

# Tougaloo College



Dr. Ernst Borinski Endowed Chair  
Proposal

*Photos courtesy of the Tougaloo College Archives, Civil Rights Collection  
at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Clarence Hunter, Curator*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: ERNST BORINSKI ENDOWED CHAIR PROPOSAL TOUGALOO COLLEGE

Ernst Borinski (1901-1983) was professor of sociology at Tougaloo College in Mississippi from 1947 until his death in 1983. He made an indelible impact on students, colleagues, black and white Mississippians, members of the Jewish community locally and nationally, sociologists throughout the South, and others across America. Tougaloo has undertaken to establish an endowed chair, “the Ernst Borinski Chair of Social Sciences,” to keep alive the memory of his remarkable life and to further the goals for which he worked.

After escaping the Holocaust and serving in the U.S. Army, Borinski earned a degree in education in 1946 from the University of Chicago. In 1947 he came to Tougaloo, where he played a pivotal role in reshaping a fledgling sociology program. He earned a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Pittsburgh in 1954. As a German Jewish émigré, Borinski understood that freedom is not just a matter of laws but also a state of mind. His discussions on sociological issues forced students to debate ideas. His mission was to develop students capable of thinking critically about the world in which they lived. Borinski lived simply in faculty housing at Tougaloo. From Tougaloo, he launched a stream of graduates who have spread across America, earning doctorates and master’s degrees from prestigious graduate programs. The Southern Sociological Society accorded Borinski its highest award, the Roll of Honor. The American Sociological Association gave him its first Sydney Spivack Award (for sociological research applied to intergroup relations).

Tougaloo College and its students played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement. Many of those students were in Borinski’s classes. Throughout the 1960s, Borinski was kept under surveillance by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, partly because he maintained relationships with whites in the state. As well, Borinski’s Social Science Forums had become notorious, because they provided open dialogue on critical issues and attracted large interracial audiences from on and off campus.

This endowed chair will help Tougaloo attract a top-tier professor it could not otherwise interest or afford. It will help the college in its central mission: providing students disadvantaged by race and class with education that is academically exciting and ethically inspiring. It will honor a great man, ensuring that his name and story endure at the institution that was so dear to his heart. It will also provide a marvelous stimulus to Tougaloo College and will be the first fully endowed chair at the college.

Tougaloo hopes to complete the Borinski campaign successfully by the summer of 2014. Doing so  
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will require at least \$2,000,000. Send checks, earmarked “Borinski Chair,” to Tougaloo College, Office of Institutional Advancement, 500 West County Line Road, Tougaloo, MS, 39174. Pledges of future support and estate bequests are also welcome. The campaign also welcomes your active involvement – contact Donald Cunnigen, [donaldcunnigen@cox.net](mailto:donaldcunnigen@cox.net). Thank you!

## ERNST BORINSKI ENDOWED CHAIR PROPOSAL TOUGALOO COLLEGE

### **Introduction: An Unforgettable Human Being**

Ernst Borinski (1901-1983) was professor of sociology at Tougaloo College in Mississippi from 1947 until his death in 1983. During almost 40 years, he made an indelible impact on students, colleagues, African American and white Mississippians, members of the Jewish community in Mississippi and nationally, sociologists throughout the South, and many others across America, even some who knew him only in passing. Tougaloo College has undertaken to establish an endowed chair, “the Ernst Borinski Chair of Social Sciences,” to keep alive the memory of his remarkable life, to construct an institutional memorial that will prompt others to learn of his achievements and character, and to further the goals for which he worked during his extraordinary career in Mississippi.

Borinski’s character was woven into the relationships that he cultivated with his students through the Social Science Laboratory, Social Science Forum, United Nations Day, and various other activities. His life course illustrated his love of ideas, freedom, and humanity. The path that he walked as a Tougaloo faculty member and scholar included impressive elements that enabled and fostered excellence in an academic department at a small liberal arts college. The ideals he personified provided models for countless others as they constructed – and continue to construct – their own life paths.

