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Good Intentions: Collegiate Desegregation and Transdemographic Enrollments

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> *One often sees [that] good intentions, if pushed beyond moderation, bring about very vicious results.* —Montaigne, *Essays,* Book II, chap. 19

Collegiate desegregation remains one of higher education's most important challenges. The quest to facilitate equity and equality in postsecondary educational access, opportunity, and attainment is a critical effort in advancing America's democratic ideal (Brown, 1999b). Yet despite collegiate desegregation's significance, higher education researchers and policy makers lack clarity or consensus about it even as state coordinating boards and institutional boards of trustees implement collegiate desegregation compliance initiatives. Current desegregation initiatives center on changing the

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racial demographics of the student and staff populations (Brown, 1999a). The result is a collection of ad hoc policies and practices which promote shifts in the statistical composition of the student population within the corresponding institutions based solely on race—transdemography. Transdemography poses a unique set of opportunities and challenges for public historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Transdemography offers HBCUs an opportunity to both enrich the student campus context and encourage intercultural communication within the academic environment. However, transdemography simultaneously has the capability of eradicating the rich campus culture for which HBCUs have been lauded (Brown, forthcoming; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1984; Hytche, 1989; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Willie & Edmonds, 1978). This article explores the conundrum of transdemographic enrollments at the public HBCU. The article also investigates the possibilities and problems associated with the growing number of White students at HBCUs, following a history of African American student participation in higher education and the legal context of collegiate desegregation. Using sociological research findings on tipping-point theory, I present a case study of institutional and cultural change. The findings provide important policy guidance on the state and place of HBCUs in higher education in an era of shifting student enrollments.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PUBLIC HBCU

Public historically Black colleges and universities have a unique historical context. Educational opportunities were limited for African Americans prior to the Civil War. The problem of access was further complicated by the system of slavery operating in the South and the unquestioned racism of the North. While some free African Americans attended White colleges in northern states, systematic postsecondary educational opportunities for African Americans were virtually nonexistent (Brown, 1999a). In an effort to fill the void, northern missionaries, abolitionists, and educators began to establish colleges devoted to the education of African Americans. The first such college to be officially chartered was Cheyney State University in Pennsylvania, founded in 1837. The aftermath of the Civil War brought a proliferation of institutions targeted toward the newly freed African American population. More than two hundred HBCUs were founded or chartered by 1890 (Brown & Davis, 2001).

In 1890, the second Morrill Act passed Congress. The first Morrill Act (1862) provided federal support for state-level public higher education. The Morrill Act of 1890 mandated that those funds include colleges and universities that enrolled African American students. Because of the practice of segregation in the South, many states elected to establish separate public HBCUs for the sole purpose of having a legal beneficiary for the new fed-

eral support (Weinberg, 1977). These public HBCUs eventually came to be called "1890 institutions." This pattern led to a dual system of higher education in 19 southern and border states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) which cemented the status and place of public HBCUs on the nation's higher education landscape.

This stratagem of providing postsecondary education persisted until African American students filed a series of cases seeking admission to historically White institutions (Brown, 1999a). *Berea College v. Kentucky* (1908), *Pearson v. Murray* (1936), *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* (1948), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* (1950) each involved African American plaintiffs seeking to integrate a White college. These integration cases served as jurisprudential planks for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* which established, according to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling, that school settings restricted by race were unconstitutional. This case was the real beginning of the complex and elusive process of desegregating public education.

While desegregating public schools proved difficult, the disestablishment of the dual postsecondary education model remained even more complex. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a federal attempt to support the cumbersome efforts aimed at desegregating colleges and universities. Subsequent litigation bolstered the federal government's authority under Title VI, especially *Adams v. Richardson* (1972) and *United States v. Fordice* (1992). Both of these cases specified circumstances under which the federal government could intervene to resolve issues surrounding collegiate desegregation compliance within the 19 southern and border states.

