A Backward Glance Forward: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives on Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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The American dream lies at the very heart of the American cultural ethos. At the center of the American dream is the emphatic conviction that, in this society, education opens the door to success. The belief that even the poorest American can achieve greatness with talent and hard work is one of this society's cherished cultural ideals (Hochschild, 1995). In most instances, talent is equated with educational attainment. African Americans have embraced these beliefs to the extreme. Dating back to when Black slaves were

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forbidden to learn to read and write under threat of physical harm or death, we have invested education with mythic qualities, seeing it as our hope and salvation for the future. No matter how much education African Americans achieved, they still suffered discrimination based on skin color. Nevertheless, Black people have continued to crave and to embrace education as the ultimate solution. Despite the paradox of societal stereotypes of Blacks as lazy, ignorant and mentally inferior—even as America developed history's most elaborate institutional barriers to deny African Americans equal access to learning and knowledge—Black people continued to pursue education. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) grew out of and were shaped by this striving of African Americans for education. These institutions have embodied the hopes and frustrations of a people seeking the Promised Land.

Education has long been seen as an essential foundation of democracy. The extent to which individuals are afforded the opportunity to obtain knowledge speaks volumes about openness and power relations within any society. Yet for African Americans, the centuries-old struggle for access and parity in higher education has been emblematic of their larger fight for equality and group recognition in America. As direct outgrowths of this struggle, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) embody the African American quest for education. In the face of numerous obstacles, HBCUs have functioned as multifaceted institutions, providing not only education, but also social, political, and religious leadership for the African American community. While rooted in a long, rich tradition of achieving against the odds, they are now presented with new challenges as well as opportunities for growth and change. HBCUs are called upon to continue effectively serving a community that is itself in the grip of profound change. This article looks at the past, present, and future of HBCUs, examining the contributions, key issues, challenges, and trends in their development.

THE FREEDMEN'S EDUCATION MOVEMENT, 1865–1877

From their very beginnings, HBCUs were faced with outright opposition to their existence. In the years following the American Civil War, African Americans, no longer constrained by the bonds of slavery, seized every

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opportunity to formalize and expand upon the clandestine educational practices that had functioned in slavery. Indelibly marked by their slave experience where they had been forcibly kept in a state of ignorance, Blacks invested education with great importance. Formal education was a chief means for African Americans to distance themselves unequivocally from slavery and their subordinate status in society. Education also enabled African Americans to achieve social mobility while "defending and extending" (Anderson, 1988, p. 3) their newly gained rights as citizens. Thomas Webber (1978), James Anderson (1988), and V. P. Franklin (1992) characterize the efforts of African Americans to gain and secure educational access through institution building and legislation as a social movement. By working to establish a system of universal public education, which included poor Whites as well as Blacks, in a region where education had largely been the privilege of the White upper class, African Americans were in essence attempting to transform the Southern social order.

African Americans were not alone in their struggle to secure educational access. In addition to the fierce drive for Black institutional development, the post-Civil War years also witnessed the en masse arrival of Northern missionary societies. Organizations affiliated with various religious denominations and composed of men and women who had been sympathetic to the Abolitionist cause now saw the "social uplift" of freedmen as the second phase of their work. However, these missionaries perceived Blacks as hapless victims of a corrupt and immoral system that inculcated values antithetical to "civilization" and viewed as their God-given task to both "civilize and educate" the freedmen, in so doing ensuring the survival of American society. To this end, they ventured into urban and rural Black communities throughout the South as teachers, where they established and operated educational institutions of varying levels.

The continued drive for group advancement and community empowerment by African Americans in this period necessitated the development of institutions that would produce a highly educated, politically astute generation of leaders, capable of representing Black interests within the White power structure while remaining independent from it.

> Ex-slave communities . . . believed that the masses could not achieve political and economic independence or self-determination without first becoming organized, and organization was impossible without well-trained intellectuals—teachers, ministers, politicians, managers, administrators, and businessmen. (Anderson, 1988, p. 20)

Blacks and their White allies faced opposition from Southern conservatives—representatives of the old regime who saw higher education for African Americans as a threat to White supremacy (Allen, Hunt, & Gilbert, 1997;

Morris, 1984). Their resurgent power after the demise of Radical Recon-struction, coupled with a lack of funds and insufficient numbers of quali-fied teachers, made Black independent support of institutions of higher learning next to impossible. To this end, Blacks accepted the assistance of White missionary groups, embracing the normal schools and colleges they had established and benefiting from the high level of training offered. How-ever, the persistent conflict between Black desires for empowerment and White desires for assimilation and social control shaped these institutions in the years that followed.

WHITE PATERNALISM AND BLACK EDUCATION, 1865–1920

As the turn of the century approached, African Americans had made definite inroads into securing access to higher education. Twenty-five years after the Civil War, there were approximately 100 colleges and universities for African Americans, located primarily in the South. While a minority of these institutions (most notably those founded by the AME church) were operated and controlled by Blacks themselves, the vast majority were gov-erned by White philanthropic agencies and missionary societies (e.g., the American Missionary Association, the American Baptist Home Mission So-ciety, and the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church). As such, African Americans found their collective voice in the education of their leaders limited by the paternalism of their White allies.