### **Borinski’s Background**

Born in 1901 to a relatively prosperous secular Jewish family in Upper Silesia along the German-Polish border, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Halle Muenchen in 1924 and studied law in Halle, Saale, Hamburg, and Berlin, Germany from 1925 to 1928. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Berlin in 1928 and an International Law degree from the Academy of International Law at the Hague, Netherlands, in 1930. He then taught legal rights to workers at the Zeiss Optical Works, served as a judge in the General Court of Kelbra, and practiced law in Erfurt, Germany, with a Jewish fraternity brother from 1929 to 1932. Forecasting the development of Nazi Germany, he escaped to America in 1938 and served overseas in the United States Army during World War II as a translator.

Starting a new life in America after the war, Borinski received a Master of Arts degree in education in 1946 from the University of Chicago. It was during his Chicago study that he became familiar

with the American Missionary Association schools, such as Tougaloo College. Through those contacts, he learned about and accepted a position as a sociology professor at Tougaloo in 1947, where he played a pivotal role in reshaping a fledgling sociology program. Tougaloo had offered its first sociology course as early as 1899-1900. Until Borinski's arrival, however, the sociology program lacked clear focus and direction. With his leadership and commitment, it developed into a strong academic department within the new Division of Social Sciences. During his tenure at Tougaloo, he received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in sociology from the University of Pittsburgh in 1954. Despite the demands of his teaching responsibilities, he found time to publish articles, including articles on civil rights law and segregation derived from his dissertation research.

As a German Jewish émigré, Borinski understood the power of ideas and their potential to liberate a people. He came to Tougaloo with a message that freedom is not just an issue of laws but also a state of mind. Borinski's classroom discussions on sociological issues forced students to debate ideas. As a Tougaloo faculty member, he felt his mission was to find and develop students capable of thinking critically about the world in which they lived. According to sociologist Maria Lowe, his teaching philosophy emphasized the symbiotic relationship between academic work, activism, and civic responsibility.

Borinski lived simply in faculty housing at Tougaloo throughout the last half of his life. From Tougaloo, he launched a stream of graduates who have spread across America. As a sociology professor, he encouraged students to command their material thoroughly and thoughtfully. He also encouraged them to present scholarly papers at professional meetings such as the Southern Sociological Society (SSS), Southwestern Social Science Association, and Association of Social and Behavioral Scientists (ASBS). Borinski modeled professional behavior by preparing and presenting extraordinary papers at the Southern Sociological Society and by bringing students to these meetings whenever they were held nearby. He was known throughout Mississippi as the best and most impressive sociologist in the state. His reputation – and that of his students – for excellence in sociology extended across the South. In 1979, the SSS accorded Borinski its highest award, the Roll of Honor. Only two other sociologists had ever won that award previously, both from large departments at state universities. He was co-recipient of the American Sociological Association's first Sydney Spivack Award (for sociological research applied to intergroup relations) and had been a mentor of his co-recipient that year. After his death in 1983, the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association gave him a special memorial tribute at its annual meeting.

Throughout his life at Tougaloo, he maintained extensive correspondence with people and non-governmental organizations around the nation. He then used this far-flung network to connect Tougaloo students with summer jobs, internships, graduate study, Operation Crossroads Africa, the Peace Corps, and other opportunities. Thus he encouraged them to transcend the limitations of the segregated environment in which they lived.

In 1963, he gave an impassioned impromptu talk at the business session of the Mississippi Sociological Society, meeting at Millsaps College that year. He pointed to a white student whom he had brought along to the meeting, an exchange student from Brown University. “My Tougaloo students know where I am today. They know I have brought [this student]. They know I did not bring them. I can no longer attend on this basis.” Then he issued an invitation to the Mississippi Sociologists to come to Tougaloo for its 1964 meeting. They agreed unanimously, and Dr. Borinski prepared a lavish event, with nationally-known sociologists from outside the state as plenary speakers. Unfortunately, except for one graduate student from Mississippi State University, only the sociologists from University of Mississippi, having been “freed” by the existence of James Meredith on their campus, attended the event. Borinski was ahead of his time. (The Mississippi Sociologists died out as an organization at that point, later to be reconstituted as the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association.)

Tougaloo College and its students played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement. At the Jackson Public Library in 1961 nine Tougaloo students staged the first Mississippi student sit-in. Many of those students were in Borinski’s classes. After this bold action on the part of Tougaloo students, the direct action campaign took hold within the state. Throughout the 1960s, Tougaloo students challenged segregation in Mississippi institutions such as churches, concerts, train depots, bus stations, and other aspects of segregated culture. Those challenges resulted in the arrests and harassment of Tougaloo civil rights activists. During their incarceration, Borinski sent books and other course material to students to help them maintain their academic work.

