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All Quiet on the Southern Front: The Bravery of  
Edward S. Lewis - A Look at the Policies and Politics  
Regarding Admission of African Americans to Johns  
Hopkins in the 1930's

In the 1930s, African Americans in the South who wanted to pursue higher education had severely limited options. They could attend the small number of historically black private colleges (such as Howard, Fisk or Spellman) or they could apply to the chronically under-funded and under-staffed “Negro Schools.” These schools –which supposedly fulfilled the “equal” side of the 1896 Supreme Court Ruling upholding Jim Crow segregation in “separate but equal” public institutions– were, for most African American Southerners, the only option.

In the early 1930s the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) assembled the best African American lawyers throughout the country to challenge state institutions that abided by Jim Crow Laws. Refraining from an all out assault on the “separate but equal” standard, the NAACP took aim at equality. Focusing on graduate and professional education, the NAACP argued that there was no equal alternative to the white institutions

admission of African American applicants. In cases stretching across the South from Texas to Virginia, from Missouri to Maryland, the NAACP legal campaign ultimately culminated in the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954,<sup>1</sup> which demolished the “separate but equal” standard.

The NAACP took on the mature Jim Crow system but African American Southerners had been fighting segregation and racial discrimination ever since emancipation. Viewing education as the key to advancement, African American Southerners were particularly energetic in challenging segregation in schools and universities.

In 1887 an African American graduate student named Kelly Miller was accepted to Johns Hopkins University during the Presidency of Daniel C. Gilman. Miller was the son of a slave and had a remarkable journey from the poor countryside of South Carolina eventually becoming one of the educational elite. Miller thought that the reason he had been accepted was that, “...a prominent railroad official, who was a member of the Board [of Trustees], advanced the opinion that the founder of the university, being a Quaker, stipulated that neither race nor color should form a bar against admission to either hospital or university. Other members of the Board seemed to have accepted his views as correct.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, when outlining his plans for the University and Hospital, Johns Hopkins requested that people should be received, “without regard to sex, age or color.”<sup>3</sup> This sentiment was in accordance with his Quaker background and had been good enough for President Gilman and The Board of Trustees to admit Miller. But it did not mean that the University would accept African American

applicants as a common practice. As white Southern racism hardened in the twentieth century, Hopkins followed Southern custom. The next African American to be admitted to Johns Hopkins was Frederick Scott who graduated in the class of 1950; fully 60 years after Miller had graduated.<sup>4</sup>

President Gilman justified his continued exclusion of other African American applicants based on his belief that African Americans belonged to the manual laboring class and should receive only industrial education. But there were other reasons to exclude African American students. In 1910 a professor asked about the acceptance policy towards African Americans. Noting that the Hopkins student body was largely drawn from the South, Ira Remsen (Hopkins' President from 1901 to 1912) worried that following Quaker practice would send Hopkins students running south to universities in Charlottesville and Chapel Hill. The young white men who came to Hopkins had "the natural feelings of men from that part of the country." Admitting African American applicants to the university would be "almost suicidal."<sup>5</sup>

Schools of similar academic prestige and reputation accepted Africans Americans much earlier. For example, George Lewis Ruffin graduated from Harvard's Law School in 1869, and other Ivy League schools turned out colored graduates for the first time throughout the next two decades. Hopkins, although founded later, was clearly behind in comparison to academically comparable universities.

Rather than look to Harvard and Yale for precedents, however, Johns Hopkins looked southward. In 1914 Carl Murphy, a black graduate of Harvard

University, applied for a summer school course in German.<sup>6</sup> He received a reply from Hopkins stating that, "There has been no provision made for the admission of colored men and women to our summer session." The President of the University, Frank Johnson Goodnow, made an official statement citing the laws of Maryland's traditional segregationist practices. Goodnow said Maryland had always provided for separate institutions for the, "white and the colored." Goodnow went on to reason that since, "Johns Hopkins University is in receipt of a considerable appropriation from the State and it seems to us that on this account we should not be authorized to depart from the general policy of the state."<sup>7</sup> Fully in accord with Southern racial practices, Johns Hopkins cast its lot with Virginia, Georgia and Carolina, rather than the Ivy League.

In 1937 Edward S. Lewis applied to The Johns Hopkins University Department of Political Economy. A Baltimore native, Lewis was well qualified to study at Johns Hopkins, having already earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago and had almost completed a second degree at The University of Pennsylvania. Lewis was also incredibly active within the social groups in the Baltimore region such as the Baltimore Urban League and the NAACP. The only Hopkins faculty member to promote Lewis' cause was an outspoken liberal professor named Broadus Mitchell. Mitchell fought hard for Lewis but ultimately failed after Lewis' application was held pending acceptance for 18 months.

The fight to integrate the Hopkins graduate school would eventually cost Mitchell his job and Lewis would earn his third graduate degree elsewhere.

Broadus Mitchell showed that he was different from the rest of the Hopkins faculty and administration. A person who truly believed in equality for all regardless of race, Broadus Mitchell was a man willing to fight for what he believed in, ultimately putting everything he had at risk because of it.