Despite their differing origins, all HBCUs addressed in some form or fashion three primary goals: (a) the education of Black youth, (b) the train-ing of teachers, and (c) the continuation of the "missionary tradition" by educated Blacks (Ogden et al., 1905). Having built, staffed, and controlled institutions like Howard University, Fisk University, Atlanta University, Hampton Institute, Straight College (later Dillard), Bennett College, Clark College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Shaw University, the cultural biases of White missionaries largely dictated the curricular means by which these goals would be achieved. Most missionary institutions em-ployed the traditional liberal arts curriculum found in elite White colleges which, as James Anderson writes, many Blacks accepted as necessary for leadership training (Anderson, 1988). In practice, however, this curriculum often reflected the biases of the culturally dominant majority. Scholars like Carter G. Woodson (1933) have noted that even the best of the missionary colleges employed curricula that focused on the contributions of Europe and the West, while viewing the non-White world (particularly Africa) as benighted and in sore need of Christianizing and civilizing. While some schools broke from the liberal arts tradition and focused on industrial edu-cation, a similar undercurrent of Black cultural inferiority existed. Hamp-ton Normal and Agricultural Institute, perhaps the best-known of the

industrial institutions and the model for those which followed, concentrated on a program of "manual training" mandated by the school's White missionary founder who believed Blacks to be "morally inferior" and incapable of efffectively utilizing liberal arts training. This curriculum taught basic academic competence, stressed manual laboring skills, and encouraged political accommodation through strict adherence to the South's racial codes (Bullock, 1967; Spivey, 1978).

Beyond the immediate missionary presence at HBCUs, White philanthropy as a major source of funding for HBCUs also affected the educational destiny of African Americans. Nowhere is this influence seen more clearly than in the emergence of the Booker T. Washington/W.E.B. Du Bois controversy. Booker T. Washington, a graduate of Hampton Institute, established his own school on the Hampton model in Tuskegee, Alabama, and became famous, not only for his advocacy of self-help and industrial education for Blacks, but also for his conservatism on race issues. Largely through his efforts, the Hampton/Tuskegee model of education was accepted and avidly encouraged by White Northern philanthropists and Southern politicians as an effective compromise between maintaining White supremacy and satisfying Black educational aspirations in the South. An 1890 modification of the 1862 Land Grant Colleges Act, combined with the immense popularity of the Hampton/Tuskegee model, spawned the growth of state-supported technical and industrial colleges for Blacks in the region (e.g., Alabama A&M, Tennessee A&I, North Carolina A&T universities) (Anderson, 1988; McPherson, 1975).

The overwhelming support for the Hampton/Tuskegee model and Washington's national prominence as a leader and spokesman for African Americans generated controversy within the African American community. W.E.B. Du Bois, a liberal arts graduate of Fisk University and Harvard University, opposed both the industrial model and Washington's influence, arguing instead for the education of African Americans "according to ability" and for continued political agitation against segregationist customs and laws in the South. This debate effectively split the African American intellectual community and HBCUs themselves into two separate camps. As a result of Washington's influence, many liberal arts institutions with staunchly integrationist traditions were required to adopt aspects of the Hampton/ Tuskegee philosophy to maintain financial support from Northern philanthropists and Southern state governments (Bullock, 1967; Du Bois, 1969). While the Washington/Du Bois controversy is significant as an effort by African Americans to retain a voice in deciding their educational (and by extension, social, political, and economic) destiny, its outcome was, in fact, largely decided by those with the power and resources. The decisions to fund industrial rather than liberal arts colleges for Blacks and to adopt industrial courses at traditionally liberal arts schools were largely out of the

hands of African Americans. These decisions were made by White-controlled state governments, White individual and corporate philanthropists, and White-dominated agencies such as the General Education Board, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund (Bullock, 1967).

The problem of White philanthropy and missionary control remained an issue for Black colleges well into the 1920s. As Raymond Wolters (1975) notes, the advent of the "New Negro" movement in the 1920s saw the alumni and students of schools like Howard, Fisk, Hampton, and Tuskegee become more vocal, insisting on greater Black representation among the faculties and administrations of these schools and lobbying for changes in curriculum and rules governing student life. To make their voices heard, African Americans typically resorted to protests, both on campus and in the surrounding community. In more than a few cases, these protests succeeded in achieving the intended goal. This tradition would resurface in the late 1960s and 1970s, as Black student activists turned their attention toward self-definition and self-determination, renouncing the vestiges of the cultural paternalism that had been intrinsic in the founding of many HBCUs (Wolters, 1975).

