



Dorm Hair: Black Sisterhood, Protest and Academic Excellence at Harvard, 1975-1990

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Abstract

The Association of Black Radcliffe Women (ABRW) started in the spring of 1975. They first wanted to achieve unity among the students "from all regions of the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Africa." These women were very aware of the ethnic and cultural variety among the black community of women. They also set up a big sibling program to address the divide between upper classwomen and the "freshwomen." This would allow cross-class friendships and mentorships to flourish across the divide between the Harvard Yard and upper class houses. The diverse community of black women took its first steps in strengthening its constituency.

"Let us find the strength, support, courage in our unity, combining our spirit, intellect, and resources so that we may best address our needs," ABRW Constitution, 1975



Mission Statement of the Association of Black Radcliffe Women (ABRW)

The Association of Black Radcliffe Women — founded in 1975 — was designed to be a catalyst in the Radcliffe community. It was the founders' hope that ABRW would draw together the diverse population of Black women and allow them to address issues affecting them that had previously gone unrecognized by the Harvard/Radcliffe community. ABRW has been just such a force in the lives of its present members. ABRW's primary goal has been to give both Black women and the community a heightened awareness of Black women's issues and interests. Over the years we have striven for this goal by sponsoring political forums, movie series, rap sessions, guest speakers and the like.

Creating a community of excellence: ABRW's annual college scholarship



Radcliffe President Martina Horner, right with Margo Forde, center and her mother. Ms. Forde was the recipient of the ABRW college scholarship in February, 1985.

Black Women and the Long Struggle: ABRW focused on connecting black women across academic class lines. They also set up programs to address the educational needs of its female members by forming study groups and had teach-ins to discuss the best organizational techniques. The women appropriated the word of teach-ins, an technique of civil disobedience where members learned about the political cause of the day, to describe workshops on study skills. ABRW did not eschew political engagement was open to explicit forms of activism as well. They opening advocated for the Ephraim Isaac, a popular black scholar and professor, to receive the tenure appointment in Afro-American Studies department. The group would form strategic partnerships with the BSA or Third World Organizations to fight the larger battles for admissions, divestment, or affirmative action.

