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SOBLU at 50

Kardelen Koldas

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SOBLU AT 50

By Kardelen Koldas '15 | Photography by Edwin J. Torres '12



Left page: Juan Luna '20 (left),
Jamya Brown '23 (right)
Right page: Sarah Martinez Roth '11
(top), Dontie Tate '05 (left),
James "Jimmy" Reynolds '90 (right),
Doris Ford Mathis '73 (bottom)

“SOBHU was really a way for me to be rooted in an experience of being an African-American, being from the South, being in this new experience and just really needing some type of a safety net, to be able to know that there were people that always had your back.”

—James “Jimmy” Reynolds '90, former SOBHU president



“SOBLU is home, it’s a place where
my people were—
they were just loving.”

—Marnay Avant '18, former SOBLU president



(left to right, top to bottom)
Kris de Luna '20,
Ashley Gissel Olvera '20,
Kenny Douyon '23,
Reagan Dennis '23,
Juan Luna '20,
Robnique Davy '22

For the online story, visit colby.edu/mag/SOBLU

The Timelessness That is SOBLU

For Edwin Torres '12, today's club represents the "family" he found as a student.



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Photographing for *Colby Magazine* has prompted me to revisit the meaning of home. What is it that best reminds us of home? Is it a porch with a slow rocker? Is it the presence of loved ones? Is it the smell? Or is it the collective feeling that we are all in this together? It's a combination of all of these things.

As I sat on the porch at the home of Doris Ford Mathis '73 in Washington, D.C., it clicked. I took photographs of her with a twin-lens reflex camera of the 1970s. She was part of the founding of Students Organized for Black and Latinx Unity (SOBLU). Doris made it clear. The reason the club was created then was simple: to have a sense of home and community in a renowned institution that was far away from home.

As a student from the Bronx, N.Y., I traveled to Colby from a high school that was 98 percent Hispanic and Black. There was a certain culture and rhythm to us whenever we hung out or even interacted. I found this same rhythm at SOBLU. The club represented a sense of home and family. In this new home, I would do a variety of things. I would take a nap on the infamous couch after lunch before biology class, listen to some Biggie and Tupac, or vote on strong club initiatives.

The sense of comfort in knowing that you all share similar perspectives and are looking out for each other—that was a powerful feeling. Whether it was the 1970s or decades later, the young, ambitious faces that filled the room and created a sense of home, now in the present, remained the same. It is this timeless quality that I was looking to instill in my work. Working on this photo essay was a true blessing. I had the opportunity to meet SOBLU members from almost every major era in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Maine. It was a process of sharing stories and catching up on life since Colby. With the students on campus, I felt incredibly humbled to be let into their “era of SOBLU.” I was wholeheartedly impressed with how they fostered community and contributed to the greater campus through their maturity. I listened to their stories, and I embraced them.

I made these photographs with the intention of preserving a slice of “home” for a club with an immense history. Many of my photographs were shot on medium-format film and hand developed at my home. This slower process helped my subjects slow down from their usual routine and reflect on the importance of our collective narrative. For me, this process filled my heart with a warm feeling, and I was humbled to be able to listen and see.

—Edwin J. Torres '12





Members of SOBU, along with Student Government Association leaders, delivered speeches at the entrance of Lorimer Chapel, which SOBU occupied in March 1970.



“I think it’s extraordinary that the organization has not only endured but has thrived. It has changed with the times over these last 50 years. So that’s extraordinary to me.”

—Charles Terrell '70



SOBLU AT 50 ONLINE

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WHEN STUDENTS ORGANIZED FOR BLACK UNITY (SOBU) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1969 AT COLBY, SOBU-like organizations were being formed on college campuses across the country as part of the Black revolutionary movement that started a few years earlier. These organizations became a way for Black students to unite, be visible, and have their voices heard.

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IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE, in celebratory occasions, or just during day-to-day activities, SOBLU, with all its names and iterations, has served as a refuge. It became a home on Mayflower Hill. It provided a loving and caring family at Colby. At times it became a nexus to push for change on campus.

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WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY MORE THAN 40 MEMBERS ACROSS THE WHOLE FIVE-DECADE SPECTRUM, WE PREPARED AN ONLINE STORY TO TAKE YOU BACK IN TIME WITH WORDS, IMAGES, AND VIDEOS. There's still much more to be preserved from the first 50 years of SOBLU. As you to get absorbed in this online story covering the organization's past, we invite you to build onto its history with your contributions, leaving a more enriched story for future generations of Colbians whose lives are touched by SOBLU directly or indirectly.

EXPLORE MORE DEEPLY

FROM THE VOICES OF FORMER AND CURRENT SOBLU MEMBERS, you will learn about SOBLU in different eras and uncover new dimensions of this landmark organization.

FIRST PERSON ACCOUNTS by Charles Terrell '70, Sebsibe Mamo '70, Doris Ford Mathis '73, and Vincent Guess '73 will take you inside Lorimer Chapel, which was occupied by SOBU in March 1970.

PERSONAL ESSAYS by Tionna Haynes '15, Charles Terrell '70, Kebba Tolbert '94, Claire Jimenez '06, and Juan Luna '20 and Kris De Luna '20 will show the club, Colby, and the world through their eyes.

A POWERFUL PHOTO ESSAY by a former member and award-winning photographer Edwin J. Torres '12 will show moments of SOBLU from present times and introduce you to current and former members.

For the online story, visit colby.edu/mag/SOBLU