The college became a refuge for civil rights activists. In some quarters, it carried the moniker of “the oasis of freedom” because it was one of the few Mississippi locations where interracial groups could gather on a basis of full equality. Some scholars have depicted it as a staging ground for social activism. Leading civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) held meetings on campus. Tougaloo’s chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was influential in the “Jackson Movement,” and the Tougaloo campus provided a platform for Medgar Evers, NAACP State Field Secretary.

With the support of the Field Foundation, Robert Moses initiated a work-study program at Tougaloo that aided many civil rights activists such as Colia Lidell in completing their college education. Many Tougaloo students were outstanding field secretaries in SNCC, including Joyce and Dorie Ladner, Euvester Simpson, Lafayette Surney, and MacArthur Cotton. Other Tougaloo students, such as Ann Moody, were active in CORE. Lawrence Guyot was an active participant in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and MFDP meetings were held on campus. The Free Southern Theater was established on the campus during the Freedom Summer of 1964. In 1965, pre-freshmen students met in the Social Science Lab to depart for the campus of Belhaven College to attend a production of the Jackson Opera, only to be turned away by Belhaven authorities

owing to their race. The culmination of the 1966 “Meredith March” was on the Tougaloo campus, where celebrities from around the country entertained the marchers the evening before their entry into Jackson.

Throughout the 1960s, Borinski was kept under surveillance by white segregationist intelligence agencies of Louisiana and Mississippi – the Louisiana and Mississippi State Sovereignty Commissions. In 1958, local Jackson newspapers acknowledged this surveillance as a result of his participation as a speaker in a Millsaps College forum with the Rev. Dr. Glenn Smiley of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission’s archives indicate that its Louisiana counterpart reported on Borinski’s speech at an American Friends Service Committee program during its annual Institute of Religion in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Sovereignty Commission and the White Citizens Council (now the Conservative Citizens Council) played a major role in the maintenance of segregation within Mississippi.

Borinski maintained strong relationships with some whites in the state and the region. In the Jackson area, these included leading religious figures in the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities, such as Father Joseph Brunini (later Bishop Brunini) and Rabbi Perry Nussbaum. Owing to his secure institutional base, Borinski was able to present views on race and religion that other whites in the state would not or could not voice. As a result of Borinski’s invitations, Brunini, Nussbaum, and other whites in the Jackson area made appearances on the campus, seeing for themselves the intellectual and social reality of African American students. Borinski also developed close relationships with a few members of the Millsaps College faculty. Beginning in the 1940s, Millsaps faculty taught history and social science courses as adjunct faculty members at Tougaloo. This arrangement helped the college to expand its course offerings. Beginning in 1968, some sociology students took courses on the Millsaps campus and some Millsaps sociology students took courses at Tougaloo. Millsaps faculty members also were guest speakers on the campus, and as noted above, Borinski returned the favor by appearing on the Millsaps campus. For white Millsaps faculty members, their participation in interracial Tougaloo events created great risk in the violent era of Mississippi’s segregated politics. Yet, Borinski and Millsaps faculty members such as Frances Coker, T. W. Lewis, and Marguerite Goodman continued their relationships throughout the period.

On a regional level, Borinski’s employment as a summer school faculty member at Duke University and Vanderbilt University augmented his meager Tougaloo salary, allowed him to develop key relationships among leaders in southern sociology, and provided contacts that were useful to the advancement of his students. At the same time, Duke and Vanderbilt faculty gained access to a perspective that could not otherwise be had in their academic worlds.

### **His Impact on Campus**

Not only through his character and example but also by his personal efforts and hard work, Ernst Borinski created program after program to improve the intellectual life of Tougaloo College. In



1948, he founded the Social Science Laboratory in the basement of an academic building. It featured a classroom, office, round-table conference hall, and a reading, study, and guidance center. Borinski created a core library in the social sciences, a Communication Center, a section of resources about the United Nations and international relations, a Job Exploration Center, and a Diagnostic and Self-Study Center. The Lab's library gave many Tougaloo students their first exposure to a wide of range of literature with varying political views such as the *New York Times* and *Christian Science Monitor* as well as a variety of works by African American and African authors. Most of the activities or "centers" associated with the Laboratory were operated mainly by Borinski, who worked personally with students to assess their academic problems and skills.

