

Evelyn Rich  
105-25 Horace  
Hunting Expressway  
Corona, N.Y.  
11368

Rediscovering BRYN MAWR - Past and Present

From a Black Perspective

*clear,*  
*you might be treated in this.*  
*- her*

Evelyn Jones Rich '54

with Afro-American Students and Alumnae

Rediscovering BRYN MAWR - Past and Present

From a Black Perspective

Friday evening:  
(February 7, 1975)

Informal meeting - Catch-up time!

Saturday  
(February 8, 1975)

Panel : Careers: "Choosing, Financing,  
Doing and Winning"

9:00 - 12:00 a.m.

Camilla Jones Tatem '58  
Joyce Greene '57  
Cynthia Bowens '76  
Dorothy Norton - School of Social Work

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Panel - "Self Discovery and Awareness:  
Person, Woman, Wife, Mother, Divorcee -  
all or none or in-between"

Chris Clark '59  
Beverly Davis '70  
Sheila Griffin '76  
Marion Edwards '75

5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Summary: "Next Steps"

Evelyn Jones Rich '54



## INTRODUCTION

This report describes an extraordinary event in Bryn Mawr College history. Afro-American students and alumnae came together briefly to share experiences, aspirations and problems. The group spanned more than forty years of the College and a panorama of careers to which Black women aspire. Alumnae outnumbered students although the total number of both was small.

The first session was designed to focus both on the Bryn Mawr academic experience as well as its impact on alumnae as they functioned in the world upon graduation. Panelists tended to emphasize their diverse careers over and above the actual campus experience. Some recalled the less-than-positive attitudes of specific faculty members. Others stressed their relationships with compatriot Black students on the campus (though there were indeed few), and highlighted the importance of the mutual support they gave each other in this period. There is reason to believe that, particularly with the older alumnae, the experiences encountered in establishing careers and families, as well as themselves, overshadowed the four years spent at Bryn Mawr even though each woman acknowledged the influence her undergraduate days had on subsequent endeavors.

The second session focused on the problems Afro-American women confront as people in the real world. There were, however, few statements of personal identity and what this means in the 1970's.



One of the major points which did emerge was the importance of female friendships and, moreover, the necessity of a female support system in the rather isolated Bryn Mawr environment.

Also important were the interests students expressed in male companionship which often appeared excessive to many of the alumnae, given the reality of Bryn Mawr and the constellation of colleges to which it relates. Thus concern with Black women's sexuality dominated much of the session. The Black male was an invisible participant, always in the background and often on center stage as women, particularly many of the younger ones, defined themselves in relation to him. It is quite likely that some of the participants - particularly students - interpreted this part of the meeting not as an attempt for Black women to define themselves in relation to Black men but rather as a recognition of the real problem of maintaining a normal social and intellectual existence in an environment where there were/are very few Black men. Other participants, however, insisted that maintenance of a "normal" existence in the Bryn Mawr community was not a realistic objective for a Black woman. Whether this is a phenomenon singular to women at a women's college or is shared by young women in a coed environment is not known.

It was clear that the participants in attendance saw themselves as Black women - with equal emphases on both terms. They were less clear about how the College perceived them.

This meeting has interesting implications. Can Black graduates of college such as Bryn Mawr form a network which provides

mutual support and encourages creative performance both on the campus and in the larger society? To what extent is Black female sexuality different from female sexuality in general, and what responses can be anticipated to this problem? Can a predominantly white college accept and support the needs peculiar to Black women and the efforts of alumnae to respond to those needs? Are the specific suggestions which emerged adequate to resolve the needs and interests which brought the group together in the first place or will they generate other activities which respond to needs as yet unexpressed?

Participants shared a brief part of this first session with Harris Wofford, President of the College, and Nina Dana, President of the Alumnae Association. Their presence reflected the College's support for this effort, as well as its interest in responding more effectively to the concerns and special problems of Afro-American students on the campus. President Wofford will welcome specific suggestions growing out of the conference which address themselves to these concerns and problems.