However, *Adams v. Richardson* was dismissed in 1990, and this action propelled *United States v. Fordice* (1992) forward as the new legal standard for collegiate desegregation efforts. The primary concern of the *Fordice* case was whether an institution could be deemed desegregated, even if it had race-neutral missions and policies, as long as it still had racially predominant enrollments (i.e., Is an HBCU considered desegregated if it has a 90–99% African American student enrollment?). The Supreme Court ruled that an institution could not. This landmark ruling drives the continuing focus on transdemographic enrollment shifts as the arbiter of collegiate desegregation compliance.

Collegiate Desegregation

The *United States v. Fordice* (1992) case sent a clear signal to the 19 southern and border states that more than racial neutrality and good-faith ef-

forts would be necessary under the law to demonstrate that the effects the prior system of segregation had been eradicated. After years of what postsecondary education had assumed to be race-neutral mission statements and admission requirements, the *Fordice* case declared that the mere existence of predominantly African American and White institutional enrollments represented a remnant of legal segregation. The U.S. Supreme Court held that Mississippi's race-neutral policies and good-faith efforts had not fulfilled its obligation to disestablish the state's dual higher education system. The opinion reads:

> If the State perpetuates policies and practices traceable to its prior system that continue to have segregative effects—whether by influencing student enrollment decisions or by fostering segregation in other facets of the university system—and such policies are without sound educational justification and can be practicably eliminated, the State has not satisfied its burden of proving that it has dismantled its prior system. (*Fordice,* p. 731)

Further, the *Fordice* case identified four issues which were identified as "readily apparent" remnants of segregation. Simply stated, the Court questioned the fulfillment of the collegiate desegregation compliance mandate in Mississippi given (a) the continued operation of eight public universities, (b) unnecessary program duplication, (c) the institutional mission classification scheme which disadvantaged HBCUs, and (d) the existing admissions policies which abetted African American student attendance at HBCUs and White student attendance at predominantly White-enrolled institutions. These last two observations have led to collegiate desegregation compliance efforts which focus on changing the demographic complexion of college campuses in the 19 southern and border states (Brown, 2001; Drummond, 2000).

The *Fordice* ruling shifted the collegiate desegregation compliance framework from one of fiscal and academic equity to one of mission redesignation and racial recomposition of student populations (Brown, 1999a; Brown, 2001; Brown & Hendrickson, 1997; Drummond, 2000; Levinson, 2000; Williams, 1997). Current collegiate desegregation initiatives have as their primary aim attracting white students to HBCUs. As an interesting turn, existing compliance plans proffer limited resources or support for targeting significant increases in African American student attendance at the historically White institutions within the respective states. Collegiate desegregation has morphed into a transdemographic enrollment initiative.

In Tennessee, the original postsecondary desegregation compliance mandate required Tennessee State University, a historically Black school, to shift its enrollment from 97% African Americans to 50% (*Geier v. Alexander,* 1984). Ten years later in 1994, Tennessee State had achieved an enrollment that was 32% White and 64% African American (U.S. Department of Edu-

cation, 1996). As of this writing, the suit for noncompliance is still on-going, with efforts underway to reach an out-of-court settlement. What are the effects of such a major enrollment shift on the institutional culture and climate? Does transdemography impact an institution's cultural context? Can HBCUs maintain their historic mission, essence, or significance while undergoing radical shifts in student enrollment populations?

According to Halpern (1992), historically Black colleges have made their most important educational contribution through their profound commitment to and encouragement of African American students. At the same time, HBCUs have never been monolithic, monocultural, or homogenous, but offer a rich history and practice of diversity (Jewell, forthcoming). Foster, Guyden, and Miller (1999) write, "Historically Black colleges have always had a white presence. From the beginning, white participation in Black education was the rule rather than the exception" (p. 1). What follows is an investigation of Bluefield State University—the HBCU with the highest level of White student, faculty, and administrative participation in the United States. West Virginia State College will also be discussed for comparison purposes.

