

Introduction



OBERLIN—A COLLEGE AND A CAUSE

ON THE OCCASION of the sesquicentennial of Oberlin College in March 1983, Professor Geoffrey Blodgett wrote, in understated fashion, that the institution's sometimes activist and peculiar history had "made it a controversial kind of place."¹ Blodgett echoed, perhaps, the sentiments of founder John Jay Shipherd. One year after the founding, Shipherd had coined the phrase "peculiar in that which is good" to describe both the Oberlin Collegiate Institute and the Oberlin Colony.² Shipherd, a Presbyterian minister from New York State, and Philo P. Stewart, his classmate and friend, had developed a "Grand Scheme" for the establishment of a utopian community in the frontier state of Ohio,³ and together these dreamers had purchased land in the heart of what was popularly called the Western Reserve.⁴

The founders and their pious followers had selected an unusual location for the new enterprise—the initial purchase of five hundred acres was swampy, forested land, on a flat, clay plain.⁵ The site lay thirty-two miles southwest of Cleveland and just eight miles southwest of Elyria, Ohio, where the colonists had first settled. This second settlement was an unattractive place dotted with a few log cabins and mud roads, a place that "brought hardship and expense to the early colonists."⁶ The disciplined, self-sacrificing

families who settled there wanted to promote “earnest and living piety among the students” and saw in Oberlin the “burning and the shining light which shall lead [America] on to the Millennium.”⁷ The two founders proposed to name the institute, its manual labor school, and the covenanted colony in honor of John Frederic Oberlin, a pious German Lutheran pastor who had pursued similar utopian ideals of education and community.⁸

At Oberlin, four early decisions by the board of trustees “fixed the purpose and the image of the college for a century to come.” The first was to ask the students to perform manual labor on the college farm or in the campus buildings as a way of contributing to the cause of the college and advancing individual, personal virtue as well as of enabling poor students from all over the country to obtain an education; the second was to admit women students along with men; the third (known as the Finney Compact) was to accept the principle of general faculty control over the college’s internal academic affairs without interference from the trustees; and the fourth was to admit black students.⁹ This last decision, surely the most controversial of the four, came in 1835, when the trustees of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute adopted by a one-vote margin a policy to encourage and sustain the mission of educating students “irrespective of color.”¹⁰

Robert S. Fletcher’s two-volume study, *A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation through the Civil War* (1943), examined the events and motives leading to the college’s bold decision to open its doors to black students. In Fletcher’s narrative, founder Shipherd was the leader of a Christian flock determined to settle the Western Reserve and to advance perfectionist ideals and an education that was practical and useful for missionary work and moral reform. Oberlin’s proximity to Lake Erie—opposite the shores of Ontario, Upper Canada, the ultimate terminus of the Underground Railroad—influenced the colonists’ antislavery position and their decision to become involved in that preeminent moral cause of the time.¹¹

Fletcher’s authoritative, thoroughly documented narrative dominated the approach to the institution’s history for four decades. Although this Oberlin College graduate had trained as a historian at Harvard University, Fletcher did not bring his analytical tools to interpret the conflicts that drove middle-class social groups and classes apart during the formative three decades before the Civil War.¹² Among the first noninstitutional historians to offer serious reflection and criticism on Oberlin from a black perspective was James Oliver Horton, who in 1985 published “Black Education

at Oberlin College: A Controversial Commitment.”¹³ A few years later, William and Aimee Lee Cheek published a biography of John Mercer Langston in which they explored how Oberlin had enabled this graduate “to work out [his] destiny” through the resources and fortunes of the free black community in the North and through his own fight for freedom and citizenship.¹⁴ Since then, other writers on Oberlin’s African American history have filled in gaps in the story line.¹⁵ Cally L. Waite, for example, has joined Horton in challenging traditional thinking about education for blacks at Oberlin by arguing that in post-Reconstruction America, when racial attitudes hardened, Oberlin was not always a friendly place for black students.¹⁶ History professors Gary Kornblith and Carol Lasser are engaged in a project that will assess the founding vision and trace the evolution of race in the town of Oberlin.¹⁷ All of these writers drew heavily from the pathbreaking work of William E. Bigglestone, Oberlin’s first professional archivist,¹⁸ who was among the first to advance the view that the presence of blacks in the postemancipation years had become an irritant to the community and that the town was not colorblind.¹⁹