In many ways, HBCUs were far more than educational institutions. Du Bois referred to them as "social settlements" where the "best traditions of New England" were made known to the sons and daughters of former slaves through close contact with White missionaries (1989, p. 100). Many missionary teachers sought to divest Blacks of their "peculiar" cultural past and to teach them the ways of middle-class White Americans. However, their modernist/evangelical fervor produced a system of draconian rules that rigidly defined "appropriate" behavior, dress, speech, and extracurricular activity for the future "leaders" of the Black race. These rules were roughly similar to those enforced at predominantly White institutions in the early years but, at HBCUs, were predicated to an extent upon Blacks' supposed moral laxity. As such, these rules lasted well into the 20th century, long after they had been relaxed or modified at traditionally White institutions (TWIs) (Flemming, 1983; Jewell, 1998; Little, 1981).

HBCUs also played an important role in structuring the social stratification system within African American communities, primarily by acting as gateways for social mobility. The professional classes in African American communities were trained almost exclusively in HBCUs in the era prior to the 1954 *Brown* ruling. Even today they account for a disproportionate number of the advanced and professional degrees awarded to African Americans (Allen & Jewell, 1995; Nettles & Perna, 1997). While these institutions produced the highly educated and skilled class of leaders that the Freedmen's Education Movement had envisioned, they were also (in keeping with the desires of their missionary founders) a group thoroughly assimilated into middle-class Anglo-Protestant culture. These institutions gave a distinct and definite cultural meaning to class and status among African Americans.

Adelaide Cromwell theorized that the process of stratification within minority communities—i.e., status estimations of the majority group (e.g., wealth, education, occupation) and the minority group (e.g., skin color, antebellum status)—is "synthesized" into a mutually agreed-upon class structure. This synthesis was facilitated within HBCUs, where Blacks were routinely exposed to the cultural knowledge, behavior, and tastes of the Anglo-Protestant elite.

The regular social contact with middle- and upper-class Whites afforded by HBCUs served as an important resource for Blacks seeking social mobility in an America socially and culturally dominated by Whites (Jewell, 1999). Having successfully assimilated this knowledge, college-educated African Americans felt that it was their responsibility to hand the "principles of Western culture" to "the masses below" (Miller, 1905, p. 15). As Kevin Gaines (1996) notes, late 19th- and early 20th-century notions of racial uplift that were partially instilled and nurtured at HBCUs contained visible elements of cultural paternalism and class privilege. Though gallantly committed to the struggle for civil rights and racial equality, some of these men and women were often as paternalistic towards the Black masses as their White missionary teachers had been towards African Americans as a whole. The result often placed Black elites summarily at odds with the community they were pledged to uplift, a split that lasted well into the civil rights era and beyond.

Segregation and Black Higher Education, 1896–1954

While HBCUs met with a great deal of success, their effectiveness was also limited by the realities of segregation. Despite the language of "separate but equal" in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Black public education was dramatically underfunded on the state and local levels. In fact, the public educational system for African Americans was described as "inadequate" by federal investigators some fifty years after the end of the Civil War, leaving HBCUs (which continued to be operated mainly under the auspices of the Northern missionary societies) primarily responsible for what educational opportunities existed for Blacks in the South, particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Although missionary societies and philanthropic agencies had intended to help lay the groundwork for a system of public and higher education for Blacks, they often found themselves solely responsible instead for providing the only quality education available for Blacks. Across much of the South, Whites remained overtly hostile to the inclusion of African Americans in the statewide system of public education (Anderson, 1988). To compensate for the lack of state funding, African American communities—with vital assistance from these missions and foundations—were called on to establish and maintain quality schools, provide teachers, and fund building construction.

HBCUs were also compelled to function as multilevel institutions, including students at the secondary, college preparatory, and college levels, thereby serving the varied educational needs of the African American community. These burdens had a decidedly negative impact upon the development of HBCUs as full-fledged collegiate institutions. White power structures in the South carefully monitored the curricula of state-funded colleges, keeping them colleges in name only (Morris, Allen, Maurrasse, & Gilbert, 1995). In most state colleges for Blacks, precollegiate courses were offered along with limited vocational and industrial education. Because of their large secondary departments, the vast majority of these institutions were not recognized as college-grade institutions by federal and state agencies and, for many years, were denied accreditation.

In time, as the secondary departments were phased out, Black educational institutions took their place in the college community, although on a limited basis. With White administrators in charge of hiring and firing Black teachers at many state-run industrial schools, qualified liberal arts graduates were often passed over for those with inadequate education so long as they demonstrated the proper political outlook. Funding was often inadequate, and curricular offerings were severely restricted. Graduate education at Black institutions were significantly less available than quality elementary, secondary, and college-level education. In the 1930s, lawsuits filed in Southern states challenged the "separate but equal" concept in higher education in attempts to break the "glass ceiling" imposed on Black education for the past 70 to 75 years. While Blacks gained severely limited access to professional schools funded by the states, little change resulted until 1954 when the Supreme Court reversed its decision in *Plessy* with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.* After another decade marked by Southern resistance to integration, African Americans began to gain access to previously segregated colleges and universities (Jewell, 1999).