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Broadus Mitchell was born in Georgetown, Kentucky in December 27, 1892 to Alice Broadus Mitchell and Samuel Chiles Mitchell. His family was representative of a new kind of southern progressivism and most of the characteristic traits that Broadus portrayed throughout his career were rooted in his upbringing. His family believed in the industrialization of the South and in education for industrial workers and farmers. Critical of the racial regime in South Carolina, the Mitchells supported racial progress in education and segregation. These ideas were all things that Broadus strongly believed in and would fight for throughout his life.<sup>8</sup>

Alice Mitchell taught at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville while Samuel Chiles Mitchell bounced around throughout his career, as his son would do. He first taught at the University of Richmond, which was known as Richmond College at the time. Eventually Samuel moved his way through the educational ranks and became President of the University of South Carolina.

Unfortunately for the Mitchell family, his time as president was brief. The Governor of South Carolina, Coleman Blease, bumped heads with Samuel Mitchell on many issues. Governor Blease, a spokesman for the uneducated country white poor, was an opponent of nearly everything Mitchell Sr. stood for.

The tension finally erupted over a racial issue. Samuel Mitchell believed that a Peabody educational fund should be set aside for blacks attending the Black state colleges while Governor Blease thought it should be reserved for a white women's scholarship fund. Blease attacked Mitchell Sr. saying he favored "blacks over white womanhood." The feud grew intense and in his fourth year as President of the University of South Carolina he was forced to resign. The series of events that transpired with Governor Blease and his father helped enforce Broadus Mitchell's controversial economical and social beliefs even more. Blease was the antithesis of everything the Mitchell family believed in. Their son would go on to be an avid and outspoken socialist throughout his academic, political and social careers.

After he completed his undergraduate work at the University of South Carolina in 1913, Broadus Mitchell worked as a journalist part time while attending graduate school in the Political Economy department at Johns Hopkins. During those years Mitchell struck a balance between being a social reformer and sociologist, a person who would speak out on how he felt and back up his often controversial opinions with methodical research to support them. He also fell into contact with people who influenced his political development as it matured.<sup>9</sup>

In his second year at Johns Hopkins Mitchell devoted much time to social work and researched socialism extensively. This work was encouraged by his relationship with Elizabeth Gilman, a female reformer prominent in Maryland at the time. Elizabeth Gilman was particularly influential at Johns Hopkins because

her husband, Lawrence Gilman the grand-nephew of Daniel C. Gilman, donated substantial amounts of money to the institution. Mitchell would spend many hours at the Gilman house. There he met other radicals and also had a recess from the intense academic world that existed at Hopkins. During this time his views focused more and more around socialism, progressivism and workers rights.

In 1918 Mitchell completed his dissertation on the rise of the Southern textile industry. As interested in the lives of workers as the progress of the Southern economy the essay showed the heavy influence of Broadus Mitchell's father. Broadus Mitchell himself admitted that the essay was "little more than illustration of [his father's] analysis of the past."<sup>10</sup> But one could also see that Broadus had developed his own perspective from his studies as well as what he had picked up from his experiences at the Gilman house and working with organizations like the Baltimore Family Welfare Association.

Mitchell served briefly in the Army at the close of the First World War even though he opposed United States entry and involvement in Europe's affairs. He returned to Hopkins and joined the faculty in 1919. His thesis (published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1921 as *The Rise of the Cotton Mills*) was highly respected within academic circles and made him a name within his department but also the receptive political community.

Mitchell's early years at Hopkins were very busy and garnered attention from the onset. He believed in being part of the community and thought Hopkins tried to separate itself from Baltimore's predominantly African American population. He often took his classes outside the classroom and into the city,

using Baltimore as a kind of social laboratory to see how the things they studied in the classroom were manifest in the city around them. Like other radicals of his generation, Broadus Mitchell also visited the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

Always eager to further the education of his students, in 1938 Mitchell tried to get his class permission to view a lavish cotillion held annually in Baltimore. He failed to gain admittance but an anonymous partygoer eventually gave detailed descriptions of the party to Mitchell and his students. They calculated the cost per bachelor to be well over a thousand dollars. Multiplied by the number of attendees and other estimated costs, Mitchell used the cotillion to illustrate that even during the hardest times of the biggest depression to ever hit the United States the rich still spent lavish amounts of money simply for indulgence. Mitchell's study received significant attention in the Baltimore papers, embarrassing the party's organizers. Future cotillions were postponed until the end of the depression and donations were made to social groups by some of the wealthy bachelors who had attended.<sup>12</sup>

Mitchell was always keen to know what was going on within Baltimore, and was always looking to improve the city's social life. Mitchell read about social work and workers' educational movements elsewhere, and tried to do similar things at Hopkins. For awhile he conducted night classes specifically for immigrants and tried to start a Labor College at Johns Hopkins. Not only did he believe in supporting the disfranchised poor, but also he was a firm believer in women's rights and education. During summers he taught at the Bryn Mawr Summer School, an all female institution, and he later taught at the Southern

Summer School for Women Workers.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout his stay at Hopkins there were two reoccurring issues that landed Mitchell in trouble time and time again with the University and opened him up to criticism: his radical political and economic views as a socialist, and his outspoken stance supporting equal rights along racial lines.