What, then, is new about the present volume? Put simply, it resists a simple characterization of the history of Oberlin’s black education experience by taking readers directly to the sources that tell the story of what happened after Oberlin opened its doors to black Americans. It is one thing to read a historian’s claim that in the 1880s, the community began to practice a kind of gradual segregation between blacks and whites. It is another thing entirely to read a poignant letter from 1882 in which a college benefactor, who had steered black students to Oberlin and even financed their education, protests the beginnings of that segregation. That the letter came from a mission school in distant Kansas also reminds the reader that events in Oberlin, Ohio, often were—and are—noticed by the rest of the nation. Such documents allow readers to experience history and to see for themselves how even chaotic admission arrangements built constructive efforts to educate black Americans.

In researching and writing this collegiate history, I have had to wrestle with multiple versions of the historical narrative and with changing meanings of terms in the dialogue about race. To place Oberlin’s struggle over race in context has not been an easy task, in large part because the reconstruction of many of these forgotten episodes is not a story line of institutional beauty. For white students in 1835, admitting black students represented the mission

work of Oberlin perfectionists, who were considered extremists at the time for promoting such an egalitarian policy. By 1910, the issues of race and educational equity in the context of an undergraduate culture were concerns of a very different sort in an era dominated by a doctrine of “separate but equal.” By 2007, the meaning of being black had become blurred in the larger context of being a person of color. Even so, to discuss the complexity of these changes over time, I have had to assess individual sins of omission as well as the actions of white liberals who tried to influence institutional deeds based on prevailing views of what was dominant in society. Administrators and general faculty were often intentional agents of the status quo. It was not always easy for members of the white majority to accept and cherish the contributions of pluralism to the entire community. Members of the black community, unified or not, were not always willing to recognize the incremental efforts of generations of progressive whites to advance humanity and racial equality. In the long run, what individuals and groups accomplished in the promotion of racial understanding on the Oberlin campus stands as a guidepost reminding us not to take for granted the college’s high ideals and the ethic of self-help among black Americans.

Few scholarly books feature in any significant way the role of black students at a majority white campus.²⁰ In an effort to get beyond impressionistic sources and slender secondary works, I have focused on what students thought and did while they were enrolled in college. This led me, in turn, to explore a wide array of primary sources: annual reports; correspondence of alumni, faculty, and students; minutes of board of trustees meetings and those of the general faculty, student senate, and Oberlin Student Cooperative Association; committee reports; financial records; manuscript essays; handbills; memoranda; petitions; reports; sermons; student addresses; interviews; and contemporary oral histories. I have also made extensive but careful reference to such underscrutinized periodicals as the *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, the *Oberlin Review*, and the alternative student newspaper, the *Oberlin Grape*. The record is immense, in part because, as early as 1834, the college established an archives and identified a record keeper to collect and preserve the documents that now enable us to tell the story of the perceived value of an Oberlin education over 175 years.²¹

In particular, the thirty documents presented here capture the essence of black education as an integral part of the college’s past and present.

Oberlin's history and its story of racial progress are full of irony, contradictions and integrity, myth and reality, and imperfections. Oberlin College was very often a cockpit of argument, and its multifaceted story deserves to be better known, if only for the light it sheds on the sometimes fumbling efforts of the college to sustain its original ideals. Oberlin had played a pivotal role in the quest for educational opportunity for black Americans during the college's thirty years of a golden era, under presidents Asa Mahan (1834–50) and Charles G. Finney (1850–66); their leadership fostered conditions that led to the slow reacceptance of social integration of the races in higher education during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. Over the last half-century, Oberlin has had to wrestle as perhaps no other college has over the meaning of race and the destiny of black people in American society.

