

Cole, Eddie. *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the Struggle for Black Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. xi + 376 pages. Hardback, \$29.95.

A history of mostly white college presidents may seem like an unexpected way to contribute to the scholarly literature on the Black Freedom Movement, but this is exactly what scholar of higher education history Eddie Cole sets out to do in *The Campus Color Line*. Based on extensive research in dozens of archival collections, *The Campus Color Line* is the first study to make college presidents' offices, "where numerous racial practices were conceived and facilitated," its focal point (p. 10). Acting as institutional guardians, college presidents sought to negotiate conflicting interests ranging from trustees, faculty, students, and alumni to community members, journalists, government officials, and foundation officers. In the process, Cole argues, college presidents played an outsized role in shaping racial politics and practices "both inside and outside of the educational sphere," including access to education, fair housing, employment opportunities, free speech, and desegregation (p. 10).

Focusing on the period from 1948 to 1968, each chapter highlights a college president or small set of academic leaders from one institution who shaped a major issue related to racial politics. Martin D. Jenkins, president of Morgan State College in Baltimore, serves as the anchor for Chapter 1. He demonstrates the extent to which Black college presidents relied on hidden networks and behind the scenes organizing to challenge racial practices, disputing the general characterization of Black college presidents as deferential to white interests. The remaining six chapters focus on white academic leaders, highlighting the influential role college presidents played in shaping housing policy at the local, state, and national levels; negotiating institutional autonomy from new forms of university governance structure and state-level politics; devising strategies to avoid violent conflict resulting from desegregation; brokering a balance between free

speech policies and strategies intended to promote racial and intellectual diversity; and setting the priorities of affirmative action, with the self-serving motives of elite academic leaders ultimately undermining the earlier, more capacious system-wide goals of affirmative action programs. While Cole emphasizes the extent to which much of these presidents' work happened behind the scenes, taken together, these chapters show how and why positive publicity around questions of diversity became increasingly indispensable in the calculations of white university administrators.

The Campus Color Line will be particularly enlightening for scholars interested in truth and execution of those programs in ways that disproportionately displaced African American residents. Had University of Chicago's administration acknowledged the institution's role in perpetuating local and national housing discrimination, Cole's work implies, perhaps Beale would have been willing to engage with student and community partners to devise more equitable policies.

Most of the chapters successfully place the actions of particular college presidents within larger networks and cohorts, thus demonstrating how one or a small number of college presidents became "a driving force" on some central issue of racial politics, such as housing or affirmative action policy (p. 10). Occasionally, however, it is not clear that the actions of particular presidents grounding Cole's analysis carried this level of national influence. Chapter 5 considers how University of Alabama (UA) president Frank Anthony Rose helped prevent the outbreak of violence at UA over the admission of Vivian Malone and James Hood, despite his personal ambivalence on desegregation. While the chapter demonstrates "the significant, yet often quiet, role that college presidents played in influencing racial policies and procedures," the analysis stops short of arguing that Rose's actions transformed racial politics in higher education or beyond (p. 232). This issue is less a weakness and more of a byproduct of the work's ambitious scope—a

“panoramic view of American higher education from the 1940s through the 1960s” that “transcends regional boundaries”—which, on the whole, is *The Campus Color Line*’s great strength (p. 10).

The Campus Color Line offers new historical evidence and analysis of interest to historians, social scientists, and educationists engaged in research on higher education and Black liberation. What’s more, Cole thoroughly contextualizes each chapter in the local, regional, and national struggle for civil rights in a way that makes this text accessible to non-specialists. *The Campus Color Line* should be required reading for academics or anyone interested in how issues of racial justice became enmeshed in higher education.

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