Methodological Scheme and Praxis

In the summer of 2000, I conducted an exploratory ethnographic case study of Bluefield State University in West Virginia. I made regular visits to the campus for five weeks to conduct random informal interviews and collect relevant printed materials. I also made one-time visits to West Virginia State College and several other state institutions with primarily White enrollments. In an effort to delimit the "official liturgies" which often result from elite and/or purposeful interviewing, I used unobtrusive participant observation, artifact gathering, document analysis, and informal interviewing for data collection. Given the unique sociopolitical context of the institutional case, if I had presented myself as an outsider, I would probably have been given only judicious or rehearsed responses and conversed with few beyond designated spokespersons (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Developing the Case Study

I used the data thus collected to construct a case study of Bluefield State within both the state and national contexts. The case study utilized a microincremental approach. A microincremental approach is field-based and emphasizes qualitative research methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Such an approach allows the researcher to investigate environments which are "embedded in a cultural context" (p. 566). This study is a microincremental case study of transdemographic student enrollment at Bluefield State University.

Case studies allow complex educational settings to be organized cohesively for analysis. Further, case studies allow the researcher to explore and represent the complex phenomena (e.g., collegiate desegregation) in sufficient detail. (For an example, see Brown, 1999a). Case studies provide for the recognition of unique contexts which may be multifaceted in scope and significance. The Bluefield State University case study follows the guidance proffered by Yin (1984) and Stake (1994)—capturing the history, persons, and multiple contexts of educational phenomena. Hence, the encapsulated "case" is useful for making "grand generalizations" based on the evidence gathered (Stake, 1994). Additionally, the study adhered to the general guidelines for qualitative research suggested by Conrad (1982), Creswell (1998), and Lincoln and Guba (1985). In accordance with those guidelines, the interpretation of data reflects the assumptions consistent with constructivist inquiry.

Framing the Inquiry

In *African American Culture and Heritage in Higher Education Research and Practice,* Freeman (1998) posits that it is necessary to consider both the culture and traditions of an institution when conducting academic research. The framework upon which the research is based should acknowledge the specific cultural context(s) involved. Such acknowledgment helps higher education policy makers and researchers craft and implement research investigations that are authentic, accountable, and effective. Freeman defines cultural context as the "interrelated characteristics that provide a perspective—frame of reference—for understanding individuals' and groups' ways of knowing and being" (p. 2). Freeman also declares that acknowledging the cultural context is especially important when "researching and addressing policies related to African Americans" (p. 3). In response to this methodological beacon, my study avoids the racial polarization involved in comparing historically Black colleges with predominantly White colleges, situating both the gathering and the analysis of data within the cultural context specific to public HBCUs. Hence, I have made only within-group comparisons.

Analyzing the Evidence

I use tipping-point theory as the theoretical lens of analysis for this study. Tipping-point theory argues that there is a referential threshold at which majority groups retreat or withdraw after being joined by the corresponding minority group. The theory emerges from a series of studies conducted primarily between the 1950s and 1980s regarding either the forced or voluntary integration of residential communities (Fitzpatrick & Hwang, 1990; Giles, Cataldo, & Gatlin, 1975; Grodzins, 1958; Marshall & Stahura, 1979; Myerson & Banfield, 1955; Ottensmann, 1995; Schelling, 1978; Stahura, 1988;

Stinchcombe, McDill, & Walker, 1969; Wolfe, 1963). These studies had, as their main purpose, the investigation of the phenomenon often referred to as "White flight."

The xenogenesis for tipping-point research is Myerson and Banfield's (1955) landmark study of the Chicago Housing Authority's residential distribution patterns. They conclude that, if the number of African American and minority residents occupying an originally White neighborhood grows to a level greater than one-third of the total population, then the likelihood of withdrawal by a significant proportion of White residents increases. The study further reveals that, when Whites leave these particular areas, Blacks will immediately occupy those spots, thereby facilitating resegregation. Schelling (1978) calls this reciprocating process "tipping-in and tipping-out."

Tipping-point theory is also useful for understanding racial integration in school settings. The quest for racial integration, and ultimately social diversity, in public schools and the larger society is significantly impacted by the tipping-point phenomenon. Because schools draw on their neighborhood's population, the nexus between school attendance and residential patterns is inherently married to tipping point. Consequently, tipping point becomes a critical factor in attaining desegregation in public education. Residential mobility—the ability to choose location—therefore becomes a key contributor to or inhibitor of the desegregation effort (Giles, Cataldo, & Gatlin, 1975; Grodzins, 1958; Ottensmann, 1995).

