities founded. A Black University

¹⁸ Hare, 69.

¹⁹ Hare, 70.

²⁰ Cleveland Sellers with Robert Terrell, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (New York: William Morrow & Company, INC., 1973), 57-58.

differed from historically Black colleges because it was not there in order to give Black students a degree. MXLU was founded to give Black students the training and education to liberate all Black people. It became necessary to found a school that would not allow their goals to be changed. It was this failure of Black studies and Black colleges and universities that produced the void in Black education that MXLU strove to fill.

The decision to found MXLU was not made because Duke did not respond in the way the students wanted. The students who left Duke did so because through a long process they came to understand that no matter how Duke reacted, it would not be enough. In 1968 there was a Summer Intern Program which brought Black college students from all over North Carolina to live and organize in Black neighborhoods. This program made the Black students at Duke University consider the educational process of Blacks. They started to work with many of the non-academic workers at Duke, most of whom were Black. The students came to the conclusion that the process as it existed at the time was irrelevant, because it did not revolve around the needs of the Black community. This was when the students decided to occupy the Allen Administration Building in the hopes of “awakening the existing education powers that be.”²¹ The students had immediate support of many neighborhoods in Durham. In the months following the occupation they realized no white university could provide them with the kind of education they believed was necessary to achieve their goals. They were strongly influenced by the Pan-African movement, and this ideology convinced the students that the best way for them to get the education they desired was to establish their own school.

²¹ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” June 5, 1969. Folder 3, Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, 2.

MXLU used Pan-African ideology for the basis of the school. The Pan-African theory stated, “blacks wherever they may be are still an African people and share the same problems and goals.”²² The students believed that the problems of Blacks in America were the same problems of Blacks all over the world. MXLU was founded to spread that idea and to teach Blacks how to uplift themselves from their lower status. According to the university’s curriculum plan the school’s goal was “Nation building,” and the students were technicians educated to “serve the needs of the African Nation.”²³ MXLU used the Pan-African ideology in a way that allowed for the students of the school to be focused on what they did, not what they learned. According to the curriculum plan the “primary purpose of MXLU is to provide a framework within which Black education will become relevant to African peoples all over the world and to the struggle for Black liberation.”²⁴ MXLU was focused on the struggle for Black liberation. Education was a means to further their efforts in the struggle. Black studies and Black colleges were more focused on the means to aide in the struggle, instead of the actual goal of liberation for Blacks.

The namesake of the school was important in understanding the objectives of MXLU. A description of the students was painted near the door of the Durham location. They saw themselves as, “a new generation of black people who have become disenchanted with the entire system and who are ready now and willing to do something about it.”²⁵ The words of Malcolm X greeted every person who entered the school. In one of Malcolm X’s most famous speeches he

²² Ronald P. Topping, “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” *Greensboro Daily News*, June 28, 1973, sec D-1.

²³ Malcolm X Liberation University Curriculum Plan,”1970-71, 1.

²⁴ “Malcolm X Liberation University Curriculum Plan,”1970-71, 1.

²⁵ James T. Wooten, “Malcolm X Univeristy to Open in Durham as Militants’ School,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1969.

addressed the issue that MXLU was centered on, the unity of all Blacks. “Rather than discuss black people’s differences—especially religious—he exhorted the audience to focus on resistance to racial oppression, which is what united them.”²⁶ Malcolm X was a firm believer in the unity of all Blacks to oppose their oppression. However, Malcolm X was also against any kind of moderate action in terms of race relations. He referred to Martin Luther King Jr. and Jackie Robinson as race traitors. According to Peniel E. Joseph, “For Malcolm, Robinson’s political moderation smacked of racial disloyalty that, even more infuriatingly, was disguised as social activism.” Moderate changes, such as Black Studies at Duke, were not radical enough for Malcolm X.

The proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University showed how central the Black community was to the success of the Pan-African movement and therefore the school: “We are oppressed because we are Black and our community is not determined by geography, but it is a matter of Black community being wherever Black people are within this world.”²⁷ The Pan-African movement stressed the involvement of the whole community. They realized that the struggle for liberation would only succeed if disparate groups of Black people became one Black community. All Blacks had to work together, instead of a few leaders working for the cause. This was one of the original goals of Black studies. Educated students would become leaders, but they would reach out to the community and together they would liberate all Black people. In a later version of the proposal they added, “It is clear that Black people must move away from the Western European influence of Individualism and ‘me first.’ MXLU will work constantly to

²⁶ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 89.

