

CHAPTER III

A FULL-FLEDGED FLEDGLING COLLEGE

The 1930's, while difficult years for higher education in the nation at large, were especially severe on black colleges and universities. New graduates found jobs non-existent; graduates from black schools struggled against unemployment, apathy, and racism. A majority of those fortunate to find employment were teaching in the segregated school systems in the South. The dilemma of the black college graduate was further compounded by the fact that, in the 1930's, white southern legislators and newspaper editors voiced increasingly more criticism of the purpose and expense of higher education for Negroes. For example, H. L. Mencken of the Baltimore Sun, in a series on the University of Maryland, described Princess Anne Academy as "a one-horse institution on the Lower Eastern Shore, ostensibly of college grade but actually little more than a glorified high school....It is so small that, despite the modest total expense of operating it, the cost per student is higher than that of any other school of the university."¹ As segregation in Maryland's

¹Baltimore Sun, May 20, 1937.

public colleges further compounded the educational problems of the Negro, it was vehemently denounced by the black community.

During this period blacks questioned and took to court to integrate previously all-white universities. The University of Maryland found itself a defendant. In 1935 Donald Murray sued the University to enter its law school. Thurgood Marshall, representing Murray, won the case to admit Murray to the law school in Baltimore rather than going out-of-state. The state gave grants to students seeking higher educational opportunities unavailable to them at Negro colleges in Maryland. This was a tacit admission by the legislature that if it could not provide separate but equal educational facilities, then Negroes had the right to a subsidy for study elsewhere. The Murray case "officially...opened all the University's professional schools to Negroes, but to avoid 'indiscriminate mixing,' the legislature increased out-of-state funds to \$30,000." More significantly for Princess Anne, the University at College Park feared more suits for entrance to the undergraduate schools. This was the rationale behind the state legislature's appropriation of \$100,000 for the purchase of Princess Anne from Morgan College. It was hoped that Princess Anne College would offer a full, four year collegiate program for Negroes.² President Harry C. Byrd

²George H. Callcott, A History of the University of Maryland, (Baltimore, 1966), pp. 306-307.

of the University of Maryland lobbied to build up the Eastern Shore Branch with the argument, "If we don't do something about Princess Anne we're going to have to accept Negroes at College Park, where our girls are."³

The Murray case served to focus attention on the inadequate and unequal educational facilities afforded to Negroes in the state of Maryland. Princess Anne College and Bowie State Normal School were the only two state-funded institutions for the higher education of Negroes. Neither of these two schools compared with the University of Maryland's standards and offerings. Up until the Murray litigation it was painfully evident that the state was doing little if anything but the bare minimum required by law to provide higher educational opportunities for Negroes in liberal arts education, teacher training, the pre-professional areas of law, medicine and engineering, business, and the creative arts. Out-of-state scholarships were the pathetic means open to Negroes who wanted to pursue careers in the professions.

(At the 1935 legislative session, a Commission on the Higher Education of Negroes in Maryland was formed to report back in 1937 with its conclusions to the governor and legislature. Judge Morris A. Soper, who was also a trustee of Morgan College, was the chairman. In January of 1937 the Commission made its findings known to the state.

³Baltimore Sun, February 5, 1937.

The Soper Report discovered "that in comparison with the provisions for higher education of the white people, the State is far in arrears of reasonable and justifiable provisions for the colored people of the State."⁴ More specifically, the Commission recommended that "Princess Anne Academy had far better be abandoned altogether than continue its present pretense as a college....In its present condition, it is no credit to the State."⁵ As an alternative, Princess Anne Academy could be converted into "a high school with special emphasis upon vocational training."⁶ Fortunately for Princess Anne, nothing was done to implement the Commission's proposals. The school at Princess Anne, however, was now in the midst of a rivalry with Morgan College for recognition, appropriations, students, and political support. Henceforth most studies on higher education for Negroes in the State pitted Morgan College and Princess Anne against each other for power, control of Negro education, and money.