## PANEL - CAREERS : CHOOSING, FINANCING, DOING AND WINNING

We are what we do! Educating women "to do" as well as to be has always been an important part of the philosophy of Bryn Mawr College as evidence by the axiom - "Our failures only marry." For the Afro-American student career preparation is a vital part of the experience at the College. From the decade of the thirties, when the first Afro-American students came onto the campus, to the present, the pull of the liberal arts has been strong. But, the "ivory tower", isolated, egocentrism of the campus has, in some case made the decision to specialize a difficult one. The commitment to succeed is and has been ever present but there was also the reality of the limited opportunities of the present, coupled with a recognition that some doors are still closed to entrance. There is much less upward mobility, in a host of careers to which white students have relatively easy access. For some, there was the feeling that self-confidence in one's ability to reach the frontiers of one's potential had been undermined significantly in the course of the struggle of the Bryn Mawr A.B. For others, Bryn Mawr was a solid foundation on which to build a career.

In this context, four alumnae provided glimpses of their careers since graduating from Bryn Mawr.

JOYCE GREENE '57

Joyce Greene had both "good news" and "bad news". The good news involved her gradual movement through the Biological Sciences to her present position as Assistant Professor of the Biological Sciences at Smith College. The bad news was that her achievements were not made without obstacles of more or less severity.

Joyce is the product of both an undergraduate and a graduate Bryn Mawr College. Coming from a family of modest means, her attendance as an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr was an intellectual, social, and cultural awakening. The undergraduate years were spent as a non-resident student, majoring in Biology and tapping the intellectual vitality of the College. Her social activities, however, remained very much in Philadelphia where she lived.

After a year of research, Joyce Greene returned to graduate study receiving an M.A. in Biology from Wesleyan University. Another several years were spent in Microbiological research at Amherst College before the search for answers brought her back to Bryn Mawr. This time she took her Ph.D. in Microbiology and Physiology in 1968.

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Joyce Greene '57

Following two years of Postdoctoral research, she has concentrated her energies in teaching Microbiology and Immunology at Smith College. During her current sabbatical while recuperating from the rigors of College teaching she hopes to finally publish those papers that have been waiting on her desk.

The "bad news", though not explored as thoroughly as one might like, goes to the heart of the Black Bryn Mawr experience - and perhaps to the heart of the experience of all women entering professions. Some of the questions that naturally come out of this are: 1. To what extent does the Bryn Mawr experience separate students from the mainstream of Black Culture? 2. What does one postpone, or give up, in pursuing a career? 3. To what extent does "Black identity" conflict with one's own definition of self? 4. To what extent does the color of one's skin shape the direction and determine the goals which one wishes to pursue? Dr. Greene, while admitting to the questions, did not provide the answers, insisting that though there are common experiences, the obstacles perceived, the solutions derived, and the decisions made are quite individual.



DOLORES NORTON MSS Ph.D.

Dodie Norton received a B.A. from Temple University in Philadelphia and went on to work as a case worker with the Philadelphia Department of Public Assistance.

The continuous and continuing search for answers to the questions which confronted her in this first job led her back to the graduate school at Bryn Mawr - for the M.S.W. and then the Ph.D.

She was unique among the women sharing vignettes about their careers with the participants because her Bryn Mawr experience is a graduate experience which includes the dual roles of student and teacher at the College. She also managed to squeeze in the fifteen years between her B.A. and her doctorate, marriage and children - yet she simultaneously found and exploited an interest, first in psychiatric social work at the master's level and now in Social Research.

Dodie Norton's major interest is Human Development, particularly differential Child Development. She is active on various committees - both public and private - which relate to policies of child development and how such differential factors as race

Dolores Norton MSS Ph.D.

and environment affect development. Dr. Norton seems to have won a place of respect in the Bryn Mawr community overcoming the obstacles that those in the School of Social Work often confront as they seek to assert their intellectual equality among their peers at Bryn Mawr - both as members of the teaching faculty and as members of various administrative committees.

The courses which she teaches at the College, both at the graduate level and one at the undergraduate level, reflect interests on the frontiers of Social Science research and simultaneously address questions which confront women, especially Black women, as persons, wives and mothers.