Research on tipping points asks two primary questions. First, why do White residents flee from African American residents? Second, what leads to White resistance of the African American presence? This study has transposed and extended these two questions as a means of addressing collegiate desegregation, particularly in West Virginia. Hence, the study asks two questions: (a) Why has the presence of White students at Bluefield State decimated the enrollment of African American students? (b) In what ways has the traditionally African American institutional context persisted despite the White presence on campus?

Higher Education in West Virginia

West Virginia is the only state in the union whose geographic borders lie completely within the Appalachian Mountains. The state is home to ten public four-year institutions—Bluefield State University (at Bluefield), Concord College (at Athens), Fairmont State College (at Fairmont), Glenville State College (at Glenville), Marshall University (at Huntington), Sheperd College (at Sheperdstown), West Liberty State College (at West Liberty), West Virginia Institute of Technology (at Montgomery), West Virginia State College (at Institute), and West Virginia University (at Morgantown). The

state has five community colleges—Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College (at Moorefield), Potomac State College of West Virginia University (at Keyster), Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College (at Logan), West Virginia Northern Community College (at Wheeling), and West Virginia University at Parkersburg. A number of the four-year institutions also offer two-year associate degrees. The state also has the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, a public professional school which trains physicians for the Appalachian region. West Virginia State College and Bluefield State University are the only institutions in the state to bear the federal designation of historically Black college or university.

West Virginia State College, founded in 1891, is the state's 1890 land-grant institution. The proximity of the campus to the state capitol has made it the primary resource for the most cosmopolitan region of the state. Despite an 86% White student enrollment and an 80% White faculty composition (see Table 1), the campus maintains the traditional tone, tenor, and feel of an HBCU (Lamont, 1979; Roebuck & Murty, 1993, Stikes, 1984). The fact that White students come on campus "only" to take classes and then leave has allowed the historic ecological psychology—embedded behavioral setting or environmental context—of the campus to remain undisturbed (Brown, 1998). The campus is said to be "White by day, and Black by night" (see Levinson, 2000). The campus has an African American president, and a majority of its administrators are Black. Based on my observation, the campus has a rich student life where traditional Black fraternities and sororities flourish. The campus is viewed as a repository for information, materials, and memorabilia of the African American experience in West Virginia.

Bluefield State University was founded in 1895 as a teachers college for African Americans in the state. The campus is geographically difficult to reach, since the city of Bluefield, located at the southernmost tip of the state, can be reached only by a state highway; no interstate is available. Surrounded by mountainous terrain, Bluefield is bordered by a state park and a national forest. The campus is located on forty acres of land adjacent to a railroad yard filled with boxcars. Unlike West Virginia State, Bluefield's campus closes down regularly around 5:00 P.M.

Bluefield State University has the lowest African American and highest White student enrollment of the nation's 103 HBCUs. The White student population was officially 92% during 1994, the most recent federal data cycle (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Furthermore, 92% of its faculty is White, and it is the only HBCU to have a White president. (See Table 1.) Unlike West Virginia State College, the campus lacks any visible or aesthetic indicators of its HBCU designation. There are no Black Greek-letter organizations on campus. Most of the traditions typical of an HBCU have vanished. There is no Greek life, no marching band, limited Black faculty/

Table 1

Faculty Composition (1994) at Two West Virginia HBCUs

	West Virginia State College	*Bluefield State University*
Total FTE	146	91
African American	23	4
White	117	84
Other	6	3

staff presence, and no signs of the historic traditions of the formerly Black-populated student body. The campus currently has no residence halls, although several are under construction.

Bluefield State is often cited as an example of collegiate desegregation gone awry because of its high enrollment of White students (Drummond, 2000; Levinson, 2000). Others suggest that White students are merely selecting HBCUs because of their low cost (Wenglinsky, 1996, 1997). Recent evidence indicates that high enrollments of White students at HBCUs may in fact be a combination of both factors (Brown, 1999a; Brown, 2001; President's Board, 1996). Many White students select HBCUs because of minority scholarships offered under extant collegiate desegregation compliance plans. Others select HBCUs because of proximity and/or programmatic offerings (Brown & Hendrickson, 1997; Wenglinsky, 1996, 1997). The transdemographic reality at Bluefield State is a composite of each of the above factors.