In 1932 a lynching occurred in Salisbury, Maryland. Mitchell was bothered that it received very little attention in the newspapers or by the police. Mitchell decided to do some detective work. The story went that a suspected murderer, Euel Lee, had been abducted and was hanged in front of the courthouse. Broadus talked with many members of the Eastern Shore community to obtain some basic ideas on the opinions of the people in that region. To his surprise nearly everyone involved in to the event had been named, but no one had been arrested for the murder. This was very typical of the lynchings that plagued the South from Reconstruction to as late as the 1950s. Many of those who were involved were well-known people in the area. Fear of being socially ostracized, or worse, prevented most people from taking any action at all.<sup>14</sup> After talking with many of the members of that region Mitchell concluded that the Eastern Shore was “backward in its mental and spiritual development.”<sup>15</sup>

The most frustrating aspect for Mitchell was the fact that the local officials had done nothing about it. Mitchell appealed to the state, which replied that it was entirely within the jurisdiction of the local police. Taking his research public, Mitchell said, “I abhor lynching and officials who allow it should be impeached... The Southerners whom I know and esteem do not believe that the Negro must

remain dependant upon the white man and they believe in the orderly administration of law as opposed to mob violence.”<sup>16</sup> Later when asked to write about his experiences at Hopkins, Mitchell mentioned his frustrations with the lynching and wrote, “Not only did Eastern Shore peace officers do nothing to identify and arrest members of the lynch mob, but the Governor and Attorney General were quiescent.” Unlike nearly all white Southerners of his day, Broadus Mitchell was willing to publicly criticize an entire white community for violating the essential rights of a single African American man.<sup>17</sup>

Most whites in Baltimore considered Broadus Mitchell’s comments outrageous, and Johns Hopkins University was quick to say that Mitchell was acting on his own behalf and that none of his expressed opinions were representative of the sentiments shared by the University. The president of Hopkins at that time, Joseph Ames, went so far as to defend the Eastern Shore communities in the newspapers saying that his experience with that region had been very pleasant and that he was considering retiring there when he moved from Baltimore. The efforts of the university to distance themselves from Mitchell were relatively common throughout his career as a professor in the Political Economy department and these events only added to the misunderstanding that grew over the years between Mitchell and Hopkins.<sup>18</sup>

The Salisbury lynching was also an example of how active Broadus Mitchell was within the African American and political communities in Baltimore. As the Depression continued Mitchell became more and more radical, openly expressing opposition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. He would

often give lectures about socialism, eliciting criticism from his peers for holding radical views. And he wrote for pamphlets distributed by organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and for Baltimore's Afro-American, the largest African-American-owned and operated newspaper in the United States. In these pamphlets Mitchell spoke out sharply for racial equality in a scholarly and passionate manner. In a 1931 ACLU pamphlet entitled "Black Justice" he wrote:

The progress which the Negro has made in the last decades blinds our eyes to the galling limitations put upon him... We are not satisfied without asking the question, Why these gross discriminations against the Negroes? In discovering reasons we shall have found remedies. The reasons are at least three hundred years old, dating to the beginning of Negro slavery in America. Discrimination against the Negro springs from a hoary source of fear, hatred, and suspicion, namely, from economic inferiority. The Negro has been oppressed because he has a low standard of living and little economic independence. And, the other way round, he is economically servile because he has been oppressed. Dependence and exploitation have encouraged each other. What we term race antipathy is really economic scorn, or, as often happens, consciousness of the threat of economic competition...

The Negro, with notable patience, has nevertheless not failed through the long years to be aspiring; above all, in the present juncture, he demands justice, and here he is our master.<sup>19</sup>

In 1934 Mitchell ran for governor of Maryland under the Socialist ticket and lost –but he received the largest percentage of votes ever received by a third party in the State of Maryland.

Mitchell was also involved in numerous other organizations that were dedicated to social causes. He was the first president of the Baltimore Urban League (established in 1925 by John R. Cary)<sup>20</sup> and also on the executive board for the unemployment insurance agency that dealt with Baltimore’s unemployed. In both of these organizations Mitchell worked with Edward Lewis, the prominent and well educated Baltimore activist who applied to Johns Hopkins in 1938. Mitchell’s fight for Lewis was the defining element of his career at Hopkins as a progressive man years ahead of his peers in terms of social acceptance and equality.

In 1935 a group of African American lawyers were recruited by the NAACP to challenge The University of Maryland Law School’s decision to not accept students based solely on color. The case came to be known as *Murray vs. Pearson* or *Murray vs. Maryland*. These lawyers, among them were Howard University’s Thurgood Marshall and Harvard Law Graduate Charles Houston, challenged the “separate but equal” standard that had been set by *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896. They argued that Donald Murray had been denied acceptance to the Law School only because of his race, --since he was denied acceptance due to his racial heritage then it was the duty of the State to provide a separate but equivalent substitute institution-- but there was none in the state.