The thirty individual stories presented here confirm the broad outlines of Kemper Fullerton's 1926 assessment that Oberlin was both a college and a cause.²² The broader story of institutional transformation and modernization coalesces around a number of ideas joined to events: the college's original commitment to admit black Americans and its implementation during the formative decades, as Oberlin became a serious place for education; the retreat from this commitment in the late nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth century; the reclamation of the ideal after World War II, following a redefinition and reshaping of educational democracy and pluralism; and, at the end of the twentieth century, the struggle to reaffirm principles and practices of racial equality in the emerging context of multiculturalism, which broadened the notion of equality to include all people of color.²³ This documentary history includes comparative perspectives from other academic institutions that struggled with the same issues relating to the color line in the United States.²⁴ Recent scholarly interpretations of Oberlin College and the history of black education in America have shaped this record, as have studies on how the nation's universities and colleges have redefined merit, responded to student demands for more autonomy, and changed their admission practices to admit talented youth born into poverty and racial disadvantage.²⁵



MANY OF Oberlin's early faculty and trustees thought that the central purpose of the college was to train ministers to spread the gospel and teachers

to educate the new settlers residing in the Great Valley of the Mississippi. They also concluded that the lack of educational opportunities for black Americans was a national problem, not just a Southern one. Filled with utopian enthusiasm and encouraged by passionate liberators like eastern merchant-philanthropists Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Oberlinians took seriously their covenant to improve the human condition, and they proceeded to implement their visionary principles of race and gender equality in education during the middle and latter decades of the nineteenth century. To preserve these principles, Oberlin had to battle the state legislature in Columbus as well as local enemies in the Western Reserve at a time when racial equality was anathema to much of the rest of the country. Between 1863 and 1880, more than five hundred Oberlin College graduates became missionary teachers in the New South in what might be considered an educational Peace Corps.²⁶

In 1835, as in 2007, Oberlin emphasized creating an inclusive and culturally diverse community. The linchpin of this policy was to give minorities, who lacked influential advocates, access to opportunities in American culture and values—how to do so was often a matter of debate among faculty and students. In the early decades, the institution was largely able to match its resources to its principles. By 1850, Oberlin had begun selling so-called perpetual scholarships to raise an endowment of \$100,000 and soliciting donations for scholarships specifically for black students.²⁷ At this time, prior to the rise of the public high school, some students were inadequately prepared for the rigors of collegiate study. Like a good many colleges in the nineteenth century, Oberlin created a precollege preparatory department, which endured from 1833 to 1916. Many black students, as well as whites, attended the preparatory school before entering one of the collegiate departments.²⁸ Additionally, when the Conservatory of Music became a part of the college in 1867, Oberlin was able to offer access to students that few colleges or universities offered. In the early decades, disadvantaged but musically inclined black students such as Lulu Vere Childers (1896), William Mercer (Marion) Cook (nongrad, 1884–88), R. Nathaniel Dett (1908), Harriet Gibbs Marshall (1889), and Jessie Gerald Tyler (1904) benefited from this development.²⁹

Oberlin's success in advancing black education can be traced through the number of its black graduates: by 1899, Oberlin led among northern,

eastern, and western white majority schools with 128. The University of Kansas had 16 African American graduates, and a handful of other schools, such as Bates (15), Colgate (9), Brown (8), and Harvard (11), also had worked to blot out the color line in higher education.³⁰ In southeast Pennsylvania, Lincoln University (formerly Ashmun Institute and the country's first college chartered for black students) by 1899 graduated 616 black male youths.³¹ The larger challenge of educating black Americans, however, was left to the southern-based black universities, such as Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard, founded after the Civil War to educate freed slaves.³² Berea College in the border state of Kentucky was, like Oberlin, a racially integrated liberal arts college.³³ But in Ohio, Oberlin College stood out. It always had the largest number of black students of all Ohio institutions, the majority of whom after graduation were probably teachers and ministers.³⁴ "Elsewhere, apparently," writes James A. Hodges, "no college or university prohibited their enrollment, but black students were small in numbers and isolated in white seas."³⁵

The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a critical turning point in American civil rights history.³⁶ The court institutionalized racial segregation under a principle of separate but equal accommodations. This controversial and far-reaching declaration set the conditions for black Americans' access to education for six decades (1896–1954); yet the court's endorsement of racial segregation in matters of education went largely unnoticed in Oberlin because under the law reasonable accommodations for blacks applied only to public institutions.³⁷ During Oberlin's formative decades, the college had been a target of accusations from both the North and the South for "race mixing."³⁸ At the same time, liberal critics complained that the college was losing its historic hospitality to black residents and visitors. After the *Plessy* decision, Oberlin, it seemed, began to mirror the rest of society.