## CAMILLA JONES TATEM '58

Camilla Jones came to the College from a privileged background, intent on realizing her life-long dream of becoming a doctor. She did it too, and one gets the feeling that she succeeded in spite of Bryn Mawr.

Though Camilla Jones majored in Biology, she never felt a part of Bryn Mawr's Biology Department, asserting that it discouraged rather than encouraged her interest.

She received little emotional support in her quest for medical training and found medical school (Women's Medical College in Philadelphia), a series of adventures, many of them negative, in which race was a dominant factor.

Dr. Tatem did her internship and residency in New York City, her home town, and managed to acquire a child (and a husband too) in between. She acknowledges the tremendous amount of support which her husband provided in these difficult year. The Director of Pediatrics did not view Dr. Tatem's pregnancy as an insurmountable handicap and bent the rules in such a way that she could fulfil the requirements.

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She worked part time doing research in pediatric neurology during the years in which her children - now three - were infants. This speciality became more refined as she moved into the area of mental retardation in children - diagnosis, maintenance care, treatment and research.

Today, Dr. Tatem is Director of the Howard Park Unit, Queens Developmental Center, and is responsible for the administration of the New York State program for retarded children in Queens. She insists that she never chose between her career and her family, but rather responded to different priorities at different times. This flexible approach has enabled her to grow as a person, wife, mother and professional and all those who know her have benefited. So too has Dr. Tatem.



Sister Alfred Marie Russell, O.S.F., LILLIAN RUSSELL '34, came to Bryn Mawr from Boston's Girl's Latin School in 1930, the second Black candidate for the Bryn Mawr A.B. Restrictions against Blacks in the Charter of the College prevented her from taking up residence in the dormitories. The Boston Alumnae, who had selected her as a New England Regional Scholar, were unsuccessful in their attempts to have the residency restriction set aside.

Lillian Russell thus spent her first weeks with President Marion Park before settling into quarters off campus. Some forty years later she noted at a class reunion that some of her classmates did not know that she was a non-resident student.

Lillian Russell thrived at Bryn Mawr, majoring in Chemistry and Philosophy. She participated fully in extra-curricular activities. The shortage of jobs in 1934, when she was graduated, led her to accept a Fellowship for graduate study in Organic Chemistry at Howard University. She received a Masters degree in Chemistry two years later.

A period of search and discovery followed. Lillian Russell had been raised as an Episcopalian. In an elective course in Music Appreciation at the college, she first studied the Mass and grew to know and love its musical form. Her work in Philosophy equipped her for her personal search for truth and that brought her to the Catholic Church which she embraced six years after Bryn Mawr.

She continued in research in industrial Chemistry and pursued further graduate study in Physical Chemistry at MIT. She then went on to a research position at the University of Illinois where she became very active with the Newman Foundation. At Illinois Lillian Russell first felt the stirrings of vocation and with the help of a spiritual director and a Sister on campus who was also a research chemist, she



recognized both the fact of vocation and the Order to which she was being called. And so, almost twenty years after Bryn Mawr, in the midst of a career as a research chemist, Lillian Russell decided to become a Sister of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

During Religious Formation in Postulancy and Novitiate, Sister studied more philosophy, and, while still a novice, taught chemistry, physics and mathematics at St. Francis Academy. Later she joined the College faculty in Mathematics and spent summers studying theology, especially the Franciscan heritage.

Then, responding to the need for a Registered Pharmacist as a part of the planning and building of Our Lady of Angels at Joliet, Sister turned to this new challenge and after more study was licensed as a Pharmacist and headed the Pharmacy there for six years.

Sister's many academic interests had taken her in and out of Missouri and Illinois. She then moved to Washington, D.C. in response to a request for her services in a cooperative effort of Blacks to contribute more actively to the church. Taking up residence with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Sister did what was needed including collecting statistics, organizing workshops, etc. Again came an assignment in Pharmacy, this time at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Washington, D.C. Today Sister is involved with the V.A. Drug Treatment Program there. She sees her present work not only as professional service but also as an apostolate very much in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

Through all of this, one gets the feeling that Sister feels good about her Bryn Mawr experience.