Judge Eugene O'Dunne issued a writ of mandamus ordering the University of Maryland Law School to admit Donald Murray.<sup>21</sup>

If Johns Hopkins University was going to truly take on the practices of state institutions –as they did with Carl Murphy in 1914-- then after *Pearson vs. Murray* one could reasonably infer that Hopkins would adopt the policy of accepting African American applicants who were applying to departments that had no equivalent counterparts within the State of Maryland. Hopkins' Department of Political Economy was unrivaled in the state. If Edward Lewis were a worthy applicant, did not *Pearson v. Murray* call for his admission to the Ph.D. program?

Edward Lewis graduated from the University of Chicago with a BA and was working on a graduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League school, when he applied to Hopkins. Lewis had served one time as President and was Executive Secretary to the Baltimore Urban League at the time of his Hopkins' application. He also served on the executive board of the Unemployed Insurance Company, was involved with the United States Employment Service, Maryland State Conference of Social Workers, Goodwill Industries, Council of Social Agencies, Council of Churches, Boy Scouts of Baltimore and also worked with NAACP in conjunction with the Urban League on many issues. For example, he fought alongside the NAACP through the Baltimore Urban League to desegregate downtown department stores. Edward Lewis's qualifications and credentials as both a scholar and a citizen enough to deserve acceptance at Hopkins.<sup>22</sup>

### The Edward Lewis Case

“I have long thought that the University ought to admit Negroes. We exist for an educational purpose, not to perpetuate racial prejudice and discrimination. When I have spoken of this to some of my colleagues, they have regularly replied: ‘You know as well as anyone why Negroes are not admitted.

I do not know, in the first place, that Negroes are excluded. If they are, is this in accordance with charter provision, ruling of the Trustees, provision of Hopkins’ will, or arbitrary action of registrars? I think the best way to find out is to ask you whether, if a qualified Negro applied for admission to the University as a student, he or she would be accepted.”<sup>23</sup> – *Broadus Mitchell to Jacob Hollander, November 23, 1938*

When Lewis applied in 1938 Mitchell was aware of what could transpire and talked to various people, both students and staff, in different departments to ask them their opinion on going to school with African American students. Dr. Jacob Hollander was head of the Political Economy department that Mitchell taught in. He was also a member of the Academic Council, the university’s governing body. Mitchell wrote to Hollander during October of 1938 asking what his “Attitude would be, as a member of the council, on the question of admission of Negroes to the University.”<sup>24</sup> At this early stage Mitchell obviously knew that Lewis had applied but was trying to subtly press the issue and at least bring it gently to surface. As Mitchell wrote before, these pertinent race questions and their purpose, “often escape our thought,”<sup>25</sup> and Broadus did not want the issue

to escape anyone's mind. He was trying to get a colleague into his department but also break a color barrier that had been established over forty years earlier. Mitchell understood what he was going against, he understood the full repercussions that it could have on his career and from the onset he spoke out loud and clear on Lewis's behalf.

A week later Dr. Hollander responded with caution and care. He said that, "Personally, as a member of the teaching staff, I am in favor of admission of Negroes... I am ready to aid in any possible way the provision of facilities for graduate study by Negroes." Hollander also added that regardless of what he preferred, "administrative problems of paramount importance are involved... responsibility for this resides in the Board of Trustees." Hollander may have claimed to be in favor of African American admission, but he was not willing to push it on the Academic council with any sort vehemence, and certainly not with the vigor that Mitchell was willing to put forth himself. Mitchell had hoped that others could at least approach his intensity and stick up for a righteous cause.<sup>26</sup>

Time passed and it appeared that Lewis' application had been buried and the issue avoided altogether. Edward Lewis wrote to Hopkins President Isaiah Bowman in November. Inquiring about the status of his application (which he had sent in many months before) Lewis also asked about a meeting that Bowman was supposed to have had with the Academic Council concerning his admission.<sup>27</sup>

President Bowman responded promptly by saying that, "I have to say that the question of your admission to the graduate school of this university was

discussed by the Academic Council, and up to the present time, the council has not submitted a recommendation on the question... no member of the faculty with whom I have talked has expressed any unwillingness whatsoever to teach negroes.”<sup>28</sup> Bowman’s answer was extremely elusive and aimed to buy more time for an administrative decision. In Lewis’s former inquiry, he did not mention race to be an issue and Bowman answered the question in obvious reference to that fact. President Bowman’s racial beliefs had already begun to show themselves.

Mitchell’s aggressiveness could be seen by his peers. He asked the members of his classes and his faculty peers how they felt about African American students. He later asserted that nearly everyone had no qualms studying, teaching, or attending the same institution as African American students. He also wrote an article in the Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine about the issue. Mitchell was doing all he could do to help Lewis gain acceptance by both the University and by its academic community.<sup>29</sup>

Mitchell also contacted many of the members on the Board of Trustees, since the decision ultimately came from the Board and the President of University, as Hollander had said. Donaldson Brown, a very wealthy member of the Board of Trustees, inquired about the issue.<sup>30</sup> Brown wrote to Bowman and he quoted Mitchell who had written a letter to all the members in the Board of Trustees. The letter expressed moral obligation and called upon the Board to do the right thing.