INTEGRATION OR DESEGREGATION? 1955–1978

While many believed that *Brown* signaled an end to the Black struggle for educational opportunity, in many respects this Supreme Court decision was, in fact, just the beginning. Across the South, school districts resisted the Supreme Court's mandate for integrated education with legal maneuvers and outright defiance. Nationally, White parents fled to the suburbs and/or enrolled their children in private schools, intending to thwart the court's ruling. As a result, to the present day, the nation's schools remain largely segregated by race (Orfield et al., 1996).

After some delay and further resistance, previously segregated universities grudgingly opened their doors to African Americans in the decade following *Brown.* Predictably this process moved faster in institutions of higher

education outside the South. The national enrollment of African Americans in college grew significantly, increasing from 83,000 in 1950 to 666,000 in 1975 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979). More dramatic, however, was the shift in patterns of where African Americans attended college. In 1950 the overwhelming majority of Blacks in college attended HBCUs; but by 1975, fully three-quarters of all Blacks in college attended predominantly White institutions. During the 20 years following *Brown,* African Americans participated in a second "Great Migration." This time, however, the move was not from the South to the North, but instead consisted of an enrollment migration from HBCUs to traditionally White colleges and universities (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). It should be noted that this "educational migration" reflected, in sizable part, significant gains in the overall numbers of African Americans enrolling in college.

Over this period, HBCUs made important contributions as catalysts and agents for social change. Students and faculty from these institutions played instrumental roles as leaders and foot soldiers in the civil rights and Black power movements. Leaders of the student sit-ins of Greensboro, participants in mass civil disobedience at Birmingham, and contributors to the voter registration drive across Mississippi were often students at HBCUs (Morris, 1984; Payne, 1994; Robnett, 1997; Ture & Hamilton, 1992). Alumni from HBCUs were liberally represented among the leadership of civil rights organizations and among the attorneys pursuing legal challenges for equal opportunity in education. Graduates from HBCUs were also disproportionately represented among Blacks who were "pioneers" in fields, occupations, and positions that had traditionally been closed to Blacks (Nettles & Perna, 1997).

Assisted by favorable social attitudes, a strong economy, and sustained government and university commitment, African Americans made great strides in college enrollment and degree attainment during this period. For example, in 1976–1977, 58,636 African Americans earned bachelors' degrees. By 1994 this number had grown to 83,576 (a 43% increase). Unfortunately, African American gains in earned doctoral degrees were much more modest. While total earned doctoral degrees increased nationally by 30% from 1977 (33,232) to 1994 (43,185), the increase in earned doctorates was only 73% for African Americans (from 1,253 in 1977 to 3,344 in 1994). Over this same period, the number of doctoral degrees awarded by HBCUs increased by 218% (from 66 in 1977 to 210 in 1994) (Blackwell, 1981; Nettles & Perna, 1997).

The number of African Americans enrolled in college grew from 1.033 million in the fall of 1976 to 1.5 million in the fall of 1994. In 1976 African Americans constituted 9.4% of all enrolled college students in the nation; by 1994, nearly 20 years later, they were only 10.1% of the total (Nettles & Perna, 1997). The contributions of HBCUs to African American college

enrollment and earned degrees have always been disproportionate. In 1995 230,279 (17.3%) of the total 1,334,000 African Americans enrolled in college attended HBCUs. Similarly, the 23,434 baccalaureate degrees awarded to African Americans in 1993–1994 by HBCUs represented 28% of all B.A.'s awarded to African Americans nationally. These enrollment and degree statistics loom especially large when we remember that only 2% of the nation's institutions of higher learning are HBCUs.

However, storm clouds loomed just beyond this period of phenomenal success in the form of a less sympathetic political climate, a declining economy, and court challenges to race-based admissions programs. The subsequent reversal in fortunes is best symbolized by the *Bakke* case. In 1978 Bakke challenged the race-based admissions procedures of the University of California-Davis, claiming that his rights had been violated by an admissions process that selected less academically qualified Black and other applicants over him. The Supreme Court ruled in Bakke's favor, striking down the University of California-Davis Medical School admissions program as "racially discriminatory." The court ruled that, while race could not be the sole or determining factor in admissions, it was permissible for race to be one of several factors employed in the admissions process. *Bakke* continues to be the U.S. Supreme Court standard for national legal precedence on the permissible role of race in college admissions decisions.

A quarter century after *Brown* saw the paradox of great educational advances by African Americans amid persistent racial inequities. The dream of integrated education had given way to the bitter reality of, at best, partly desegregated education. De jure segregation in the nation's schools had evolved into de facto segregation—with the same result for the vast majority of African Americans (Orfield et al., 1996). Separate and unequal education in racially segregated schools with few resources and low achievement levels continued to be characteristic for significant segments of the African American population. Further, within racially desegregated schools and universities, African American students were overrepresented among low achievers and in weaker academic tracks or programs.