In 1952, Borinski developed the Social Science Forum to provide open dialogue on critical political, social, and economic issues. Distinguished speakers such as John Kenneth Galbraith, Eudora Welty, Medgar Evers, William Kunstler, Malvin R. Goode, James Baldwin, Hodding Carter Jr., Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Harrington, and Otto Nathan attracted large interracial audiences from on and off campus. Prior to each presentation, Borinski conducted seminars for students on important themes to be discussed in the lectures. Faculty members were encouraged to incorporate the lecture topic in their classes. Social gatherings were held before each forum, including dinner in the Lab that gave students and faculty a chance to interact with the speaker. For many students as well as some white Jackson townspeople, these gatherings provided rare opportunities to hold conversation across racial lines.

Borinski established Tougaloo's observance of United Nations Day as a tradition in the late 1950s. In segregated Mississippi of the Cold War era, no other institution dared invite guest speakers who would say anything positive about the UN. Each year, he invited a prominent speaker to the campus – national and international figures like Ralph Bunche and Pauline Frederick – to discuss important international issues. For mostly rural students who were isolated from international discussions due to the provincialism of the state, United Nations Day provided a window to wider perspectives on the world.

In 1963, Borinski organized the Social Science Advancement Institute (SSAI), using funds from a Field Foundation grant. The SSAI was developed to assist in the cultivation of the students' intellectual talents and energize the college's social science program. It provided a wide range of activities, including intercollegiate seminars, discussion groups, preparatory seminars for graduate study, programs for individual study, and tutorials.

Building on SSAI activities, faculty in Borinski's Social Science Division developed a new course for first-year students, the Freshman Seminar for the Social Sciences (FSSS). It evolved from a 1967-1968 pilot project funded by the Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education and by Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Until that time, like most United States colleges and universities, Tougaloo had routinely required "History of Western Civilization." (Later

Stanford would famously drop this requirement, followed by most other colleges.) The FSSS was an intensive interdisciplinary course taught by a team of instructors in small seminar classes. It provided students with a series of readings in social science disciplines –anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. These were organized under the chronology of African American history. In addition, guest speakers such as C. L. R. James and A. B. Spellman appeared on campus.

Within the Department of Sociology, Borinski produced graduates who went on to further study and distinction in the discipline. During the 1960s and 1970s, Tougaloo produced six Danforth Fellows and three honorable mentions, nine Woodrow Wilson Fellows, and several Ford Fellows. Most of these students studied with Dr. Borinski. In addition, a Tougaloo student was in the first cohort of American Sociological Association Minority Fellows and another in the fifth. At least 22 of Dr. Borinski's students earned doctorates (about 10 in sociology or social work) and at least 88 students earned master's degrees, including 26 M.S.W.'s. These degrees came from prestigious graduate programs such as Harvard, Washington University, University of California at Berkeley, University of Wisconsin at Madison, Fordham, Boston University, State University of New York at Stony Brook, University of Minnesota, and Michigan State.

After completing graduate and professional school training, his students became leaders in their professions. Some notable examples include sociologist and former Howard University President Joyce Ladner, sociologist and current Kentucky State University President Mary Evans Sias, and current University of Alabama School of Social Work Dean James Princeton Adams. Several students have been elected president of various professional organizations such as the Eastern Sociological Society, the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS), the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, and the ASBS. Others have been recognized by professional associations with distinguished awards such as the Society for the Study of Social Problems' Lee Founders Award, ASA's Du Bois-Johnson-Frazier Award, Mid-South Sociological Association's Sociological Spectrum Award, ASBS's W.E.B. Du Bois Award, and ABS's Joseph S. Himes Award and A. Wade Smith Award. The recognition of former Borinski students highlights the strong intellectual influence that he had on his students.

