

March 1, 2013

## On Loyalty and Activism

“Loyalty to our college does not mean that we are blind to its imperfections. Loyalty does mean that must steadily love Colby and work, as much as is in us, for her progress and improvement.”

This quote, by Ninetta Runnals, Colby’s Dean of Women from 1920-1949, was featured prominently in Lynne Connor and Jon Hallstrom’s wonderful and inspiring “Light of the Mind” performance on Wednesday afternoon. Milton Guillen also invoked it on Wednesday morning, while introducing the film “Bicentennial”; it frames the student video of the events at the Chapel Wednesday evening; and it captures precisely the sentiment we heard, again and again, from the courageous students who participated in the Colby Speech Contest, and from those who spoke at the end of the Convocation. What we heard were students who love Colby, who are loyal to Colby, but who are also committed to making Colby a better place. Their actions on Bicentennial Day were not easy, and were certainly not undertaken lightly. Witnessing them also made us very proud and honored to be members of the Colby faculty.

Forty-three years ago today another group of Colby students, members of Students Organized for Black Unity (SOBU), were secretly planning an occupation of Lorimer Chapel, to protest institutional racism on campus, and to call for specific changes in College policies and practices to improve the lives of students of color on campus. That occupation began on Monday March 2, 1970, it lasted for eight long days and nights, and it changed Colby forever.\*\* Those students, like the students who spoke up on Wednesday, were most certainly scared, ambivalent, and uncomfortable. But they were also committed to making Colby a better place, they found courage and strength in their coalition, and in the support of a large number of white allies on campus, and they took action.

We need to remember this pivotal moment in our history, as conversations about the events on Wednesday continue, and questions about “the right time and the right place” are raised. Who determines the answer to this question? Activism is always messy, disruptive, and inconvenient. It happens when people and ideas come together, when an opportunity arises to speak truth to power, when loyalty and love win out over fear and complacency. That’s what happened on Wednesday, and, just like many other times in our history, if we have the courage to continue the conversation, we will ultimately be a better place for it.

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Education

\*For more on Ninetta Runnals, see  
<http://www.colby.edu/colby.mag/issues/64/article/1434/samantha-eddy-13-learns-that-a-special-colby-woman-paved-the-way/>  
and <http://web.colby.edu/activism/stories/runnals/>

\*\*For more on the Chapel Takeover see  
<http://www.colby.edu/colby.mag/issues/37/article/601/qa-charles-terrell-70/>  
and <http://web.colby.edu/activism/stories/lorimer/>