I take the liberty of calling your attention to a little piece by me in

the current Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine. It advocates the admission of Negroes to the University, and I hope that, as a trustee, you may give the proposal your thought and favor... Its time that the trustees should take this step, when there is enough in the world of intolerance and exclusion.<sup>31</sup>

Here again Mitchell professed his desires and beliefs willingly and unashamedly even though his way of thinking was unpopular among those he was trying to convince.

Based on his actions it could easily be seen that Broadus was certainly extending himself for a cause he earnestly believed in. Without Mitchell, Lewis's application could have been ignored and met with little controversy but with Broadus's support and constant calling of attention the issue had to be dealt with.

Dr. Theodore Marburg, an influential member on the Board of Trustees and ambassador to Belgium, was described as, "the one man who could make a most effective answer to Mitchell on the question on Negro education." He replied to Mitchell on December 19<sup>th</sup> writing, "May I venture to say, in reply to the letter of December 15<sup>th</sup> with which you have honored me, that in place like Boston, where Negroes are in a small minority it is possible to admit them to white schools, but your suggestion that this be done in Maryland, a southern state, is a reflection on your common sense."<sup>32</sup>

The Board of Trustees was clearly prejudiced against African American students, which created a nearly impossible situation for Mitchell and Lewis. Marburg implied that if the issue was less controversial then everything could be

looked at it in a different light. Also, implicit in his letter, was fear that since Baltimore was a predominantly African American city that if Lewis were permitted to attend Hopkins then more and more African American intellectuals would clamor for admittance. It was clearly a fear based solely on racial premises, and on fear of African Americans succeeding and having a significant economic and social voice for the first time.

Mitchell replied the very next day, writing about many instances where Marburg should have come forward and been more active in the past and then answered his criticism in the following excerpt:

“...You must know that it is not necessary to go to ‘places like Boston where Negroes are a small minority’ to find Negroes in schools with whites. The Court of Appeals of Maryland, as you cannot have forgotten, has decided that Negroes may attend the law school of the University of Maryland here in Baltimore, and Negroes are in it. The Catholic University, to the South of us, admits Negroes. And now comes the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court admitting Negroes to the law school of the University of Missouri, a border state like ours. You are doubtless horrified that the Nazis exclude Jews from their universities, while you call the person who objects to excluding Negroes from the university of which you are a trustee lacking in ‘common sense.’”<sup>33</sup>

By the late 1930s Mitchell became a prominent presence at Hopkins and his influence was certainly felt and recognized, along with his growing reputation he carried the entire Lewis case upon his shoulders. Mitchell’s reputation hardly connoted positive thoughts from Board members, Bowman

wrote about one Trustee member who had thought that Mitchell shouldn't have appealed directly to the Board of Trustees but Mitchell's reason for doing so was because Dr. Hollander had explained to him that the decision ultimately rested with the Board.<sup>34</sup>

In early January of 1939, President Daniel Willard of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, and chairman of the Board of Trustees, met as advised by President Bowman to discuss the possibility of African American enrollment at Johns Hopkins. Bowman and Willard had met prior to the meeting and Willard had been prepped to speak to Mitchell by Bowman. When Mitchell confronted Willard about African American enrollment the railroad man recited as Bowman had instructed him to do so. "The affairs of the University are conducted quite differently in many ways from the manner, we will say, in which industrial undertakings such as a railroad are carried on." He then referred Mitchell to the Academic Council and said, "It is customary when such questions arise concerning internal management of the University, that they be taken up in the first instance with the Academic Council... If you desire to further pursue the matter then you should take it up with the council in accordance with the established practice of the University."<sup>35</sup>

Mitchell and Willard continued to write each other. Another Board member, Mr. Dawson, became curious as to the status of the situation and through him Broadus's question of African American enrollment came closest to being answered by Willard. Willard explained that in the future the idea may be met with enthusiasm and, "receive favorable consideration" by Trustee members

or other administrative officials within the University. However, at the current time Willard explained that, “a general feeling that to make such a radical change at the present would not be wise.”<sup>36</sup>

Dawson informed Mitchell of the reply and Broadus wrote back to Willard in a distressed manner on February 9<sup>th</sup>. He criticized Willard and administrative officials by saying, “The University under your management, if your attitude in this matter of admission of Negroes is indicative, seems to me in danger of shriveling intellectually and spiritually.”<sup>37</sup> Mitchell accused Willard of failing to uphold a university’s educational obligation and purpose.

Willard responded on February 13<sup>th</sup> with Bowman’s support. He stated that contrary to what Broadus had written, the University was not under his management, rather President Bowman held most of the managerial responsibilities and to assist and advise Bowman on his decisions, he had the option of turning to the Academic Council.