## SUMMARY

The vignettes above, as well as similar stories from the other Alumnae present, provided a background against which Black students and alumnae could assess and evaluate the Bryn Mawr experience from the perspective of career preparation and participation. In the lively discussion which followed, several points emerged.

1. The experiences of alumnae in a variety of fields is an exciting story and particularly encouraging to students presently on the campus. Hopefully, alumnae will be able to provide support and encouragement to students.
2. A wide range of life styles, including the traditional role of wife, mother and helpmate is available to the Bryn Mawr graduate. Some women will choose to postpone pursuing their own career to care for children and support husband while he pursues his.
3. The setting of priorities which take into account changing needs and interests is important. Choosing between career and marriage is, in fact, not a desirable choice. As indicated by several of the alumnae this may not even be a necessary choice.

## SELF DISCOVERY AND AWARENESS

We are Black, we are women: The combination is dynamite in the 1970's. The drive to assert ourselves as persons is ever present. The reality of being Black persons in a white world demands actions and reactions which are unique to us.

Black women at Bryn Mawr are special. They represent a statistically insignificant percentage of Black women college graduates. In an era where women are redefining themselves and Blacks are asserting their identity, the Bryn Mawr experience takes on additional significance. Neither the tacit acceptance of the white majority culture before the 1950's nor the rebellious Black cultural identity of the late 1960's is adequate for students and alumnae of the 1970's. The establishment of a personhood that embodies the best of the Black and white cultures is a viable alternative for many students and alumnae.

Four women, two students and two alumnae, defined the parameters within which the discussion of Black women as persons, wives, mothers, etc., developed. Students, particularly, bewailed the small pool of men of comparable education available to them.

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They cited the small number of Afro-American men on the Haverford campus, the difficulty of reaching Philadelphia and Swarthmore to tap the pool of men there and the sexual demands that preceded development of any meaningful relationship. In general, students and some alumnae, indicated that the Bryn Mawr experience imposed a social situation which seemed to exclude any significant Black male companionship. The question which emerges was how to function creatively in such an environment.

Students explored in depth the role of social deprivation of male companionship in the light of the intellectual development at Bryn Mawr. Students seem to have the option of defining their relationships. They may reject a strictly sexual relationship and concentrate on other aspects of their development at this time; they may "turn those men around" to their way of thinking; or they may (though no one said so) acquiesce to what appears to be the norm. Alumnae stressed the importance of using yet another option, that of developing and strengthening friendships with women. The social, cultural and intellectual contacts with other women can enrich the experiences of the Black alumnae.

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Self-Discovery and Awareness

It was generally agreed that social relationships with men was desirable; if not absolutely necessary, for the fullest development of the Black Bryn Mawr woman. This, for students, might necessitate involvement in activist groups that men frequent such as political action groups or student professional groups. "Older men" seemed to have a particular attraction to Bryn Mawr women. Men who have comparable educational backgrounds, have established themselves, and have outgrown the need to prove their manhood by only sexual criteria are attractive to the intelligent, independent young women produced by colleges such as Bryn Mawr.

Important, too, is defining the marriage relationship. Often men see marriage as an unequal partnership in which the aspirations of the wife are subservient. Such an attitude can threaten or destroy a marriage in which the wife wishes to remain intellectually vigorous. Couples must redefine the marriage relationship in ways that allow both partners to grow and to develop and maintain friendships with members of the opposite sex. Professional activities demand interaction with men as

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### Self-Discovery and Awareness

colleagues. That these professional relationships may develop into friendships that permit interaction at a social and cultural level is a factor which Black women, and women in general, must confront and deal with in a constructive fashion.

Considering the rare atmosphere in which the Black Bryn Mawr woman develops, marriage with partners without comparable education is an option that must be considered seriously. Respect, and room for personal growth and fulfillment may be more important in a sustained relationship than the college from which a person obtains a degree.

The idea of interracial dating and perhaps marriage was raised. Opinions varied though a generally negative attitude emerged particularly among students. Some viewed this as a rejection of Black men, others saw it as acquiescing to racism and expressing rejection of both self and one's race. Still others saw it as a natural part of a larger question of accepting oneself and thus accepting others. Though differences may exist and these are more important, they need not inhibit personal and social growth.