²⁷ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” June 5, 1969, 3-4.

develop a feeling of collective concern for our people.”²⁸ This community mentality was a central goal of MXLU. If Blacks wanted any of their rights, those involved with MXLU believed, they had to fight for them as a people. The school believed that it was vital to reach out to the community, educate them on African history, and teach them skills that would enable all Africans to bring themselves out of the oppression they were in. By reaching out to the community, the university and the Black community, became one entity.

The curriculum for MXLU was divided into parts A and B. Part A was “designed to provide the student with a knowledge of the historical, social, economic and political framework within which African people have been forced to exist.” The Africans this quote was referring to included not only those in the United States but also those in Africa.²⁹ Until this time Blacks had no history that was not in the context of white control and so it was necessary that MXLU offer an education which related everything back to the African experience. This meant that Black history was not the history of Blacks, but of the whites who controlled them.³⁰ It was the demand for Black studies that brought about awareness of the lack of history originated by Blacks. The difference between MXLU and Black studies at the end of the 1960s was that MXLU taught Black history and related it to the conditions of Blacks at the time. A curriculum plan for 1970-71 offered History courses on Independent African Civilization, Slavery, Colonialism, and Neo-Colonialism.³¹ The Colonialism class was “geared toward gaining a clearer understanding of the Euro-American, military-industrial complex and it’s strangle hold

²⁸ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” November 1969, 4.

²⁹ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” November 1969, 7.

³⁰ Gerald A. McWorther, “Deck the Ivy Racist Halls: The Case of Black Studies,” in *Black Studies in the University* ed. Armstead L. Robinson, Craig C. Foster, and Donald H. Ogilvie. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1969), 58.

³¹ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC,, 6.

on the African continent as well as its dehumanizing effect on every aspect of the African culture from the very beginning of the European penetration on the African soil.”³² This class along with the others, were not just to teach about colonialism, but also to teach the students how colonialism affected them and Black people as a whole. Teaching the students how Blacks’ situation was created was one of the ways MXLU hoped to change that situation. Educating students on how Blacks got to where they were was one of Black studies original goals. The idea of education for liberation was changed to only education when the programs were accepted by schools.

Another fundamental difference between Black studies at the end of the 1960s and MXLU was the involvement of whites. Under the heading “Involvement of Whites,” in a handwritten packet of papers that seemed to be an early version of later proposals for the school stated, “NONE At All (if ever a situation [exists? hard to read] it should take place away from the physical plant and only in the technical areas.”³³ Those involved with MXLU believed that if whites were involved they would take control of and change their school. At a news conference where he announced he was leaving the Foundation for Community Development to work full time on developing MXLU he stated “I trust some white individuals up to a point, but I see no reason to trust them collectively.”³⁴ MXLU wanted to avoid the kind of bureaucratization and politicization that Black studies programs had gone through once accepted by a white institution. They believed that avoiding any kind of cooperation with politicized institutions such as universities would enable them to stay true to their original goals and ideals.

³² “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” 7.

³³ Handwritten packet. Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

³⁴ “Howard Fuller’s Vision,” *The North Carolina Anvil*, July 27, 1969, 4.

The importance of community outreach was seen most clearly in the way the university legitimized itself. An early proposal for the university from February of 1969 claimed, “The accreditation for the university will be granted by the Black community.”³⁵ The students received no official credit for the classes they took at MXLU. The only thing they took away with them was the experience of helping others, and a better outlook on who they were and how they could help their people. The viewpoint of the founders of the school was that giving out degrees was not their goal; their goal was to give their students the knowledge to help others.³⁶ This was one of the fundamental differences between MXLU and Black studies at the end of the 1960s. The goals of MXLU were to give students the tools to help people, whereas Black studies took out the community aspect and focused only on teaching what ‘Blackness’ was.³⁷ The September after the occupation of the Allen Building Howard Fuller addressed the incoming Black freshmen at Duke. He told them, “Your role as students is irrelevant unless it meets the needs of black people outside these walls.”³⁸ He emphasized to the new students that their education did not matter unless they used it to help Blacks.

Because the accreditation was given by the community instead of professors who handed out grades, the students were able to focus on their goal of helping the community. Since the curriculum focused on how the students used what they learned, there was no distraction from the lesson. In the November proposal for MXLU it was added that accreditation, “must be granted on the basis of our ability to produce people who have both skill and the commitment to

³⁵ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” June 5, 1969, 4.

³⁶ “Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University March, 1969, Folder 8. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC, 1.

³⁷ Hare, 67.