He went on to give Mitchell an odd threat, saying that “... your rather unusual efforts to force this matter to a conclusion at this time may result in putting off action longer than might otherwise be the case.” He also reinforced the idea that he himself was not necessarily opposed to African American admission but that many men, “doubt the wisdom of Johns Hopkins University stepping out front on this particular matter at this time.”<sup>38</sup>

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February Mitchell responded to Willard’s vague threat. He wrote that he was surprised that his push for Lewis’s case, “may delay action longer than otherwise would be the case.” He also urged the Board of Trustees

to, “try and decide why you do not want Negroes in the University now... what would be gained by waiting?”<sup>39</sup> Mitchell was alone on a limb, gradually applying pressure to the university administration without support of his colleagues in the university. Since Mitchell didn’t have supporters at the university he could be cut off easier rather than if his entire department backed him.

Mitchell’s letter would never actually receive a response as Willard was instructed by Bowman to not answer his letter and let the decision making responsibilities be placed on the Academic Council.<sup>40</sup>

A few days later an article appeared in the Johns Hopkins Newsletter entitled *Mitchell asks University to admit Negroes*. The entire Hopkins’ community soon knew about the case, as Broadus brought more and more light to the issue. Also, a poll was taken across campus to see how students and faculty felt about African American admission; the results were overwhelmingly in support of African American students to be accepted.<sup>41</sup> Shortly thereafter an article by Mitchell was distributed on campus and Willard was furious at the attention and interest the community had showed concerning African American admission. In a private letter to President Bowman on March 4<sup>th</sup> Willard said the article, “sought to discredit the President of the University by raising questions of his sincerity and his honesty.” He accused Mitchell of trying to, “break down and destroy in the student body the respect for and confidence in the President which should exist in an institution of this character... I am firmly in the opinion that you should take proper steps to terminate Professor Mitchell’s relationship with the University...”<sup>42</sup>

About a month later on March 21<sup>st</sup>, an article was published in the *Newsletter* entitled “Abstraction vs. Simplicity” that considered the Edward Lewis case from the student perspective. It argued that “the best way to solve the problem, it seems to us is to return to simplicity, examine the record of Edward Lewis without regard to color...” This affirmation of color-blind admission standards by the students of Hopkins belied earlier explanations of Hopkins’ adherence to Jim Crow lines as demanded by the student body and revealed the true source of racism on campus: the President’s Office, and among the Board of Trustees.<sup>43</sup>

The same the day the article was published Mitchell received a letter from the Academic Council. It read, “After careful consideration of the question of admission of Negroes to the University, the committee appointed to consider this matter recommends that the council take no action at the present time.”<sup>44</sup>

At this point Broadus Mitchell’s father, Samuel Chiles Mitchell arranged a meeting with President Bowman on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939.

The meeting began with Mitchell Sr. making a sort of disclaimer saying that he and his wife had not always agreed with all of their son’s economic opinions and questioned the, “wisdom of expressing them as he had.” Yet as the years passed—and the International depression deepened—Samuel Chiles Mitchell wondered if perhaps his son had not, after all, been right. He reasoned that since his son had excellent foresight in his field, then perhaps, once again, Broadus was right in insisting that the University ought to admit African Americans. President Bowman admitted that he had no criticism for Broadus’s

scholarly work or his other views because he did not know them particularly well.<sup>45</sup> President Bowman explained that his problem with Broadus was primarily his manners and the way he had conducted himself during the push for Edward Lewis's admission. Bowman said that, "[Mitchell] had gained disfavor for his impudence chiefly." Bowman went on to say that he had exhausted his options as President of the University but perhaps as a father, Samuel could influence his son in ways that Bowman could not. Bowman begged Samuel to pressure Broadus to conform to the status quo at Hopkins.<sup>46</sup>

This meeting took place without Broadus's knowledge, but his father informed him and the following day Mitchell Jr. and President Bowman met. According to Bowman's notes, Broadus came in and asked why his father had been disturbed by their meeting the day before and what he had done to deserve the criticism leveled at him. Bowman wrote that he said, "After several dealings with him I had a right to doubt the sincerity of his request." The discussion turned into a heated argument, Bowman constantly accusing Mitchell of taking words out of context and twisting them around. Mitchell, offended, said, "Go ahead, bring in a stenographer right now!" Broadus felt he was met with a "paroxysm of anger and abuse."<sup>47</sup> The argument ended with Mitchell yelling as he prepared to leave, and when he opened the door he grew quiet and repeated as he walked out, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."<sup>48</sup>

At the climax of his frustration, Mitchell threw in the towel just as his father had in South Carolina. The day after his meeting with Bowman, Broadus wrote to Jacob Hollander:

“I wish to resign my appointment as Associate Professor of Political Economy on this University effective at the beginning of the next academic year. Will you kindly convey this resignation to the proper University authorities...