Participants also explored the implications of having and raising children in the context of being a Bryn Mawr woman. There was general agreement that this is attractive. The years of a child's dependency are small compared with the total life span and the satisfaction and pleasure

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Self-Discovery and Awareness

which can be derived from one's children. There is time to pursue active careers after the major child rearing years for those who wish to devote full time activities to children for a predetermined period.

Although life as a single woman was not generally endorsed, it is an option which some of us must consider. The drawbacks are many - financial, in terms of excessive income taxes; social, since our culture is couple-oriented; and personally, because of the demands made professionally, socially and sexually on a person alone. It is possible to establish a reasonably satisfying life style where marriage, per se, is excluded. Here as during the "isolated" undergraduate years, one can establish friendships with other women, a "lover", and fill the need for close relationships with other people.

Several participants lamented the primary focus of the discussion roles of Black women as they relate to men and hoped that future meetings might include more discussion of women as persons, discovering and asserting themselves and deciding their future.

With all of this, a general feeling of excitement permeated the discussions with the recognition of shared attitudes, problems and decisions, some of which are still to be made.

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## CONCLUSIONS

The paradox of the Afro-American Bryn Mawr experience lies in the apparent denial of racial differences on the part of the College on the one hand and the importance of those differences inside and beyond the Bryn Mawr community on the other.

Students are justifiably required to perform at levels commensurate with the majority student community, yet implicit in the attitudes and actions of some parts of that community is the assumption that there are differences which shape ability to perform academically and to function on levels of equality socially and culturally.

Students and alumnae seem agreed that Bryn Mawr offers a unique opportunity to get the best education possible with which to confront and resolve the challenges of the present and the future. Granted that there are differing perceptions of what those challenges are, nevertheless there is general consensus that they have a great deal to do with being Black and female.

The specific suggestions which grew out of the discussions generated among students and alumnae are:

1. A directory of Afro-Americans associated with Bryn Mawr should be developed. The directory should include faculty members and students (undergraduate and graduate) including those who have transferred to other colleges and/or withdrawn. Notation should be made of those who attended the Reunion Conference. The list should include both current and permanent address and occupation.
2. Afro-Americans associated with Bryn Mawr should be questioned about their interest in organizing a group through which common interests and problems can find expression. In the interim all those interested should continue to function on an ad hoc basis. Some of the students expressed interest in a Black alumnae association.
3. Alumnae should participate wherever possible in the College's internship program.
4. Alumnae assistance in helping students find summer jobs and making career contacts should be forthcoming.
5. Alumnae should cooperate with the College in actively undertaking a project with oral history components which will trace the Black experience at Bryn Mawr.
6. Alumnae are encouraged to respond positively to requests for help in providing materials for inclusion in a proposed brochure to be developed jointly by administration and students to encourage increased Afro-American enrollment.



7. Alumnae should cooperate with the College in developing a program in international studies which reflects the African and Afro-American experience more fully.
8. The College should undertake efforts to widen the pool of Afro-American applicants by recruiting actively in public and/or inner-city schools. Afro-American students should respond positively to requests from the College for assistance in recruiting. Prospective Bryn Mawr students who are Afro-Americans should be given the option of speaking with a Black student during campus visits.
9. A section on "Afro-American Alumnae" should be included in the class notes in the Alumnae Bulletin.

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE  
BLACK STUDENTS  
Class of 1979

Anderson, Karen	Rochester, New York
Baker, Pomphylia	Los Angeles, California
Banks, Jocelyn	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Burns, Adrienne	New York City
Dixon, Cheryl	Washington, D.C.
Eaverly, Mary Ann	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Jones, Barabra	Burlington, New Jersey
Lee, Adrienne	King of Prussia, Pennsylvania
Lindsay, Traci	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Marshall, Ellen	Brooklyn, New York
Roberts, Evelyn	Chicago, Illinois
South, Damaris	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuitt, Susannah	New York City
Young, Loren	Piedmont, California