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century, progressive-minded white students and faculty joined a handful of black students to take the lead in pressing for black participation in the campus community.³⁹ These reformers had become frustrated by Oberlin's inability or unwillingness to live up to its liberal ideals of enabling black Americans to negotiate and integrate into American society more confidently. State laws and social practices that kept blacks in a subordinate

position were repugnant to them. This small group of activists wanted to go beyond the *Plessy* doctrine that had kept black and white colleges separate but not in fact equal.

From the early 1900s to the 1950s, Oberlin encouraged students to learn the importance of service through participation in faith-based youth organizations, such as the YMCA-YWCA and those run by local churches, and to recognize an individual's character along with his or her academic achievement. This model of social justice was rooted in white evangelical Christian social activism and, as such, was not without its own intrinsic race and gender biases. Furthermore, this ethos of cultural diversity did not always embrace religious diversity; however, if religious differences had limited the number of Catholics and Jews admitted to the student body before 1920, Oberlin's admission officers acted over time to make each incoming class of students more diverse and representative. College students also pushed for human rights and educational opportunity abroad by taking service and learning to Asia, Natal, South Africa, the Near East, and elsewhere under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the Oberlin Shansi Memorial Association. At these mission posts, or stations, Oberlin students encountered firsthand the impact of imperialism or neocolonialism.

The problem of the color line in the United States during and after World War II proved a difficult one to tackle.⁴⁰ By 1940, for instance, a collective effort had begun at the local level to reestablish Oberlin as an oasis of interracial harmony. As students began to couple the quest for social integration and fairness with the advancement of equal educational opportunity, attitudes toward physical differences and racial classifications began to change, ever so slowly. Students sought to spur institutional change by questioning the authority of presidents and demanding a role in the decision-making process. As the selected documents and accompanying annotation demonstrate, students challenged discrimination wherever it arose, whether it barred a black student from dancing with a white student, getting a haircut in town, or joining white classmates at a local restaurant. Beginning in 1946, some students and faculty participated in exchanges with the nation's leading historically black colleges to gain a better understanding of race in America and an appreciation for the viewpoint of others. Emboldened by the ideas of social psychology, those who fought for the

welfare of minorities often themselves came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. They included many sons and daughters of Christian ministers and missionaries as well as a growing number of Jewish students. Even though Oberlin no longer branded itself as a Christian nondenominational college after 1953, the social reformist tone set by students nonetheless benefited from the presence on campus of a graduate school of theology until 1965.⁴¹

During the first six decades of the twentieth century, Oberlin College walked a tightrope to handle competing demands. Oberlin still depended on feeder high schools for most of its African American enrollees,⁴² but talented black students came from other parts of the country as well.⁴³ The college provided a relatively comfortable environment in which these students could work hard to advance their self-development through education. Perhaps Jewel C. Stradford '43, who experienced racism as a child in Chicago, best characterized Oberlin College before 1960 as something of a "dream world." Later in life, she wrote: "Racism was on the back burner, they had done away with sororities and fraternities, you couldn't have a car, and social distinctions were laid down. So when I left Oberlin [in 1943], I believed if you were nice to people and they smiled, they were going to love you."⁴⁴ Of course, her recollections of the period may differ from those of other alumni.

Many black graduates of this period, such as Carl T. Rowan '47, Gene-Ann Polk Horne '48, and Charles Blackwell '50, used their education and experience to break barriers and make a difference by carrying the banner of civil rights for the disadvantaged and the afflicted among their race. Their Oberlin experience, which informed their mostly nonviolent mode of agitation, included learning how to fight discrimination by working with whites in the public arena.⁴⁵ During the era of Jim Crow, many black Americans still chose Oberlin over other northern schools like Carleton, Swarthmore, and Williams,⁴⁶ and even over the best of the historical black colleges and Howard University in Washington, D.C.⁴⁷

