Book Review

Vida L. Avery. *Philanthropy in Black Higher Education: A Fateful Hour Creating the Atlanta University System*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 290 pp. Hardcover $95.00.

Philanthropy in Black Higher Education: A Fateful Hour Creating the Atlanta University System is a well-developed and chronicled work of the affiliation of Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College in 1929. While Avery weaves in the philanthropy of white industrialist, John D. Rockefeller Sr., his son "Junior," the Rockefeller-sponsored General Education Board, and others, I found her book in many ways to be more of a biography of John Hope, the first black president of Morehouse College and Atlanta University, than a history of the philanthropy that supported the creation of the Atlanta University System. No matter how you view this history, it is a well-researched, compelling work that advances our understanding of both white philanthropy in establishment and support of black higher education and, perhaps more importantly, black leadership and agency in this work as well.

The book begins with a concise, yet comprehensive, overview of major philanthropic investments in higher education, more specifically black higher education, post-Civil War. In particular Avery does a stellar job considering the historiography of white industrial philanthropists' involvement in black higher education and their relationships with the black college academic leadership.

One example of Hope's leadership and agency was highlighted by Avery in his interaction with Abraham Flexner, Sidney Frissell, E. C. Sage, Thomas Jesse Jones, and a larger committee at the General Education Board's first annual Interracial Conference on Negro Education in 1915. Avery provides nearly eight pages of transcripts from the meeting with little interruption or commentary. I found this to be a powerful tool as a reader. I was able to hear each voice in my head, understand the interaction, and come to my own conclusions about Hope's relationships with his funders and future partners in the creation of the Atlanta University System. While I enjoyed reading the transcripts and the insights I received from the primary document, there was room for more analysis and Avery's expert voice.

After discussing Hope's relationships with Flexner and the General Education Board, Avery considers the complexity in not only creating black education in the South but merging three institutions, while keeping their distinct identities. Avery briefly mentions the complexity of curricular development and evolution from being mainly for elementary

education of the newly freed slaves to collegiate education at all three institutions. Given the focus of the book, philanthropy, Avery spends substantially more time reviewing the funding of all three institutions. She describes these black colleges in the late nineteenth century in a way that unfortunately, can still describe many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) today:

> Black institutions did not have the luxury of endowments and presidents of these intuitions [sic] continuously had to generate alternative revenues from which the funds would come. Student tuition generated some income; but with most blacks living in poverty and competing with poor whites for jobs, tuition was a severely restricted source of funding. Black communities and missionary societies generated some donations ... but black institutions desperately needed a constant flow of money to ensure their survival (pp. 109–110).

Avery noted that both Spelman and Morehouse received most of this "constant flow" from donations from the Rockefellers, the General Education Board, and their religious affiliation with the American Baptist Home Mission Society. However, Atlanta University was in a "more precarious" funding situation, having received some funds that were secured by Congregationalists from the Freedman's Bureau and the American Missionary Association (p. 110). Avery points out that even with the need for additional funds, Edmond Ware, the president of Atlanta University prior to John Hope, wanted an institution that was free of denominational control; thereby walking away from future American Missionary Association donations only after two years of existence (in 1869). Ware subsequently pursued state funding with limited success given the racial climate in Georgia at the time.

I found this decision to disaffiliate with the church to be extremely interesting and pivotal to the development of Atlanta University and the eventual merger. However, it was not explored or critiqued in this text. I am left wondering why Ware chose to leave potential funding on the table. What were his concerns with donor control of the institution? And, how did this decision impact the need for the merger and its outcome?

Like the lack of discussion of Ware's action, nearly absent from the history were the presidents of Spelman College, Florence M. Reed, and Atlanta University, Myron W. Adams, who are standing behind then Morehouse College president, John Hope on the wonderful photo on the front cover (and p. 145) of the book. While not the central players in Avery's history, I was left wondering about their involvement in the affiliation and interactions with the General Education Board and philanthropists. How had their relationships and leadership impacted the merger and vision for the future?

One aspect that I appreciated from Avery's history is her telling of how the cooperation between the three institutions moved from a fiscal necessity, which arguably was being encouraged, if not more strongly, by the white philanthropists, became a strong partnership that strengthened black higher education with the vision of black leadership. In other work, we have seen industrial philanthropists trying to manipulate the black community, maintain the Southern caste system, or accept racism and Jim Crow, without pushing against these prejudices. Here Avery helps complicated the story by showing black agency and leadership that strengthened the community.

While Avery does not exclude the strong arm of donor control from the overall history, she has built a compelling narrative in which John Hope and others seized the moment and opportunity. Hope worked in partnership with the philanthropists, but ultimately did not cede control of his vision for black higher education. Avery refers to this relationship as symbiotic, where "the control mechanism of the relationship shift[ed] back and forth, as each party redefine[ed] its needs and expectations" (p. 179). Avery argues that by not viewing this give-and-take as symbiotic, but rather in the "confines of manipulator or manipulated," the importance of both roles and all actors' involvement in the success of the philanthropic effort, in this case the improvement of higher education for blacks in the twentieth century and beyond, is lost.

Avery's *A Fateful Hour* has already been recognized by the Council for the Advancement Support of Education (CASE) with the John Grenzebach Awards for Outstanding Research in Philanthropy for Educational Advancement. The award was well deserved. And, I hope that many others choose to read this compelling story of philanthropy, partnership, and strategic leadership.

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