THE DERACIALIZATION OF BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION, 1978–PRESENT

In 1978 William Julius Wilson published his enormously influential book *The Declining Significance of Race*. Wilson argued that race relations have evolved to the point in the United States where socioeconomic class is more significant than race as a basis for discrimination. He concluded that life opportunities for African Americans are now shaped more by economic status than by racial identity. Wilson's thesis coincided with several other trends, events, and shifts in society, which combined to fuel the argument

that race no longer mattered in America. More significantly, the thesis suggested that race-based policies were no longer needed to address (redress) the status inequalities of African Americans. In short, society declared the battle for racial equality a victory and announced that America was now officially color blind or "de-racialized" (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997).

Several key trends motivated and sustained the deracialization hypothesis, despite persistent evidence to the contrary in the form of continuing inequities in education, employment, wealth, and well-being. The 1970s and 1980s were characterized by an upsurge in political conservatism. For most of these two decades, Republicans dominated the national political scene (Cohen, 1999). The political climate was cool toward and restrictive of any activist role for government in addressing racial inequality. The growing mood in the country was that government had done enough in the decade of the 1960s to address racial discrimination and Black inequality (Dawson, 1994).

In the courts, a string of key decisions (often issued by conservative Nixon, Reagan, and Bush judicial appointees) questioned, weakened and in some instances overturned precedents that had favored equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. The emerging consensus in these rulings was that the courts and judges had become too activist and were overreaching their appropriate roles by becoming agents for social change, as, for instance, ordering busing to achieve school desegregation. The courts' shift toward less interventionist stances coincided with systematic, well-funded campaigns by entities such as the Center for Individual Rights to reshape the national landscape. Legislation embodying hard-won civil rights and equal opportunity guarantees was held legally suspect or even unnecessary. So on both the political and legal fronts, a coordinated effort was mounted to force acceptance of a new vision of America as a color blind or deracialized society.

It is no coincidence that these trends occurred during a period of massive economic and demographic upheaval. Liberalization in immigration laws was followed by exponential increases in the number of immigrants to the United States from Mexico, Central and Latin America, and Asia. This increased demographic diversity had reverberations for racial and economic relationships in U.S. society (Omi & Winant, 1994). Racially the country was forced away from the simplistic—and never truly accurate—dichotomous racial paradigm of White or Black to a much more complicated, elusive rainbow continuum formed by skin color, ethnicity, nationality, social class, etc. More specific to this paper, in this period higher education saw dramatic increases in Asian and Latino students. Indeed some campuses in California, Florida, New York City, and Texas experienced demographic shifts that threatened the majority status of Whites. Gradually the previous rhetorical emphasis in higher education on equal opportunity (read: the inclusion of African Americans) gave way to a broader rhetoric of diversity

(read: all groups of color, women, gays/lesbians, and the physically challenged). In the process, African Americans were redefined from a group uniquely deserving "educational compensation" because of past racial injustice to just one of many groups vying for college admission under the goal of "increased diversity."

On the economic front, the country experienced a severe downturn. America and the rest of the world were battered by a series of consecutive recessions. This economic decline and instability bred insecurity and fueled racial scapegoating (Cohen, 1999). Many Whites felt economically insecure and threatened by African American socioeconomic gains. They felt that any economic progress made by African Americans (and the largely colored immigrants) came only at their expense. The media drumbeat of court cases charging "reverse discrimination" in hiring and promotions that violated White constitutional rights by favoring "unqualified" Blacks and minorities over Whites only exacerbated these feelings. Thus, increasing numbers of Whites resented and resisted the continued pressure from African Americans for expanded economic opportunities by asserting White privilege and White supremacy. This backlash grew even as the country continued to craft a new vision of itself as color blind.

Consistent with this notion of the "new America" as color blind were the changes noted in White responses to surveys of racial attitudes. Some surveys reported dramatically positive changes in the views Whites expressed about and toward Blacks and other people of color with the result that some researchers were skeptical of surveys that reported continued racial hostility and negative attitudes by Whites toward Blacks. Bobo and Smith (1997) documented that, in fact, negative White attitudes toward Blacks persisted, albeit in more subtler forms. Bobo and Smith argued that the old Jim Crow racism had become *laissez faire* racism. A series of voter propositions that followed seemed to support their conclusion. In California, Proposition 209 outlawed affirmative action for students of color while Proposition 187 denied public education to illegal immigrants. In Washington, voters outlawed affirmative action, and similar drives nationally received widespread support. The result clearly communicated the continuing racial animus of a majority of Whites toward—if not African Americans themselves—programs whose purpose was to advance racial equity between Blacks and Whites.

Forming a backdrop to these developments was a growing chorus in the scholarship of writers such as Charles Murray, Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, Dinesh D'Souza, Glen Loury, William J. Wilson, and Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom. This body of writings argued aspects of the new racial orthodoxy, which proclaimed that America was now color blind, that African Americans had achieved equality, and that the need for government equal opportunity programs was past.