³⁸ Ken Friedlein, “Black, White Alliances said Good Only in Specific Aims,” *Durham Morning Herald*, September 21, 1969.

work for the liberation of our people.”³⁹ Those involved with the university believed if the students did not use the skills gained at MXLU they got no accreditation and the time spent there meant nothing. Community involvement also had a role in the location of the school. The founders decided to locate the university in Durham because “Black people in Durham are well organized and have been consistently and constantly engaged in the struggle for freedom with the oppressors. This part of the Black community will provide an excellent ‘physical’ base for the university.”⁴⁰ Since the community was already very involved in the struggle for liberation, the students would see what they had to work for in all Black communities.

MXLU ensured that community involvement was one of the central goals of the university. Community involvement was one of the central tenets of Black studies when it first began, and it was also one of the first things cut when the programs were accepted by universities. On February 9, 1970, MXLU, along with two other Black Community organizations in Durham opened the Betty Shabazz Early Education Center. In a proposal for the school it discussed the importance of reaching out to children. “The basis for the decision to reach Pre-School was the feeling that there existed a definite need to reach pre-school aged Black children and give them positive social and cultural images.”⁴¹ It was important to reach Blacks at an early age and give them a positive self image to get away from the concept that they were inferior in any way, since that was one of the struggles of all Blacks. The proposal for the school from June 5, 1969 also stated the school, “must develop a Black Revolutionary Ideology, crystallize and

³⁹ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” November 1969, Folder 3, Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, 4.

⁴⁰ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” June 5, 1969, 6.

⁴¹ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” 15.

project positive self-awareness for Black people, and create an educational process that builds and disseminates concepts and techniques to the Black community.”⁴² The day care center was a way for the school to project positive self-awareness to young Blacks so that they might have that positive mindset about themselves for the rest of their lives from a very early age. This was the exact kind of community involvement that was central to Black studies before the administrations of the colleges and universities changed it.

The creation of MXLU was a reaction to the bureaucratization and politicization of Black studies and Black colleges. Black studies had changed into a study of “Blackness” instead of lessons on culture and how to liberate all Black people, and Black colleges forgot they were Black and were just colleges.⁴³ It was because of this that a school such as MXLU was necessary in the late 1960s. In his Master’s Thesis, Brent Belvin stated, “An extension of the black studies crusade was the call for a true Black University. Such an institution would attempt to break with the pattern of white dominance and control over black education in the domains of curricula, accreditation, staffing, administration, and governance.”⁴⁴ However, MXLU was not an extension of the Black studies crusade. MXLU was a reaction to what had become of Black studies and Black colleges. When Black colleges were simply colleges it meant they had changed from education for liberation to only education. They did not necessarily integrate the school, but they forgot why they were a Black college in the first place.

The founders of Malcolm X Liberation University organized multiple ways not only to educate the students about their history, but also to get them involved in and help the community.

⁴² “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University.” June 5, 1969.

⁴³ Hare, 67.

⁴⁴ Belvin, 3.

One of the fields of study provided at MXLU was Communication Technology. Just like most other schools, MXLU had a list of areas of study with information on why they were important and what they were used for. In the Communication Technology section it stated that the department, “Prepares students both technically and ideologically to meet some of the immediate needs of the African nation building in the field of communication. Complete and accurate dissemination of information to black people is stressed.”⁴⁵ Instead of relying on a mostly white media, this would allow information for Blacks to be provided by Blacks.

Another course of study that showed how important aide to the community was at MXLU was Bio-Medicine. Described as what amounts to a medical program, the course list emphasized why it was an important program. “Besides giving medical assistance to all members of the MXLU Family, students get practical experience working in clinics and hospitals during the summer. At the end of three years the student will be able to give medical treatment in field situations where all the equipment and facilities needed may not be available.”⁴⁶ According to this document it was important that the students were able to administer medical treatment when they were deprived of certain necessities such as necessary equipment or medicine. This was often the situation for Blacks and it spoke to the needs of the community that MXLU was teaching students to be able to give medical attention without certain necessities.

Many of the courses at MXLU addressed what the founders of the university believed were problems in the way Blacks thought. In the “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” the Curriculum Plan for 1970-1971, it stated that, “The curriculum for the first year is geared toward re-ordering of priorities of a Pan-Africanist perspective, and de-colonization of

⁴⁵ *Malcolm X Liberation University*. Greensboro: The University, 1971.