Bluefield State University took its mandate to desegregate very seriously. When Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, Bluefield State immediately began the process of formal integration. By 1968, the campus had its first White president. In addition to energetic compliance with the federal mandate to desegregate, the student population became a barometer of a statewide drop in the numbers of African American citizens—a drop that triggered several happenstance occurrences on the Bluefield State campus.

The Case of Bluefield State University

West Virginia was once known as "the land of coal" for its many coal mines scattered across various counties. African Americans comprised a significant percentage of the coal labor market. With the death of the coal industry in the latter half of the twentieth century, African American and

White families migrated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Toledo, Ohio; and Detroit, Michigan; among other places, in search of employment opportunities (Harley, 1995; Pettigrew, 1964; Smith, 1994). McDowell and Mercer counties, the two counties encasing Bluefield State, show the same pattern. Overall population decreased 35% between 1950 and 1990 (from 173,000 to 113,000) while the drop in African American population was a substantially greater 56% (from 32,000 to 14,000). According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (2000), the statewide population of African Americans in West Virginia as of 1999 had dropped to an all-time low of 3.2% (p. 116).

In parallel time, the campus also encountered a series of occurrences which impacted the precipitous shift in enrollment. Granted, the movement toward desegregation compliance and the changing state population affected Bluefield State University student enrollments. However, the transdemographic enrollment is also the result of the arrival of a White president, the closing of the campus residence halls, and the arrival of cohorts of veterans on campus. The presence of a non-African American president continues to haunt Bluefield; and this appointment is widely regarded as a strategic error, since Black colleges are noted for allowing African American students to see themselves reflected in the campus administration and student culture (Brown, 1997; Brown, 1998; Davis, 1998; Stikes, 1984). Additionally, a pipe bomb exploded in the campus gymnasium in November 1968. In response, the president closed all of Bluefield's dormitories, renovating them for classrooms during an era of fiscal hardship. The removal of the dormitories displaced the on-campus African American students; and the decision to build new residential facilities was only recently made.

Bluefield State enrolled only 500 to 1,000 students during the height of its prominence as an HBCU in the 1940s and 1950s. It currently enrolls over 2,500 students. This increase began after World War II when, with the passage of the G.I. Bill, Bluefield State began to see increasing number of White students. Subsequent military conflicts—for instance, the Korean War and the Vietnam War—led to a flood of White students enrolling on campus. The students reportedly selected Bluefield because of its low cost and willingness to accommodate part-time or commuting students. This trend merged with the downward trend in African American student enrollments, exacerbated by the difficulty of recruiting out-of-state students for a campus with no residence halls and the absence of facilities, activities, organizations, and cultural aspects typical of HBCU campuses. The result is that Bluefield State, as of 1994, had only an 8% African American student enrollment.

Although Bluefield State's transdemographic enrollment was not apparently caused primarily by collegiate desegregation initiatives, the contextual implications provide an important exemplar for institutions currently

Table 2

HBCU Enrollment and Changes Nationwide

	1976	*1994*	*% Change*
Total	222,613	280,071	26%
African American	197,252	236,116	19%
White	21,040	35,963	70%
Hispanic	3,442	5,012	45%
Asian American	649	2,429	274%
Native American	230	551	139%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996.

pursuing voluntary or federally mandated enrollment redistribution. Bluefield State offers a glimpse at what may occur in a campus's culture and climate when its tipping point is exceeded. The evidence from Bluefield State is particularly compelling given West Virginia State's ability to preserve the ecological context of an HBCU despite an 86% White enrollment.

White Students at HBCUs

White students account for 16.5% of the HBCU enrollment nationally, while African American students comprise only 9.4% of the student population on majority enrolled White campuses (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). The growing diversification of the Black college campus has led to concern among both researchers and policy makers (Sims, 1994). Although there is increased participation across racial categories on HBCU campuses (see Table 2), the discourse has centered on White students. Many fear that the increasing number of White students will radically change the institutional culture and climate (Drummond, 2000; Levinson, 2000). Typically, Bluefield State University is cited as a worst-case scenario.