A critical change in the history of black education in America occurred in 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* that racially separate public education was inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional. Activist students at Oberlin and elsewhere took note of this groundbreaking school desegregation decision, and the

problem of the color line in American society took on a new urgency. The case opened up several generations of litigation and led to the modern civil rights movement for African Americans and for other minorities. Over the next twenty-five years, civil rights activists at mostly all-white Oberlin pressed the board of trustees and the administration not only for more active recruitment of minority students and faculty but also for a reevaluation of the institution's standards for academic performance and its handling of social and cultural change. These difficult issues were at the heart of an Oberlin liberal arts education. The addition of race relations courses in the late 1940s attracted black students to the department of sociology, and in 1957 the history department offered one of the first academic courses on "the Negro in American History."⁴⁸ A number of speakers arrived on campus to reinforce the students' demands for change, including the continued need to account for the influence of African heritage in the history of the United States. Among those who gave addresses or held forums on race between 1950 and 1965 were Ralph J. Bunche, Melville Herskovits, Martin Luther King Jr. (three times), Roy Wilkins, and Whitney M. Young Jr.

After 1968, Oberlin slowly began to realize that it was not easy to live up to the national reputation it had earned in the nineteenth century, particularly as it had squandered its leading position on interracial education and coeducation. The expansion of higher education in America forced Oberlin to compete with a greater number of colleges for minority students. By the late 1960s, a growing number of faculty members supported efforts to admit more black students and to recognize their achievements. For some, the pace of recruitment was too slow. The pressure on Oberlin's admission counselors was enormous. They sometimes sought transfer students from Cuyahoga Community College in nearby Cleveland, Ohio; Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio; and the predominantly black college Central State, in Wilberforce, Ohio.⁴⁹ They also had to attract and recruit African Americans living in the nation's urban centers—like Cleveland, Detroit, and New York City—who differed greatly in their level of academic preparedness from minority students of former years. Darrick Strange '73, from Detroit, recalls that his student life was made easier because of the role played by the black churches of Oberlin. According to transfer student Joyce Baker, black students who had grown up in Oberlin had an advantage over their urban counterparts. Not only did these local

recruits know the small town and receive support from their families, but they also could count on Rev. Fred L. Steen, pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, and on Oberlin-educated admissions counselors like Alphonzia “Al” Wellington Jr.⁵⁰ From the outset, what proved troublesome for the college was its lack of innovative spirit and the financial means to adapt a traditional academic curriculum to reflect the experiences and culture of minority students in contemporary America.⁵¹

Despite this incremental progress by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, many African American students had become impatient with the status quo, claiming that the college was still too white and too privileged. Some asked whether black Americans had possibly outgrown Oberlin. Even as the sometimes struggling college grappled with the dual issues of admission and retention of black students, senior administrators were slow to recognize that Oberlin was no longer the white liberal arts college of choice for an African American to attend. Other equally outstanding colleges had caught up with Oberlin in appealing to black students, and some of them had more money to offer in scholarships and financial aid. Unable to compete as effectively as they had in the past, Oberlin’s academic leaders were in a quandary over how to sustain the college’s legacy of black education against inroads by schools with billion-dollar endowments. Additionally, larger numbers of blacks were opting to attend historically black colleges rather than predominantly white institutions.⁵²

In short, the recruitment initiatives were not working. True, Oberlin College had begun reclaiming its cultural heritage of education irrespective of race as far back as 1964. In that year, the Rockefeller Foundation funded the Special Educational Opportunities Program (SEOP), a three-pronged program designed to identify future applicants (black and white) deserving of a college education, to reestablish Oberlin’s place in black education in America, and to join seven other institutions in breaking the color line in education. The SEOP was less of a crash program for Oberlin than it was for some of the other schools because of the college’s long history of admitting talented black students from varied social classes. These schools competed with the nation’s historical black colleges for the same pool of talented black students, and, of course, Oberlin’s largely race-based admissions program coincided with increased national attention on the education of minority students. When Oberlin’s competitors adopted coeducation and

admitted minority students, they undermined the college's historical advantage in admissions.⁵³

This renewed commitment to the advancement of cultural diversity and social justice for black Americans required the board of trustees to reexamine institutional structures and practices, such as the admissions process, budget, curriculum, recruitment of faculty, employment of administrative staff, and governance. The contributions of blacks to America's national identity also had to be acknowledged. The powerful voice of Martin Luther King Jr. and his death in service to the civil rights cause did much to highlight racial disparities in this country; his service helped to launch the civil rights laws advanced in the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, which helped move America into the modern era of multicultural education.