⁴⁶ *Malcolm X Liberation University*. Greensboro: The University, 1971.

the mind.”⁴⁷ In order for the school to achieve its goals the students must have the same understanding of the situation of Blacks that the school had. Under their history department MXLU offered a course entitled “Neo-Colonialism.” The class was “designed to study the political and economic determinatives and manifestations of neo-colonialism (post-colonial imperialism) in order to understand the present suppression of African economic development and world leadership.”⁴⁸ This again departed from Black studies at other schools where students were not encouraged to understand the how Blacks were forced to the bottom of society and how that process related to solving the problem. They were only taught the history of how the situation was created. At MXLU the students were taught that they had to understand the situation facing Blacks in America before they could do anything about it, which only further emphasizes that MXLU encouraged action, not just education.

MXLU was a self sustaining school. Running a university cost a lot of money. However, because they adhered to the Pan-African ideals they believed Black people had to rely on themselves and their community. To make up for the funding they lacked, students and faculty aided in the upkeep of the university. A lot of work to keep the school operational was done by students, and they also grew a large amount of the food they ate.⁴⁹ However, another way they were able to support themselves had to do with the program of the school. MXLU had a three - year course of study. The first two were spent studying and the last was a year of teaching. The proposal for the school stated, “Students will be involved in teaching the subject matter of either Part A (the first year) or Part B (the second year) of the curriculum after they have been sufficiently exposed to intensive study, analysis and/or training in one or both of these areas and

⁴⁷ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University”, 6.

⁴⁸ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” 7.

⁴⁹ Ronald P. Topping, “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” *Greensboro Daily News*, June 28, 1973, sec D-1.

are adequately prepared to teach them to incoming students.”⁵⁰ This was one way of keeping the school open and keeping the ideas and goals of the school grounded. Every student had to contribute to the school that gave them an education. “It is understood that, to be a student at MXLU is to be constantly productive and willing to make sacrifices for the good of the University, and students have learned to develop positive attitudes around the Unity of Black people because of this.”⁵¹ The school was a community and every student understood they got their education in order to help Blacks. By helping MXLU stay open to teach others this same lesson they helped their community.

However, it was clearly understood that after they left the school the students had not yet fulfilled their obligations. Under the title “Role of MXLU Graduates,” a bulletin written about the school stated that, “These are skills that are needed in our communities throughout the world. Our students will be taught to use these skills for the development and liberation of our people, rather than their own individual aggrandizement.”⁵² Not only did these students not earn a degree, but there were certain responsibilities the school expected them to keep after graduation, responsibilities not to the school but to their race and community. They chose to attend MXLU so that after graduation they could go out into all African communities and help liberate them using the skills they learned.

The self-sustaining policies of MXLU could not keep the school open forever. In June of 1973 Howard Fuller announced that MXLU was closing. The school faced many challenges during the four years it was open. Among those challenges was the stigma that it was a ‘militant’

⁵⁰ “Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University”, 6.

⁵¹ “Malcolm X Liberation Bulletin 1970-71.” Folder 8, Box 12, Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

⁵² “Malcolm X Liberation Bulletin 1970-71.”

school.⁵³ This stigma came about largely because of Howard Fuller. In November 1969 Fuller was quoted in a newspaper article, “If you’re going to require us to be non-violent, then you’ll have to require your (white) people to be non-violent. Then maybe we can talk about violence.”⁵⁴ It was this kind of attitude that gave MXLU a very negative reputation. Once the location was moved to Greensboro the students took part in a strike and police brutality hearings, but they were not involved with the Blacks of Greensboro on an everyday basis.⁵⁵ That kind of isolation from the community created suspicion and skepticism among Greensboro’s Blacks.⁵⁶

MXLU closed in part because they had strayed from the community involvement that was so vital when the school was founded, and also because, according to Fuller, Pan-Africanism was too broad a movement. According to the article, “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” in a 1969 television program he said the school would continue only if it met the “needs of the people” and it would not stay open, “just because it was our thing.”⁵⁷ The article also said that Howard Fuller believed MXLU had accomplished its two main goals of teaching the history of Black people and offering technical training to Blacks. Fuller claimed that the major weakness of the school was its Pan-African ideology. Fuller said he was not abandoning that ideology, but instead he wanted to focus on “the improvement of blacks in America as the first step in bringing African and American blacks closer together.”⁵⁸ Perhaps when MXLU closed it reflected the

⁵³Wooten.

⁵⁴ “Malcolm X University Aims Told,” *NW* November 3, 1969. B-1. Folder 9, Box 12. Photocopy from Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers, Avery Institute, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

⁵⁵ Topping.