I want to tell you how much I appreciate your kindness to me over a period of twenty-five years when I have been your student, then your apprentice and more recently, one of your associates. I shall leave the University with deep regret at parting with many colleagues, particularly, of course, those in the Department.”<sup>49</sup>

With Mitchell gone, Edward Lewis lost his only advocate at Johns Hopkins. His application would actually be held pending for an additional six months, making Lewis’ application held for over eighteen months, until October 25<sup>th</sup> 1939, when the University decided to deny Lewis’ application but also stated they would, “not exclude applicants for admission on the grounds of race or color.”<sup>50</sup>

The exact grounds for denying Edward Lewis admission remains a mystery, because when Jacob Hollander, head of the Department of Political Economy, was asked to look at Lewis’ application he said that, “The requisites for admission are fully complied with, and the qualifications of the applicant, together with his prospective intentions, commend themselves... the applicant meets the academic requirements for admission.”<sup>51</sup>

Broadus Mitchell decided to move “a continent away from all our attachments”<sup>52</sup> and began teaching at Occidental College, in Southern California. However, Mitchell did not forget the Lewis case and continued his assault in an

article published in *Frontiers of Democracy* entitled “Excluded Because of Color.” In the article Mitchell exposed the entire Lewis story explaining the only reason he had been denied was because of his race. Mitchell told how Kelly Miller had been accepted in 1887 and wondered why the University wished to use itself as “an instrument of oppression.” As America prepared to enter World War II:

“How are we going to preserve democracy if we do not improve the standard of living of groups so discriminated against, and what better way to begin to improve the standard of living than to furnish training for leaders among the Negro race itself?....

If it is true that most of the students and most of the faculty do not object, in whose interest is this Negro candidate excluded?...

Johns Hopkins offers no reason for excluding this Negro, the explanation is a disgraceful one; that despite every qualification of training and competence, he is excluded because of his color.”<sup>53</sup>

Following the article, Mitchell wrote to Guy Snavelly, the Executive Director of the Association of American Colleges, asking his organization to look into the Edward Lewis case.<sup>54</sup> Mitchell never received a response from Snavelly, who happened to be a Hopkins alumnus. Upon receipt of Mitchell’s request, Snavelly wrote to Bowman in May of 1940 stating that he supported the decision to keep Lewis out.<sup>55</sup> Bowman wrote back to Snavelly commending him for his opinions and gave revealing commentary concerning Lewis. Referring no doubt to Lewis’ leadership among Baltimore’s African American community, Bowman commented “Lewis is a troublemaker in this town... The essence of this whole

matter is that Lewis refused to withdraw his application and enter courses quietly so as to do the research that he desired to do...”<sup>56</sup>

Forced to turn elsewhere, Edward Lewis attended New York University where he became involved with the New York City Urban League. He went on to earn his PhD and wrote a dissertation entitled, “Urban League: Dynamic Instrument in Social Change.”<sup>57</sup>

Mitchell would never forget his experiences at Hopkins. He talked about them quite frequently in interviews. He would continue to teach at Occidental for two more years before he returned to the East Coast. He took a temporary position at New York University and became Research Director for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. No evidence suggests that Edward Lewis had any influence in Broadus’ decision to work at NYU. Mitchell left NYU shortly after he arrived and began teaching at Rutgers in 1947 in the Economics Department.

In the 1950s, Mitchell’s radical beliefs—which had alienated him from Hopkins’ administrators and Trustee Board Members—caught up with him at Rutgers. Mitchell soon found himself entangled in one of the biggest cases in the fight for academic freedom during the Joseph McCarthy communist hunt. Two well established Professors, M.I. Finley and Simon Heimlich, were identified as Communists and sent before the Board of Trustees at Rutgers. The Professors invoked the Fifth Amendment but were fired. Mitchell was one of the more outspoken leaders to fight for academic freedom and integrity within the staff at Rutgers. Similar to the situation at Hopkins, Mitchell had very little

staff behind him as most stayed out of the spotlight. Mitchell was forced to retire in 1958.

Even at 65 years old Mitchell's spirit was strong. He took a position at Hofstra in 1959 and taught in the Economics Department. He was highly respected during his stay there and was awarded an honorary degree in 1967. He retired after he gave the commencement address in 1967 and spent the rest of his time between New York and his quiet farm in Wendell, Massachusetts. He died on April 28, 1988 at the age of 95.

Mitchell ended his career a respected scholar in Economics and published many works in that field. He also published work on Alexander Hamilton's life and beliefs. He reflected on his years at Hopkins many times, often regretting his decision to leave. He felt that Hopkins faculty had been fraudulent and dishonest with Edward Lewis and had passed up an opportunity to set a positive precedent with African American scholars.<sup>58</sup>

Mitchell had sacrificed his time and energy for a cause he believed in. He had picked up and carried a civil rights argument in the 1930s that wouldn't come to most of the United States until after the Supreme Court Decision in *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in 1954. He was an outspoken man who believed in racial equality and a part of Hopkins staff that was seemed very quiet and complacent.

The Edward Lewis affair revealed a severe breach between the university's racially conservative President and Board of Trustees and the increasingly progressive faculty and students. President Bowman comes across

as particularly craven. Willing to admit Lewis—but not publicly—Bowman sought to appease Broadus Mitchell and perhaps his own conscience, while not angering the universities more rabid racists. At the same time he hoped to avoid encouraging other members of Baltimore’s African American elite from applying to Hopkins. African American students would have made the University socially dynamic and far ahead of its time, but for bigoted members of the Board of Trustees and President Bowman this would have damaged their faith in white supremacy. This faith would be sorely tested in any case by World War II and the Civil Rights Movement. But in 1938 neither Bowman nor Willard felt the first stirring of what NAACP leader later termed “the rising wind.”