Interestingly, the racial lines in employment, housing, and education remained rigidly drawn and, for the most part, unbroken over this period. African Americans were as nearly segregated residentially in 1980 as they had been in 1950 (Farley & Allen, 1989). As a consequence, the patterns of school attendance, largely dictated by geographic neighborhood, continued to be distinctly drawn along racial lines (Orfield et al., 1996). Under the new, less supportive regime, a series of court-ordered busing plans and government-administered monitoring functions (e.g., Civil Rights Commission, Equal Educational Opportunities Program) were deemphasized and/or discontinued. *Bakke* was followed by *Podberesky* (1992), *Hopwood* (1996), and several other court decisions that signaled clearly the expressed position that affirmative action programs were without legal basis or support. Put more simply, the time when government felt the need to, could be expected to, or would legally intervene on behalf of Black compensatory claims had ended.

Evidence of substantial Black progress in education and employment was also regarded as proof that America was color blind (Hochschild, 1995). The growth in the ranks of African American professionals and the Black middle class was often cited to support the view that racial discrimination was now a thing of the distant past. African Americans were subdivided into the "truly disadvantaged" (i.e., Blacks with legitimate claims for government intervention to achieve racial equity) versus affluent, middle-class Blacks who were making illegitimate claims (Wilson, 1987). Indeed an emerging court standard or test of racial discrimination required that *individual* African Americans be able to provide evidence of specific acts of discrimination directed against them personally to receive redress for racial discrimination—as opposed to previous court standards that accepted the notions of *historical* discrimination against African Americans as a class or group of people (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997).

FACING THE FUTURE: NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HBCUs

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed new challenges (alongside persistent old ones) for many HBCUs with regard to student enrollment, academics, and resource availability. These challenges have only intensified in the last decade of the 20th century. The civil rights gains of the 1960s and 1970s opened doors for middle-class African Americans. Historically Black institutions, perhaps for the first time since their beginnings, were required to compete with traditionally White institutions for students. Thompson (1973) notes that Black colleges had in the past practiced a "modified form of open enrollment," recruiting the vast majority of their students from the lower socioeconomic classes (rural and urban) who were often unprepared for

college-level instruction. Webster, Stockard, and Henson (1981) note that the 1970s saw a sharp decline in the already small percentage of high-achieving and affluent students enrolling at HBCUs, a trend that continued into the 1980s. This enrollment trend, coupled with the steady decline of American public schools which, according to census data, educate roughly 80% of African American school-age children, has led to a corresponding change in the academic environments of many HBCUs. By continuing to assume responsibility for repairing deficiencies in the education received by most Black students, many colleges now commit greater resources to remedial instruction than they have in the past. This added burden continues to put a strain on HBCUs, often taking time and energy away from college-level instruction and hampering their recognition as high-quality academic institutions (Jencks & Reisman, 1968).

Yet for a select set of historically Black colleges and universities, the late 1980s and 1990s revealed a totally different story. The experiences of institutions such as Spelman College, Morehouse College, Xavier University, Hampton University, Howard University, and Florida A&M University differed dramatically from the challenges described above. Not only were these schools able to maintain strong academic programs and to build strong endowments, but they also competed successfully with predominantly White institutions for the "brightest of the bright"—the offspring of the growing Black middle class. In many instances, these jewels in the crown of HBCUs surpassed their White competitors on commonly accepted indicators of academic excellence and institutional success. For instance, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Fisk University were all named among the best liberal arts colleges in the nation in the 1999 *U.S. News and World Report* educational rankings. Similarly, Xavier University has been acknowledged as the nation's leading institution for the production of Black undergraduates who enter medical school. For consecutive years, Florida A&M University held the record for the largest number of National Merit Achievement Scholars enrolled.

Interestingly such shining successes brought, along with the celebration, concerns in some quarters over whether the high-academic status historically Black colleges and universities had in fact lost their way. Questions were raised about whether these schools had turned away from their traditional constituency to attract the children of African American elites through increased emphasis on high standardized test scores, exclusive honors programs, and high national rankings. Ironically, many of these African American elite parents were once themselves beneficiaries of opportunities for advanced education provided by HBCUs dedicated to developing the raw academic talent of first-generation college students. In any case, HBCUs continued to make striking, disproportionate contributions to the higher education of African Americans. Although the 100 or so HBCUs represent

roughly 2% of the nation's 3,000-plus institutions of higher learning, in any given year HBCUs enroll over 25% of all African Americans attending undergraduate programs and graduate just under 30% of all African Americans who receive bachelor's degrees (Carter & Wilson, 1997).