⁵⁶ Topping

⁵⁷ Topping.

⁵⁸ Topping.

same kind of shortcomings as those of Black studies and Black colleges. However, for about four years the school was able to achieve its original goals.

Although MXLU was only open from 1969-1973 it was significant in many ways. This was a school that was able to keep its doors open during a time period which responded to any radical movement with fear and suspicion. MXLU was also important because it was able to bring Blacks together. At least while in Durham, the students reached out into the community on a regular basis. Community involvement was a part of their education. MXLU was also significant because of one of the reasons it closed. Howard Fuller said that he wanted to focus first on the improvement of Blacks in America.⁵⁹ Instead of reaching out for a connection to Africa, the students were able to see that before that connection could be established, they first had to improve the situation of Blacks in America. Pan-Africanism held the belief that Blacks, no matter where they lived, were an African people who had the same problems and goals. However, no one can help another group of people, until they have first helped themselves.

Malcolm X Liberation University was founded because those involved came to an understanding about the education available to them.

In the process of the struggle Black people came to realize a simple truth. The realization that those who are oppressed cannot look to those who oppress them to deal, in any form, with the source of their oppression. If Black people wanted a relevant education, Black people would have to build and control their educational institutions themselves.⁶⁰

This was written as background information in a bulletin for MXLU. The students who protested at Duke realized that, had a Black studies program been formed at Duke, it would not meet their needs for education. In background information of MXLU it stated, “Regardless of whether

⁵⁹ Topping.

⁶⁰ “Malcolm X Liberation Bulletin, 1970-71.”

Duke sincerely wishes to adjust to the needs of Black students, the institutional framework at Duke thus far has proved too rigid to make the necessary changes.”⁶¹ They believed the environment at Duke would not allow for the kind of changes they believed were necessary. The students from Duke believed their education had to be education for Blacks, by Blacks, because any other kind of education would not enable them to liberate their people.⁶² Malcolm X Liberation University was founded in response to the fact that Black studies and Black colleges and universities had not been able to provide any kind of education to Blacks that would encourage them to act on the oppression of their people. The primary goal that started as liberation for all Blacks changed into simply a degree program for Black students. The Black colleges and universities that had wanted to turn young Black students into leaders of the movement instead turned them into young Black graduates and nothing more. Because MXLU kept their focus on the ways they used the skills they learned, and not just on what they learned, they were able to adhere to the original goals of the school. They were not focused on the degree they needed for a job. They were focused on the skills they needed to liberate Blacks. The school was grounded in community involvement, and because of this the school was grounded in the change that was achieved and not the knowledge gained.

⁶¹ “Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University,” March, 1969, 1.

⁶² “Malcolm X Liberation Bulletin 1970-71.”

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books

Fischer, Roger A. "Ghetto and Gown: The Birth of Black Studies." In *New Perspectives on Black Studies*, edited by John W. Blassingame. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971, 16-27.

Fischer discussed where the idea for black studies first came from. He also discussed what both academics and students thought black studies were. This is used to show what the original goals of black studies were from those who first demanded them.

Hare, Nathan. "The Battle for Black Studies." In *Black Scholars on Higher Education in the 70's*, edited by Roosevelt Johnson. Columbus, Oh: ECCA Publications, Inc., 1974.

Hare claimed that black studies were meant to be programs of change. They were supposed to teach blacks how to liberate themselves. He also discussed the changes in black colleges and universities and said that they, just like black studies, were changed in order to be accepted by whites.

Korberg, Allan and Joel Smith. "It Ain't Over Yet." In *Black Power and Student Rebellion: Conflict on the American Campus*, edited by James McEvoy and Abraham Miller. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1969, 100-121.

This gives an account of the events surrounding the Allen Building takeover. There is close attention paid to how the university and the community reacted to the events. They also focus on how the university community affected how the leaders of the university responded.

Sellers, Cleveland with Robert Terrell. *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC*. New York: William Morrow & Company, INC., 1973.

This book is an account of Cleveland Sellers with close attention paid to his involvement with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Sellers talked about his disenchantment with Howard University which is used to show the impression a would be Black Power supporter had of the black college he attended.

Newspaper and Journal Articles

Friedlein, Ken “Black, White Alliances said Good Only in Specific Aims.” *Durham Morning Herald*, September 21, 1969. Folder 9 Box 12. Photocopy from Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

This article is about Howard Fuller’s address to the black freshmen at Duke University. Fuller discussed MXLU and encouraged the students to do something to make a difference to the lives of blacks as a people.