The effects of these administrative attitudes still resonate today as Hopkins remains a predominantly white school with an atmosphere that does not always promote either diversity or tolerance. Only now in the year 2003 is an Africana Studies department being organized, presenting a hope for minority students on the horizon.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: Uncle Fearless’s Nephew*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly Miller, unpublished autobiography, TS, The Kelly Miller Papers, Special Collections, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

Helen Thom, *Johns Hopkins, A Silhouette*, p.3

<sup>4</sup> Julia Morgan, "Son of a Slave," *Johns Hopkins Magazine* June 1981, 20.

<sup>5</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72, 73, 74, 76: Letter from Metcalf to Remsen, 24 February 1910. <sup>6</sup> *The Afro-American*, "Why Not Hopkins?" p. 4

<sup>7</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Goodnow to Childs, 16 October 1915.

<sup>8</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South." *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)

<sup>9</sup> "Southern Historical Collection #4141 Broadus Mitchell Papers," <<http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/m/Mitchell,Broadus>> (18 March, 2003)

<sup>10</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)

<sup>11</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)

<sup>12</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Looking Back at my Time at Hopkins." 1952.

<sup>13</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading South ern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)

<sup>14</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "A Strange and Bitter Fruit." *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993)

<sup>15</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 29 January 1932.

<sup>16</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 29 January 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Looking Back at my Time at Hopkins." 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Looking Back at my Time at Hopkins." 1952.

<sup>19</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Foreword—by a Southerner." *Black Justice*. American Civil Liberties Union, May 1931.

<sup>20</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 20 February 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: Uncle Fearless's Nephew*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kramer, "White Sales: The Racial Politics of Baltimore's Jewish-Owned Department Stores, 1935-1965." *Enterprising Emporiums: The Jewish Department Stores of Downtown Baltimore*. (Baltimore, Jewish Museum of Maryland, 2001)

<sup>23</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Mitchell to Jacob Hollander, 8 December 1937.

<sup>24</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Jacob Hollander Papers, 59: Letter from Mitchell to Jacob Hollander, 29 October 1938.

<sup>25</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Foreword—by a Southerner." *Black Justice*. American Civil Liberties Union, May 1931.

<sup>26</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Jacob Hollander Papers, 59: Letter from Hollander to Mitchell, 1 November 1938.

<sup>27</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Lewis to Bowman, 23 November 1938.

<sup>28</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Bowman to Lewis, 25 November 1938.

<sup>29</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Looking Back at my Time at Hopkins." 1952.

<sup>30</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Brown to Bowman, 20 December 1938.

<sup>31</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Brown to Bowman, 20 December 1938.

<sup>32</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Marburg to Mitchell, 19 December 1938.

<sup>33</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Mitchell to Marburg, 20 December 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Sydnor III, "A Time for Integration: The Johns Hopkins University and the Edward Lewis Case." (B.A. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 15 May 1996)

<sup>35</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Daniel Willard Vertical File, Letter from Willard to Mitchell, 10 January 1939.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Sydnor III, "A Time for Integration: The Johns Hopkins University and the Edward Lewis Case." (B.A. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 15 May 1996)

<sup>37</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Mitchell to Willard, 9 February 1939.

<sup>38</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Willard to Mitchell, 13 February 1939.

<sup>39</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Mitchell to Willard, 21 February 1939.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Sydnor III, "A Time for Integration: The Johns Hopkins University and the Edward Lewis Case." (B.A. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 15 May 1996)

- <sup>41</sup> Edgar J. Kassan, "Graduate Students favor Negro Admission, Poll Shows." *Johns Hopkins Newsletter*. 10 March 1939.
- <sup>42</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Willard to Bowman, 4 March 1939.
- <sup>43</sup> "Abstraction v. Simplicity" *Johns Hopkins Newsletter*. 21 March 1939.
- <sup>44</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Academic Council to Mitchell, 21 March 1939.
- <sup>45</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)
- <sup>46</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Bowman personal memo, 8 April 1939.
- <sup>47</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)
- <sup>48</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Bowman personal memo, 8 April 1939.
- <sup>49</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Broadus Mitchell Papers, 57, 57.2, 58: Letter from Hollander to Mitchell, 5 April 1939.
- <sup>50</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from S. Hollander to Bowman, 20 October 1939.
- <sup>51</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from J. Hollander to Bowman, 5 May 1939.
- <sup>52</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "[Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South.](#)" *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*. ed. Glenn Fieldman. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001.)
- <sup>53</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Excluded Because of Color." *Frontiers of Democracy*, 15 March

<sup>54</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Mitchell to Snively, 7 May 1940.

<sup>55</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Snively to Mitchell, 11 May 1940.

<sup>56</sup> The Ferdinand Hamburger Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Office of the President, Negro Education, 72,73, 74, 76: Letter from Bowman to Snively, 13 May 1940.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Sydnor III, "A Time for Integration: The Johns Hopkins University and the Edward Lewis Case." (B.A. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 15 May 1996)

<sup>58</sup> Broadus Mitchell, "Looking Back at my Time at Hopkins." 1952.