

Claude Dansby: Legendary Mathematics Professor at Morehouse College

Johnny Houston



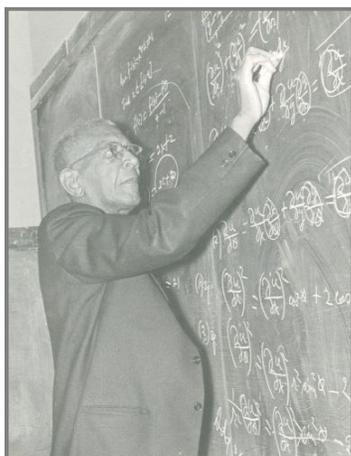
Claude Dansby

With the arrival of the year 2017, Morehouse College has been in existence for 150 years (1867-2017) as a dynamic and expanding institution, especially in STEM areas. During this Sesquicentennial period of longevity, the college has been fortunate to have had many distinguished men to matriculate as students and many impressive persons to take positions of employment, especially professors. Over the years the

impacts of many of these outstanding students and valuable professors have had various levels of influence. As time moved forward, some of these names drifted into anonymity. However, the mathematics student, Claude B. Dansby and the employee, Prof. Claude B. “Pop” Dansby reached such exceptional heights in the first 150 years of Morehouse Legacy that the name Dansby will forever be recognized if the true and comprehensive story of mathematics at Morehouse College is told.

Claude B. Dansby immortalized his personhood and his mathematical contributions during the half century plus years that he was at Morehouse College. It was my good fortunate to have been one of his mathematics students for four years (1960-1964). This article is written to share some insights about Claude B. Dansby and mathematics at Morehouse during “The Dansby Era: (1917 -1967)” as well as enlighten the reader on mathematics at Morehouse College during the “Pre – Dansby Era (1867-1917) and the Post – Dansby Era (1967-2017).

It is the writer’s belief that the prominence of mathematics at Morehouse College today has its firm foundation on the contributions of the Legendary Mathematics Professor Claude B. “Pop” Dansby (1889 – 1992) who devoted more than a half century of his life and practically all of his professional employment at



Morehouse College. In the Pre-Dansby Era, mathematics at Morehouse was “Comprehensive Arithmetic” in the Post Dansby Era, the Mathematics Department at Morehouse received (in 2016) the prestigious America Mathematical Society (AMS) “Making the Difference Award,” the first HBCU to receive the award. Prof. Claude B. Dansby (B.S., Morehouse; M.S.

University of Chicago) was one of the most outstanding students and faculty in the history of Morehouse College.

As a student, he learned quickly and easily; as a teacher, he was a master of his craft and a great communicator who opened doors in mathematics for all of his students, propelling some to their highest heights (10 of his students earned the PhD degree in mathematics). It was said of Professor Dansby that he taught with such clarity and motivation that he could make complicated mathematics so simple that if a “wayfaring fool” accidentally wandered into his classes, he would understand the mathematics being presented.

The annals of history proved that he was legendary. He took weak students and made them average; he took average students and made them superior; and he took superior students and made them exceptional. First, he taught with enthusiasm and great clarity; secondly, he went beyond the “Call of Duty” to assist students who wanted to learn; thirdly, he challenged his students to be the “Best” we could be; finally, he exhibited, as a professional and as an educator, the kind of attributes of the teacher - scholar, that president Mays articulated in our Class Charge and challenged those of us who chose to teach:

“Be so knowledgeable in what you teach, so devoted to your students, so inspiring in your teaching, and so stimulating in your writing that your students will say of you, ‘He was Born to Teach’.”

Professor Dansby and Morehouse President Benjamin E. Mays both began their professional careers at Morehouse together in the early 1920’s; both retired from Morehouse the same year, 1967. Today (2017), fifty (50) years after his/their retirement(s), mathematics at Morehouse College is taught in Dansby Hall and Mays Hall (erected next to Dansby Hall). Dozens of Morehouse mathematics alumni have earned PhD degrees in mathematics and thousands of Prof. Dansby’s mathematics students have become successful alumni of Morehouse College.

What greater Legacy can one have than that of successfully teaching mathematics to our youth.

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