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Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926–1970* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009, \$39.95). Pp. xi + 250. ISBN 978 0 8262 1862 9.

*In Search of the Talented Tenth* focusses on the remarkable group of African American scholars who gathered at Howard University from the 1920s through the 1960s. This unique concentration of black academic talent in the nation's capital was “not accidental,” Williams informs us, but rather “a direct consequence of the racial segregation policy that prevailed in American higher education” (4). As the “capstone of Negro education,” Howard housed the most elite of the so-called segregated scholars who, while invariably trained at universities such as Harvard, Yale and the University of Chicago, understood that their chances of receiving a permanent appointment at a “white” institution were effectively nil.

Equal parts intellectual history, institutional history and collective biography, *In Search of the Talented Tenth* explores “the evolution and dilemmas of African American intellectuals in twentieth-century academia, the avenues through which they formed communities and networks, and the manner in which their scholarship and activity influenced social change and the policy process” (5). The overarching theme of Williams's study is the double-edged nature of racial segregation with respect to black intellectual life. On the one hand, segregation severely limited opportunities for career advancement of all kinds, including free participation in professional scholarly organizations, the availability of research funds and access to mainstream journals and publishers. On the other, segregation encouraged a strong sense of community among black scholars, fueled the growth of black organizations and, according to Williams, fostered vital ties between black intellectuals and “both the black middle class and the black masses” (195).

Williams introduces us to well over a dozen of Howard's most significant public intellectuals, including the Social Gospel-influenced minister Mordecai Johnson, president of the university from 1926 to 1960; the poet Sterling Brown; philosopher and Negro Renaissance impresario Alain Locke; dean of the School of Religion Benjamin Mays; sociologist and relentless critic of the “black bourgeoisie” E. Franklin Frazier; archivist and bibliophile Dorothy Porter; Nobel Prize-winning political scientist and diplomat Ralph Bunche; and the late historian John Hope Franklin. While the biographical sketches of these men and women are often informative, Williams relies heavily on eulogies and tributes, which sometimes results in maudlin or frustratingly vague assessments (Frazier, for example, is characterized as a man whose “passion for truth alone shone out clear and bright” (105)).

Williams maintains that these and other Howard scholars formed what was arguably “the most active and influential” African American intellectual community of the Jim Crow era, many of whom were pioneers in the academic domains of black studies and Africana studies (it is a strange omission that Williams does not discuss the advent of an Afro-American studies department at Howard in 1969). Perhaps Williams's most intriguing and persuasive argument, however, is that Howard University served as a “de facto policy institute,” which powerfully combined research and advocacy.

In the case of the legal battles against segregated schools, for example, professor of education and editor of the *Journal of Negro Education* Charles H. Thompson collaborated with psychologist Kenneth Clark and lawyers Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall to launch the devastating critique of separate schools that culminated in the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 1954. This and other examples demonstrate the importance of Howard as a site of engaged scholarship where many professors served not only as academics but also as activists.

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