Opening the doors of the college to often underprepared first-generation and minority students led to radical change at this highly selective independent coed college. Oberlin College, like other public and private higher educational institutions, had to reconfigure its admissions budget to expand its applicant pool; to recruit more black students; to establish a black studies program; to recruit black faculty; to create support mechanisms within the Department of Residential Life, an Afro-American program boardinghouse, and a black culture week; and to consider other special programs for African Americans. The use of race-based policies was new to some members of the community: some concluded that the admission of larger numbers of minorities would weaken academic standards and result in a drop in applications, while others worried about the vulnerability of African Americans living among white and mainly wealthier peers.⁵⁴

By the time President Robert K. Carr left office in December 1969, Oberlin's educational program was proactive:⁵⁵ the issue was one of keeping the college "different and attractive to applicants."⁵⁶ Senior administrators under President Robert W. Fuller found themselves having to accept new ways of thinking about cultural diversity (and its benefits) within the context of an Oberlin education and American democracy. In an effort to reaffirm its historical commitment to students of color in the rising generation, the college found itself admitting more black students of higher academic risk. Unlike earlier students of predominantly middle-class background—exemplars of W. E. B. Du Bois's "talented tenth"—many of these black students were academically disadvantaged, less able to pay for

their education, and behaviorally less disciplined.⁵⁷ In rejecting the older notions of Booker T. Washington, the new militants were also more likely to identify with separatist notions of black power.⁵⁸ The black power movement called for separate dorms or program houses, outlets such as culture week, and the establishment of a newspaper to support a black agenda.⁵⁹

On the other hand, the presence of an increased number of black students on the campus during the 1970s created an important and positive critical mass. The enlargement of this minority group enabled the college to reclaim the Oberlin tradition, to advance interracial understanding throughout the student body and faculty, and to foster a black group identity. Before long, however, black students found that they were not the only minority constituency. Oberlin's multicultural setting also included Asian Americans, Latinos, and members of other minority groups. Competition arose among the several communities of minorities, which a new multicultural resource center helped mediate. The African Americans' important tie to the college's history came up in the March 2005 debate over the institution's strategic plan that advanced financial sustainability. They had concluded that the strategic plan had not fully considered Oberlin's commitment to African Americans.⁶⁰

In the wake of the two June 2003 U.S. Supreme Court cases on the use of race in admissions in higher education at the University of Michigan (*Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*), Oberlin College once again had to consider how preferences for minorities would continue to count. The two Michigan cases required that public universities not use numerical quotas or numerically differential standards while at the same time recognizing the value of color in building a diverse student body. In short, the judicial rulings required the school to treat applicants only as individuals and emphasized that it could not determine admission issues based solely on race.⁶¹ The court's reinterpretation of the principles of affirmative action did not legally require Oberlin College—a private institution—to change its admission policy. The decision in *Grutter*, however, was a doctrinal compromise the college could embrace because institutional leaders believed that diversity built stronger communities and fostered greater harmony between and among ethnic or racial groups.⁶²

Oberlin's senior leadership accepted the federal court's action in the *Grutter* case as a road map for its own race-conscious affirmative action in admissions. Oberlin had a good system, which had followed the old Harvard

and Princeton University model where race was but one element in a holistic approach to a student's application. Oberlin did not admit persons solely because of their race. The University of Michigan cases also reaffirmed the flexible race-conscious policies found in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1978 landmark decision in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*.⁶³

Oberlin's pioneering efforts in the nineteenth century to build community and to advance educational opportunities for black Americans were evolutionary. They were not a straight, unbroken line of progress, and the ups and downs in the record of this diverse community are visible in the twentieth century, as well. The Oberlin story of commitment to multicultural education in the first decade of the twenty-first century is likely to follow a similar pattern of moderate actions, albeit with more legal consideration. Strategically, Oberlin College is, perhaps, better positioned in 2008 than it was in 1968 to raise its game if it can do a better job of drawing a distinction between the things it can do and cannot do well.