“Howard Fuller’s Vision,” *The North Carolina Anvil*, July 27, 1969, 4.

This article discussed the press conference at which Fuller announced his intention to take an indefinite leave of absence from the Foundation for Community Development to work full time on opening MXLU.

“Malcolm X University Aims Told,” *NN* November 3, 1969. B-1. Folder 9. Box 12. Photocopy from Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

The name of the newspaper this article came from is unknown. It was copied from The Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers and only had the date the page and NN written on it.

Topping, Ronald P. “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” *Greensboro Daily News*, June 28, 1973, sec D-1.

In this article Fuller announced the closing of MXLU. He discussed what the primary goals of the school were and why it was closing. Fuller also discussed his plans after leaving MXLU.

Wooten, James T. “Malcolm X Univeristy to Open in Durham as Militants’ School,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1969.

Article which discusses the opening of MXLU. Addresses the reputation of Howard Fuller as a Militant.

Unpublished Materials

“Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University.” March, 1969. Folder 8. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Has information of the reasons the students from Duke decided to leave and why they thought it was necessary to found MXLU. Also gives information about the courses offered at MXLU.

Handwritten papers from Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Early version of proposal for MXLU. Discussed the goals of the school and how they planned on having the school structured. Addresses the business end of founding a school such as who the students were and where they would get funding.

Malcolm X Liberation University. Greensboro: The University, 1971.

This is a packet of all of the courses of study offered at MXLU. It gives brief descriptions of what each course of study involves and what students that have completed the program will be able to do. It also relates the programs to the struggle for liberation of blacks and how that program is important to the struggle.

“Malcolm X Liberation Bulletin 1970-71.” Folder 8. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Similar to the proposals for MXLU. Has the goals and objectives of the school. Also discusses what the role of MXLU graduates will be once they leave. Also gives a background on the student body of the school and refers to the diversity at MXLU.

“Malcolm X Liberation University Curriculum Plan,” 1970-71. Folder 6. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

This has detailed information on why the curriculum at MXLU offered the classes it did. It also has lists of the courses offered under each program of study and why those courses were important. The curriculum plan also refers to why each of the courses related to the goals of the school and why it was important for the students to take those courses.

“Malcolm X Liberation University: Fact Sheet,” May 14, 1969. Folder 3. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Short history of MXLU and a summary of its goals and objectives. Also has short summary of location, student selection, and cost.

“Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” June 5, 1969. Folder 3. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Talks about the students at Duke and how the crisis of the Allen Building takeover developed. Addresses specific issues of the black community that needed work. Talks about how combined those issues led to the founding of MXLU and then goes into details about the school.

“Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” November 1969. Folder 3. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

The same as the June 5, 1969 proposal with some things added and some things taken out.

“Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University,” no date. Box 12. Cleveland Sellers Jr. Papers. Avery Institute. College of Charleston. Charleston, SC.

Again very similar to the other two proposals with minor changes.

Secondary Sources

Belvin, Brent H. “Malcolm X Liberation University: An Experiment in Independent Black Education.” Master of Arts thesis, North Carolina State University, 2004.

Belvin’s paper is MXLU as a case study of Black Universities. He shows how MXLU was founded in the context of the events at Duke. He talks about the students who left Duke to found MXLU and that happened.

Drake, St. Clair. “What Happened to Black Studies.” In *The African American Studies Reader*, edited by Nathaniel Norment Jr. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001, 265-276.

Drake’s article is about the change of black studies from a struggle for Black Power into an educational program. He discusses how the involvement in schools, once black studies programs were established, had the effect of deradicalizing black studies.

Eynon, Bret “ Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left,” *The Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 39-69.

This article discusses the Student Movement and how it related to the New Left. It also talks about how the student movement began at Berkeley and how it involved other important social movements of the time including Civil Rights.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.

Joseph's book is about the Black Power movement. He discusses many important figures in the Black Power movement including Malcolm X. He also discusses how the Black Power movement developed and talks about the roles of SNCC and the Black Panther Party.

Rojas, Fabio. *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement became an Academic Discipline*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

This is about the change from Black Power a radical social movement, into black studies, a legitimate academic discipline. Rojas discusses how bureaucratic involvement in the beginning affected how black studies developed. He then goes on to talk about successes of black studies in terms of graduate schools and doctorate programs.

Rooks, Noliwe M. *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

This book discusses the affect that white involvement had on the emerging African American Studies programs. It also discusses the different viewpoints of African American Studies. It talks about what whites thought the programs would look like and why they were important and the same issues from the Black perspective.