Hofstra University and its students, staff, and faculty first had an influence on the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960’s. Students from Hofstra attended marches, faculty participated in rallies, and administrators elected impressive individuals for the Board of Trustees and encouraged well known speakers to come to campus.

This Hofstra University Library Special Collections Online Exhibit focuses on the time period from 1965-1971, and the individuals who were making news.
Hofstra students showed their support for those who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama. They marched for equal voting rights in New York as additional student groups across the country marched to show their support under the “We Shall Overcome” banner.
Civil rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was honored by Hofstra University in 1965, less than one year after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and three years before his assassination.

Hofstra President Clifford Lord and the Board of Trustees invited Dr. King to receive an honorary degree and address the graduating class of 1965.

Dr. King’s longtime attorney, Harry Wachtel (who subsequently taught political science at Hofstra, 1967-71) was a friend of Hofstra’s Board of Trustees member Bernard Fixler. Mr. Fixler and Mr. Wachtel helped to make arrangements for Dr. King’s Commencement appearance.
Tobias Simon graduated from Hofstra in 1949 and received his law degree from Harvard University in 1952. He was a tireless civil rights attorney and he is best known for defending activists including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

He provided legal counsel to activists in Florida and throughout the Deep South as early as 1960. He helped students involved in sit-in demonstrations at lunch counters who demanded service and were denied because they were black.

He often defended the rights of those who refused to take oaths of allegiance saying that they were not communists. He also defended the rights of students and protesters who peacefully demonstrated or picketed.

Simon died in 1982 at the age of 52. His memory is honored by the Supreme Court of Florida Chief Justice’s Award bearing his name, and given to Florida lawyers who carry on his tradition of unselfish advocacy.
The Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE, was founded in 1942 in Chicago. It was started by students who were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings of nonviolent resistance. It advocated sit-ins and other peaceful demonstrations as a means to change. By 1968 the chair of the organization had changed several times and the current ideology embraced the phrase “Black Power” and looked to economic development and community self-determination as a means of change. In 1968 Hofstra’s Homecoming Parade included this float that was sponsored by CORE.
Louis Lomax was born on August 16, 1922, in Valdosta, Georgia. He graduated in 1942 from Paine College in Augusta, where he was editor of the student newspaper. He then went on to receive an M.A. from American University and a Ph.D. from Yale University.

Throughout the 1960s, Lomax gave lectures on college campuses. He came to Hofstra in 1969 to talk to both faculty and students about race relations and civil rights. He held “rap sessions,” getting people to speak their mind and trying to inform them about organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

His most well-known book, *To Kill a Black Man*, about the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, was published in 1969. In that same year, he was hired by Hofstra University, first as a visiting professor teaching humanities courses, social sciences, and American studies, and then in 1970 as a member of the newly formed Black Studies Department. He moved to Baldwin Harbor and began work on a three-volume history as a writer-in-residence at Hofstra.

Lomax was killed on July 30, 1970, in a car accident near Santa Rosa, New Mexico, when his brakes failed. He was working on a new documentary about the role of the FBI in Malcolm X’s death. Some believe Lomax’s crash was not accidental.
After the start of the Vietnam War, student protestors began to question what they labelled “the establishment.” This included their university professors and administrators, as well as any military, political, or media outlet.

Students at Hofstra began to protest and demand expansion of student rights, as well as the abolishment of mandatory physical education, the abolishment of mandatory ROTC participation, more student input into curriculum, and the formation of an African-American Studies department.

Sit-ins were held and a takeover of the administrative offices then housed in Weller Hall occurred on April 29, 1969.
Speaking to a packed auditorium of over 700, Afeni Shakur told the student audience that “The revolution is here.” Shakur, born Alice Faye Williams, was part of the Black Panthers, who in 1970 were on trial for participating in many bombings.

She was her own criminal defense attorney and was acquitted on all 156 counts against her. In 1971 she gave birth to her baby, Tupac Shakur, and raised her son in the Bronx.
Lamar Cox was born in Buford, Georgia, in 1933. He moved to Hempstead in 1959 after going to the University of Cincinnati for electrical engineering and receiving a Master's in applied mathematics from Adelphi in 1951.

Cox became interested in the problem of integrated housing in 1959 and worked with engineers from Sperry Gyroscope Co. in establishing the Long Island Council for Integrated Housing. He eventually became the chairman of CORE and worked for the rights of minorities on Long Island. He was asked to be on Hofstra's Board of Trustees in 1970 and remained on the Board until 1976.
Canute Parris started at Hofstra as a professor in the Political Science Department in 1968. He was also the director of Hofstra’s African Studies Institute which was funded by Hofstra, Nassau Community College, and the Nassau County Youth Board. In the summer, the Institute held a six week program for children from 6-16 who lived in the Town of Hempstead. The courses were geared towards black culture and history.

Parris became the first faculty director of the Africana Studies Department at Hofstra in 1971. He became politically active in Long Island politics and tried to show how blacks could have influence in the political sphere, but they had to get involved.
In 1970, Hofstra held its first Black Festival of the Arts. Films and fashion shows were held and students attended lectures by Hofstra professors speaking about current topics.

In 1971, the Weekend was sponsored by the Organization of Black Collegians and among the invited speakers were poet LeRoi Jones (later known as Amiri Baraka) and boxing heavy weight Muhammad Ali (who was once known as Cassius Clay).
Ali was not only regarded for his prowess in the boxing ring, but also because he held strict to his beliefs. In 1967 after changing his name and joining the Nation of Islam, Ali refused to be conscripted into the Vietnam War. After his conviction on draft evasion charges he was stripped of his boxing title and didn’t fight for almost four years. He was outspoken about his beliefs and spoke out at college campuses against the war and for racial justice. Ali appealed his conviction and in 1971 it was overturned by the US Supreme Court. In 2008, Hofstra held a conference entitled, “The Greatest: From Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali.”
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For more information about any of these topics or individuals, please visit the Department of Special Collections located in the Joan & Donald E. Axinn Library.