The enrollment patterns at HBCUs provide an interesting commentary on the import and impact of collegiate desegregation. The HBCUs with the highest White enrollments are all public institutions. (See Table 3.) Hence, each institution has been directly impacted by the collegiate desegregation mandate. Conversely, the HBCUs with the highest Black and African American enrollments are all private. (See Table 4.) This status frees them from federal oversight and/or compliance under state initiatives designed to facilitate collegiate desegregation. Researchers have questioned the relationship between desegregation initiatives and collegiate enrollment (Brown, 1999a; Brown, 2001; Brown & Hendrickson, 1997; Drummond, 2000; Levinson, 2000; Williams, 1997). They argue that the current focus on col-

TABLE 3

HBCUs NATIONWIDE WITH HIGHEST WHITE ENROLLMENTS

	Total	*White*	*Percentage*
Bluefield State University (WV)	2609	2390	92%
West Virginia State College (WV)	4519	3864	86%
Lincoln University (MO)	3512	2476	70%
Kentucky State University	2563	274	50%
Langston University (OK)	3408	1357	39%
Tennessee State University	8180	2637	32%
Fayetteville State University (NC)	4109	1261	31%
Delaware State University	3381	995	29%
Elizabeth City State University (NC)	2099	519	25%
Harris-Stowe State College (MO)	1757	407	23%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996.

legiate desegregation, with its resulting transdemographic enrollment shifts for HBCUs, will threaten the historic mission and environment of those campuses.

The concern over an altered climate at the public HBCU emerges from the recognition that the campus culture has been the primary factor in the success of this cohort of institutions. Research indicates that HBCUs are the primary promoters of African American postsecondary attainment. The data demonstrate that while HBCUs enroll only 16% of African American undergraduate students nationwide, they produce 28.5% of the baccalaureate degrees awarded to African American students (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, 1997). Lamont (1979) posits that for many African American students, the HBCU is "culturally more congenial" than a predominantly White university (p. 32). Roebuck and Murty (1993) further suggest that "there is also a general level of satisfaction and camaraderie among Black students at Black schools that is not found among Black students on white campuses" (p. 15).

These positive gains also accrue to White students in traditional HBCU settings. In addition to having a five-year baccalaureate degree completion rate higher than that of African American students attending HBCUs (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, 1997), White students who attend HBCUs are often able to engage in more comprehensive actualization. Willie (1983) states that White students who attend HBCUs have very little difficulty communicating with people from different races and have a greater likelihood of dismissing racial stereotypes. A study by Willie, Grady, and

Table 4

HBCUs with Highest Black[a] Enrollments

	Total	*Black*	*Percentage*
Tougaloo College (MS)	1105	1105	100%
Lane College (TN)	667	667	100%
Allen University (SC)	256	256	100%
Livingstone College (NC)	836	835	99.9%
J. C. Smith University (NC)	1413	1409	99.7%
Miles College (AL)	1068	1065	99.7%
Morris College (SC)	889	886	99.7%
Fisk University (TN)	872	869	99.7%
LeMoyne-Owen College (TN)	1436	1430	99.6%
Barber-Scotia College (NC)	432	430	99.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996.

[a]I use *Black* because the data does not differentiate African American students from other students of African origins (e.g., African, Jamaican, Bahamian, and West Indian).

Hope (1991) revealed that even White professors who temporarily left HBCUs to pursue graduate work expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of faculty diversity and the negative race relations climate within the predominantly White institutions at which they matriculated.

The strength of the HBCU is its unique cultural context (Brown, 2001; Brown & Davis, 2001; Freeman, 1998). The mere presence of White students does not disrupt the maintenance and/or continuance of this uniquely nuanced reality. As the example of West Virginia State College indicates, an HBCU can maintain its traditional cultural identity despite significant enrollment increases by White or other students. What remains unclear is the proportion of on-campus students at which the cultural context begins to shift (Beckham, 1982; Fordyce & Kirschner, 1990). This nexus is the critical threshold at which the tipping-point theory becomes operative.