HBCUs have a long and distinguished history of challenging the racial and gender status quo in American higher education. In addition to offering educational opportunities to African Americans, they were among the first institutions to open their doors to students regardless of race, creed, color, gender, or national origin, despite the existence of segregationist customs that severely limited the practice of this ideal. Native American, African, Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean students have all benefited from the educational and social commitment of HBCUs, as have White women and Jews who enrolled in professional schools at these institutions when gender-, religion- and race-based quotas kept many of them out of traditionally White institutions (TWIs) in significant numbers. As Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb (1993) documents, this "open door policy" with regards to race has not been limited to students. During the second World War, refugee scholars from Europe joined the faculties of Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Xavier, Lincoln, and other schools after arriving in the United States. In the ensuing years, HBCUs have continued to employ international scholars, mainly from Africa and Asia, as faculty (Edgcomb, 1993; Logan, 1969).

African American communities are uniquely positioned to assist this nation's quest for a redefined multicultural, diverse reality. African Americans led the struggle for inclusion and provided a model for the various "Others," who were excluded because of differences defined by gender, ethnicity, religion, race, class, region, and sexual orientation (Morris, 1984). HBCUs are therefore called upon to provide leadership and to make important contributions in the quest for a truly inclusive society. The more complicated landscape of "difference" in contemporary society challenges HBCUs to do a better job of valuing and incorporating women, gays, lesbians, Asians, Latinos, Muslims, Jews, Whites, and the less affluent. While HBCUs have been at the forefront in managing and accommodating difference, these campuses are no panacea. Certain categories of people have been and continue to be discriminated against at HBCUs because of their gender, national origins, social class, sexual orientation, religion, race, or ethnicity. To simply argue that HBCUs are in many respects less discriminatory than predominantly White institutions misses the point. In fact, this argument is hard to sustain when the focus is on certain types of discrimination, e.g., gender, sexual orientation, social class status, or national origin. There is a need to recognize the invidious nature of structured inequality in our society—that all systems of domination and degradation are intertwined and that there is violence done to human beings and relationships when they are allowed to function against *any* group (Carbado, 1999; Cohen,

1999; Collins, 1998). Inevitably these patterns of hierarchy and discrimination take root and are reflected in HBCUs, since the larger society leaves its footprints, to a greater or lesser degree, on these institutions. The challenge confronting HBCUs is how to best define and realize a new vision wherein all types of difference are appreciated and celebrated rather than feared or persecuted.

The worsening racial climate nationally, and at TWIs for Blacks and other minorities, presents HBCUs with a monumental opportunity to continue to expand upon their established traditions of inclusion by recruiting Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and even lower-income Whites as students. HBCUs can draw upon the lessons from the past, where White missionary teachers and their families interacted with Blacks inside and outside of the classroom. There are lessons to be learned as well from the increasingly multiracial and multiethnic reality of contemporary American society. HBCUs can experiment with and perfect the implementation of a truly multicultural campus environment while offering educational opportunities to the youth of other groups who, like African Americans, are facing severely limited access to higher education (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). In so doing, HBCUs might reaffirm their commitment to community empowerment and racial equality by taking a leading step in promoting concrete political and economic coalitions between communities of color as well as with lower-income Euro-Americans.

It is especially ironic, given their long history as institutions that taught racial tolerance and the work of their distinguished alumni in promoting equality and cross-cultural understanding, that HBCUs should play so small a role in the current debates on multiculturalism in American higher education. Having been among the first such institutions in America, they should by rights occupy a leading position in such discussion, offering the insight that only they have gained from their distinctive traditions of opening doors to students and faculty regardless of race, class, religion, or gender. Those who control debates over multiculturalism in higher education fail to understand the rich multicultural contributions of HBCUs toward resolving the problems. Though direct descendants of the Black/White paradigm in American race relations, HBCUs have continued to expand their vision beyond these stereotypic constraints.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: HBCUS, THE NEW MILLENNIUM, AND THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION

Sankofa, an oft-seen African cultural symbol, shows the body of a bird facing forward while the head looks backward. The message is explicit: the past shapes the future. As we reflect on the future of HBCUs at this dawning of a new millennium, it is appropriate to look backward to better see

what is ahead. One inescapable lesson is that African Americans have found the road to higher education stony, fraught with obstacles and resistance. In many respects, the Black struggle for higher education is an apt metaphor for the larger Black struggles for citizenship, self-determination, and personhood in this society. Education generally, and higher education in particular, has been and continues to be fiercely contested ground for African Americans. Black educational gains have been hard won. Because our victories tend to be partial and/or precarious, African Americans often find themselves revisiting the same battlefields. Currently, national political movements against affirmative action in higher education (e.g., California's Proposition 209) and for "high stakes" standardized tests (e.g., to determine high school graduation or college admission) pose very real threats to African American access and success in higher education. Along with several court decisions that withdrew legal support for compensatory programs (e.g., *Hopwood*) and a societal-wide retreat from a commitment to equity, these trends place the future of African American higher education at risk.