### **Why Does Tougaloo College Need the Ernst Borinski Social Science Chair?**

Tougaloo continues to attract a strong caliber of students. Recently, the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics listed Tougaloo as the fourth highest-ranking black college in freshman SAT scores, following Howard University, Spelman College, and Morehouse College. The college was listed in 2010 as fourteenth in community service among the top 100 American colleges and universities by *Washington Monthly*; and tenth among black colleges surveyed for the 2011 ranking by *US News and World Report*. However, Tougaloo has struggled to maintain the level of excellence and commitment that Dr. Borinski sought and often received from students. The sociology department, in particular, has not had a professor of national stature for some years.

Like endowed chairs at any academic institution, an endowed chair at Tougaloo College will provide a range of opportunities for the growth and development of its faculty. It will aid in recruiting new faculty; helping Tougaloo attract a top-tier professor it might not otherwise be able to interest or afford. It will also help retain current competitive faculty members by providing academic distinction and remuneration modestly above “full professor.” The professorship will include a small research and travel fund, similar but in smaller scale to the foundation grants attracted by Ernst Borinski. The Borinski professor will have an opportunity to publish, present scholarly papers, and participate in other professional activities. This will help the professor maintain a major commitment to his/her academic discipline, develop educational leadership skills, and pass this enthusiastic intellectual spark about the discipline on to students.

A second key function of this chair is to honor a great man. At present, nothing on the landscape, save only his modest tombstone, honors Ernst Borinski. (See the appendix, however, for a brief bibliography of items related to Borinski.) The permanence of an endowed chair will ensure that his name and story endure at the institution that was so dear to his heart.

If this campaign succeeds, it will provide a marvelous stimulus to Tougaloo College. It will be the first fully endowed chair at the college. Endowed chairs are terribly important, because they provide basic operating expenses for institutions. Although not easily, Tougaloo has found it possible in the past to win foundation and governmental support for new programs. It continues to prove very difficult to get support from such sources for the basic task of the institution: educating undergraduates. Tougaloo needs such funds. It cannot possibly charge its students — who come from some of the most deprived communities in the United States — what it costs to educate them. Tougaloo is seeking additional endowed chairs in the natural sciences and a “Mississippi Civil Rights Movement Chair.” The success of this effort to fund the Ernst Borinski Chair will provide an invigorating example for those efforts. Tougaloo hopes to complete the Borinski campaign successfully by the summer of 2014.

The Borinski Endowed Social Sciences Chair’s projected economic plan is as follows: The endowed chair will require a funding base of at least \$2,000,000. Invested at 5%, \$2,000,000 yields \$100,000/year. Of that \$100,000, \$20,000 will be reinvested so the endowment can grow to keep pace with inflation. The Borinski Professor’s salary will be approximately \$55,000. He or she will also receive a \$5,000 research and travel fund, to be used for attending meetings in his/her discipline and/or speaking engagements on behalf of social change, stipends for students as research assistants, books and other equipment necessary for scholarship, etc. The professor will receive about \$20,000 in benefits (health care, retirement, etc.).

Even with a principal of \$2,000,000, Tougaloo might have to return to the donors for additional cash if investments plunge. Indeed, only because Tougaloo faculty members work so hard for

so little can \$2,000,000 suffice. Most other institutions of higher education demand more for an endowed chair. Moreover, we are very aware that to recruit a professor of national stature today requires more than \$55,000 – perhaps \$85,000. In turn, this requires an endowment of at least \$2,500,000. If contributions to this chair total \$2,500,000, that would be a great help to the college in an appropriate commemoration of Ernst Borinski’s great legacy. .

Although Ernst Borinski spent half a lifetime trying, he did not redress the centuries of injustice that afflicted African Americans in Mississippi. The campaign for full economic opportunity and civil and social rights continues in the nation’s poorest state. This endowed chair promises to recognize and advance that work, in several ways. It will help Tougaloo College in its central mission: providing students disadvantaged by race and class with education that is academically exciting and ethically inspiring. The Borinski Endowed Social Sciences Chair will continue his work in the social and intellectual context in which it began. It will help Tougaloo carry forward the role that Borinski charted by stimulating the entire metropolitan area through the presence of a major scholar. It will memorialize the contribution that Jewish educators have made to the cause of social justice in America. It will keep alive the memory of a most interesting person who found ways to work creatively for justice even in the most challenging of times and places. Thus, the legacy of Ernst Borinski, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, friend, mentor, and extraordinary role model will be preserved for many decades to come.

## RESOURCES

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