Stinchcombe, McDill, and Walker (1969) explain this phenomenon:

> People tolerate stimuli up to a particular point, but . . . once this threshold point of tolerance has been passed then a reaction or response to the stimulus is evoked. . . . This idea has given rise to the popular notion that there might be some "tipping point" at which a reaction to a changing neighborhood or to a desegregated school or some social aggregate is evoked. It would be at this point that a person moves out of the aggregate. (pp. 128–129)

The threshold argument clearly evinces the importance of environmental structure and context. In the HBCU environment and context, African American attainment and possibility are pervasive (Stikes, 1984). They are institutional spaces birthed and developed by African American presence. Disrupting that presence in significant ways may evoke a reaction based on the struggle between the internalized structure (a Black campus) and the externalized surface (populated by White students). Consequently, the only way to keep African American students from leaving the desegregated HBCU ("Black flight") is to insure that the proportion of White students on campus does not exceed the threshold at which African American students will refuse to attend (Grodzins, 1958; Marshall & Stahura, 1979; Ottensmann, 1995).

It is important to note that Black flight, like White flight, requires only a conscious choice (Grodzins, 1958). When factors such as campus climate begin to influence African American student choice regarding HBCUs, the process has begun (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997; Freeman, 1999). Recruitment counselors at Bluefield State University highlighted the difficulty they experience trying to convince both in- and out-of-state African American students to apply for admission. The bottom line is that African American students who want to attend an HBCU no longer consider Bluefield State an option.

CONCLUSION

In the opening lines of her 1982 book, *Lawyers v. Educators: Black Colleges and Desegregation in Public Higher Education,* Jean Preer writes:

> The existence of separate, publicly supported colleges for [African Americans] has embodied a series of legal and educational paradoxes. The public [Black] college has been expected to serve the unique educational requirements of Black students while it duplicates the curriculum offered to whites. It has been a center both to preserve Black culture and to prepare Black students for the mainstream of American life. . . . Its continued existence has been defended as necessary to maintain segregation and as essential to increase integration. Its improvement has been mandated in order to segregate Black students and to attract white ones. Its virtues have been hailed by segregationists and its weaknesses condemned by integrationists. Ambivalence toward the Black college has confounded the definition and implementation of desegregation. (p. 1)

This quotation captures the complex state of public HBCUs. Black colleges therefore find themselves at the proverbial crossroads in their existence (Brown & Hendrickson, 1997). Ongoing efforts to eliminate the vestiges of legal segregation in the South have centered on shifting institutional en-

rollment, even though the focus on transdemographic enrollments shifts as a form of compliance threatens the unique character of these institutions.

The utilization of transdemography as the method of eliminating the continuing effects of segregation is bittersweet for HBCUs. Historically White colleges are recruiting African American students who have been the primary subscribers to HBCUs. Simultaneously, increasing numbers of White students are enrolling on HBCU campuses, increasing overall enrollment and endangering the continuation of a cultural context more than a century old. Despite the case of Bluefield State University, there is limited information on the threshold or tipping point at which an HBCU can potentially lose its psychosocial and aesthetic atmosphere. This investigation is only the first of many studies that higher education researchers must conduct on White and African American student experiences at HBCUs.

The transdemographic focus of collegiate desegregation establishes a survival conflict for HBCUs. The choices appear to be (a) complying with the desegregation mandate and risking cultural collapse, or (b) maintaining the historic enrollment patterns and risking judicial sanctions. The challenge is for collegiate desegregation initiatives to move beyond numerical enrollment goals, promoting and encouraging campus communities where all races have equal educational opportunity and outcomes regardless of the campus ethos (Brown, 2001). Continuing to focus on amalgamating African American and White students on HBCU campuses offers very little guarantee of academic success. Future policy guidance regarding HBCUs should acknowledge this important reality.

Higher education researchers and policy makers must find the best possible strategies to promote positive academic experiences for the current cadre of students attending public HBCUs, as well as for students attending other institutions. Future collegiate desegregation efforts must acknowledge the complex nature and function of the public HBCU in American higher education. It is possible to define a niche for public HBCUs within the context of a unified state-level plan for postsecondary education (Brown, 1999a). In fact, it is not only possible but required. All public HBCUs could be transformed into "Bluefield States"—intentionally or unintentionally. Higher education researchers and policy makers must therefore continue working to eliminate the negative consequences which could result from the best of intentions.

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