The State government in Annapolis now authorized numerous commissions to study the condition of higher education in Maryland. In 1939 the Report of the Commission on Scholarships for Negroes to the Governor and Legislature of Maryland was issued. This Commission also had harsh

⁴Report of the Commission on Scholarships for Negroes to the Governor and Legislature of Maryland, January 14, 1939, p. 3.

⁵Ibid., p. 55.

⁶Baltimore Sun, May 20, 1937.

words for Princess Anne. "The school at Princess Anne, even with two years added to its junior college curriculum, touches mainly the industrial field and that inadequately."⁷ The final recommendations reached by the Scholarships Commission were as follows: "(1) Establishment of a bi-racial Board of Regents of Negro Higher Education corresponding in powers to the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland, to include Princess Anne College and the administration of Negro out-of-state scholarships. (2) That Morgan College be made a state college. (3) That \$55,000 for each year of 1937 and 1938 be appropriated for scholarships."⁸ The first recommendation was not acted upon. The two remaining ones received due consideration. The only direct action taken was the appropriation of \$30,000 for scholarships and their administration for the years 1937 through 1939. And Morgan College did become a state institution in 1939. From this time, Morgan State College would fear the black land grant college at Princess Anne as a competitor for state support and enrollments.

In response to public criticism, Princess Anne concentrated on expanding its agricultural program and general land grant activities. An Adult Short Course in agricultural training and home care was established, livestock facilities were greatly improved, all farm buildings were electrified, and scholarships were awarded to Negro

⁷Report...on Scholarships, op. cit., p. 2.

⁸Ibid., p. 55.

students interested in pursuing agriculture at the college.⁹ The College utilized the local WPA authority to install water mains and fire plugs, the only gratuity it would receive from the Roosevelt Administration in Washington. Although enrollments would not justify major outlays of money to Princess Anne Academy, the state improved virtually every aspect of the school's physical plant during the 1930's--from women's dormitories to a trades building and gymnasium. A \$200,000 building program for Princess Anne College was designed to strengthen the school and lessen black demands for an end to separate but equal higher education in the state.

Robert A. Grigsby, the Acting Dean of Administration for the College during this era, described his Arts and Science program in a few general and terse sentences. He was more specific, however, when he described his school's Mechanic Arts Division, a part of the curriculum that whites were most interested in. Given the prevalence of white supremacy doctrines in the state and a widespread belief in the inability of the Negro to profit from a liberal education, the land grant mission guaranteed the school's survival.

Yet ironically, the students of the black 1890 colleges did not share the same enthusiasm for agricultural education as did their white mentors in the southern

⁹Biennial Report of the University of Maryland and the State Board of Agriculture, XXXIV, No. 3, (March 1937), p. 93.

legislatures. After 1930, Princess Anne College and other black 1890 schools received a small but significant influx of middle class blacks who had heretofore shunned these schools as institutions for "the culturally deprived." Low tuition and the uncertainties of the times made the 1890 schools more attractive to the black middle class.¹⁰ When Princess Anne sent a representative to attend the annual Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges in 1936, Dean Grigsby learned that all of the 1890 schools had very small enrollments in agriculture. There was not much enthusiasm for students to major in this area. As one man at the conference succinctly put it, "Boys do not leave home for college with thoughts of feeding hogs."¹¹ The U. S. Department of Agriculture was equally uninterested in Negro land grant education. In the 1930's, according to one historian, the Department of Agriculture displayed little sympathy for the plight of black farmers and black agricultural agents in the South. The Department of Agriculture believed that it could not push the South too far on the subject of Negro land grant education because of the need for Southern congressional votes on New Deal legislation. Thus the Department acquiesced to white supremacy to get Southern political support. Although blacks were employed

¹⁰Rufus B. Atwood, "The Origins and Development of the Negro Public College," The Journal of Negro Education, XXXI, (Summer, 1962), p. 250.

¹¹Proceedings of the Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges, November 10-11, 1936, (Washington, 1936), p. 32.