Hearing that African American progress in higher education is at risk, some will find such a pronouncement alarmist. They will argue that U.S. cultural ethos and practices have changed so fundamentally that African Americans are ensured continued access to higher education. We, however, are less sanguine on this point. Looking backward, we see eerie resemblances between the systematic efforts to turn back the clock of Black progress at the end of the 20th century and similar efforts during the post-Reconstruction period at the end of the 19th century. Concretely, the 1998 implementation of the University of California Board of Regents' decision to end affirmative action in admissions (subsequently ratified in a statewide referendum, Proposition 209) resulted in a 40–50% reduction in the enrollment of African American and Chicana/o/Latina/o students at UCLA and UC-Berkeley. At the same time, several HBCUs have "converted," that is, they now have—or will soon have, given current trends—a majority of White students. Examples are Bluefield State University in West Virginia and Lincoln University in Missouri. Further, extreme fiscal crisis threatens the continued viability, if not existence, of several public and private HBCUs. In short, at the very moment when higher education options for Black students at predominantly White institutions are shrinking, we are also seeing constriction in the options available at HBCUs. Today, as in the past, HBCUs are called upon to complete the herculean task of contributing disproportionately to the higher education of African Americans.

Although greatly outnumbered and comparatively impoverished in economic and physical resources, HBCUs continue to rise to the challenge. The over 100 HBCUs represent roughly 3% of all institutions of higher learning in the nation; yet during the 1990s, these institutions enrolled around one-quarter of all Black students in U.S. higher education. These

institutions also granted over 25% of baccalaureate degrees, 15% of master's and professional degrees, and 10% of Ph.D.'s to African Americans (Carter & Wilson, 1997; Nettles & Perna, 1997).

The accomplishments of HBCUs are truly impressive by any standard. HBCUs have helped to liberate and empower Black aspirations for the American dream. HBCUs were conceived at the intersection between ideal aspirations and racial restriction. Despite White racism and White paternalism, these institutions managed to form "free spaces," racially segregated arenas where African Americans were able to forge and pursue visions of equality and self-determination, removed from the gaze and direct control of White power structures (Morris, 1984; Robnett, 1997). However, as Robnett (1997) reminds us, rarely are free spaces completely free; thus, they tend to have both positive and negative aspects. HBCUs were never left entirely alone; the reach of White domination, whether benevolent or hostile, constricted, distorted, or destroyed the interior of HBCUs to control expressions of independence and self-determination. These efforts to direct and/or suppress the higher education and development of African Americans were motivated by what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as "The Great Fear"—the fear felt by oppressive forces of the moment "when a human being becomes suddenly conscious of the tremendous powers lying latent within him." Du Bois continues: "When this happens in the case of a class or nation or a race, the world fears or rejoices according to the way in which it has been trained to contemplate a change in the conditions of the class or race in question" (qtd. in Aptheker, 1973, pp. 8–9). For Du Bois, education represented a vital tool for empowerment, education that had been systematically denied Blacks to maintain a system of White supremacy. The goal of this oppressive system was to educate African Americans to "put their rights in the background; emphasize their duties—say little of ambition or aspiration[;] . . . if their young men will dream dreams, let them be dreams of corn bread and molasses" (Du Bois, qtd. in Aptheker, 1973, p. 9). By Du Bois's account, the salvation of African Americans lay in HBCUs: "I regard the college as the true founding stone of all education, and not as some would have it, the kindergarten" (qtd. in Aptheker, 1973, p. 3).

To prosper in this new millennium as academic institutions of the first order and not, as some uniformed observers view them, as relics of America's less enlightened racial past, HBCUs must continue to evolve and change to reflect America's new reality. They must maintain and solidify the worldview and traditions that have anchored them and kept them viable for more than a century. At the same time, these institutions will need to adapt to the new reality best exemplified by the increasing number of racially, culturally, and economically diverse student bodies that they will be called upon to educate.

Certainly HBCUs will be affected by the general transformations sweeping U.S. higher education and will respond to a variety of questions as they

reassess their missions and decide how best to serve their constituencies. Among these questions are: How to do more with less? What will be the role of faculty governance? How viable is distance education? What are the information and technology needs of the future? What are effective strategies for upgrading institutional budget, records, and facilities infrastructure? How should capital campaigns be managed? What are essential elements for the 21st century curriculum? What changes will be required to recruit and serve multiracial/multicultural student bodies? What are pressing faculty needs? The list goes on.

Beyond these relatively common, utilitarian questions is another set of questions about the "heart and soul" of HBCUs, questions about their *raison d'être,* special place, and distinctive roles. These conversations are best left to my colleagues who live and work daily in these institutions. However, I would suggest that W.E.B. Du Bois's articulated vision of the nature, theory, content, and purposes of the education of Black people is an appropriate starting point for such inquiries. To be truly education, according to Du Bois, it must be partisan and—given the realities of the social order—fundamentally subversive. In this sense, he was concerned in the first place with the education of his people in the United States and with education as part of the process of the liberation of his people. He insistently called on Black people to exercise great energy and initiative in controlling their own lives, engaging in continued experimentation and innovation (Aptheker, 1973).

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