

The H.B.C.U. Imperative: How Blacks Can Unite

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Abstract

Historically Black Colleges and Universities collectively represent a wellspring of Black, history, Black culture and Black excellence. The contemporary socio-political and economic climate calls for an unprecedented renaissance of knowledge and support for these invaluable American institutions. The purpose of this article is to effectively contextualize and convey the vital importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This writing is designed to enlighten and inspire the reader towards a greater appreciation of the value of these institutions while encouraging taking actions to assist in their maintenance and expansion. Some of the key points of this text include the valuable lessons learned from HBCU history, the need for HBCU support becoming a more widely recognized global imperative, and various strategies to advance this agenda of Black academic, institutional agency. Some of the methods employed in this research study include ethnographic reflections on the history and evolution of HBCU's, sociological analysis of the ways Black colleges and Black culture intersect and ways our support for these institutions can serve a multitude of purposes including, institutional independence, economic empowerment and preparing the leaders and world changers of tomorrow. This research is presented with the intention of eliciting massive support through historical enlightenment and zealous promotion of the rich history and boundless potential of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Keywords: historically, Black, Colleges, University, Unity, diversity, equity, inclusion

Introduction

Every Black person on the planet should support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and this article will clearly explain why this assertion is salient. Why are HBCUs vital to the preservation of history, culture, (Conciatore, 2000) and Black excellence? (Rose, 2024). This marketing manifesto is crafted to advocate for a cultural and institutional shift

that prioritizes HBCUs and their rightful place in the global struggle for African liberation.(Mohan, 1976) How are the great and noble histories of these institutions positively impacting the world (Strong, 2017) in ways we must be attentive to, and supportive of? Current political threats to the Department of Education, (Lobosco, 2024) coupled with dog whistle political attacks which have twisted diversity, equity, and inclusion into a racialized pejorative (Guynn 2024) intensify the need for HBCU support. We must create and promote narratives with transformative potential that will yield positive cultural and material results. This article is an appeal to graduates of HBCUs and predominately White institutions (PWIs), as well as those who did not attend or graduate from any university, to support HBCUs.

This work departs from the typical "Save Our HBCUs" narrative (Schexnider, 2013) about certain historic institutions serving our community. Instead, it emphasizes the many ways HBCUs have saved Black people and communities globally through enlightenment and empowerment. (Freeman, & Cohen, 2001). It acknowledges the debt owed to these centers of knowledge and culture, urging readers to repay that debt with respect and action. The goal is to shift our collective view of HBCUs from something we merely support to an integral part of who we are, deserving of both reverence and tangible backing (Freeman Jr. & Lee Jr, 2018). The article will be divided into 3 primary categories which structure this Afrocentric academic appeal: history, Black culture, and unity.

History

The study of history is important because “Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research.” (Malcom X.,1963). Scholar/Revolutionary Malcolm X. memorably asserted this value of historical perspective in his seminal speech, “Message to the Grass Roots” in November of 1963. It is thus imperative that a firm chronologically accurate foundation of the history of the university as an enterprise of education and refinement from ancient Kemet to the HBCUs in America is established. The benefits of grounding this analysis in the realities of our collective history concerning cultural contributions to humanity such as Waset, the University of Timbuktu in Mali (982CE), University of Al-Karaouine, in Fes, Morocco (859AD), Al-Azhar University, Egypt (972AD) is invaluable. This section examines the history of HBCUs and the impact of their unique historical context on the present moment and future.

Black Culture

Where some see an economic educational epidemic or a crisis of consciousness, I argue that what we are witnessing in the apathy and lack of legislative support for HBCUs represents a cultural crisis for African Americans. Through a historically based, cultural reset, this article seeks to inform and invigorate the masses through the effective promulgation of the message herein by the readers, concerning the cultural significance of HBCUs (Bracey, 2017) and our intimate connection to their preservation and promotion. I am defining “Black Culture” as an umbrella term, encompassing the various customs, mores, languages, artistic and innovative creative expressions, historiographies and social behaviors relating to direct descendants of the African Diaspora. This section highlights the ways HBCUs play an interictal part of guiding and developing Black culture beyond the classroom.

Unity

Throughout history there have been several touchstones which galvanized the Black/Diasporic peoples to greater degrees of collective consciousness and political, economic, and cultural cohesion. Typically, these initiatives/movements have involved the pursuit of legislative and institutional shifts which are achieved more successfully through the effective weaponization of unification, showing the true power in numbers. This section explores the historical, contemporary and potential impacts of a more unified conceptualization and collective engagement with HBCUs.

The History of HBCU's

For many years authors have provided clarity, writing about the lessons, (Wade, 2021), relevance (Killough, 2018) and legacy of HBCUs (Albritton, (2012) and their unique institutional founding and history. “The Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded to educate the freed descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. Both before and after the U.S. Civil War, great controversy attended the founding of these institutions of higher learning. Pursuant to the values and interests that had informed the slavocracy that included most of the Founding Fathers of the U. S. Republic, there existed great ambivalence about providing any level of education for the descendants of enslaved African peoples. Once established, there was ambivalence about the real purpose and, consequently, the curriculum and future of these institutions of higher learning.” (LeMelle, 2002 p.1).

“When the first Black colleges were founded over 150 years ago, they filled an important gap in the educational terrain of Black America (Willie & Edmonds, 1978). As early as 1837,

these institutions exhibited a remarkable capacity for survival, serving as a cultural and intellectual enclave for America's Black populace (Murty

& Roebuck, 1993). During the decade following the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), it became evident that a system of formal education must be established to meet the relevant needs and conditions of the newly freed Black citizens" (Bullock, 1967; Freeman, 2002 p.351). It is therefore important to properly contextualize the creation of HBCUs within the problematic paradigm of systemic racism. Oppression became an impetus for greater expressions of academic self-determination, representing a key motivating factor for the rise, survival, and treasured value of HBCUs. The evolution of HBCUs can be viewed as a microcosm reflecting the larger societal historiography in pursuit of multifaceted expressions of liberation.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are a uniquely American institution. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines an HBCU as any Historically Black College or University that was established and accredited (or making progress toward accreditation) prior to 1964, and whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans. Cheyney University (ca. 1837) was founded first, followed by Lincoln University (ca. 1854), Wilberforce University (ca. 1856), and some 200 more by 1890 (Brown and Davis 2001; Gasman 2007a) (Arroyo & Gasman 2014).

"There are 107 institutions classified as HBCUs, representing three percent of all institutions of higher education in the United States. HBCUs currently enroll 15% of all Black college students and produce roughly one-third of all Black college graduates.² [...] HBCUs have educated some 75% of all African American Ph.D.'s, 46% of all African American business executives, 50% of African American engineers, 80% of African American federal judges, and 65% of African American doctors." (Wilson, 2007 pp. 11-12.)

Long before the first Black colleges and universities in America were opened, the earliest institutions of higher learning in the world, founded in Africa around 3200 BC, gained international prominence. Eager scholars traveled from Greece, Rome and other parts of the planet to sit at the feet of African masters in ancient Kemet (later called Egypt). It was here that young seekers of knowledge learned the deep sciences of the world (Anakwue, N. 2017). An example of this early African innovative genius was found in Waset, the world's first university

later called Luxor by the Greeks. Famous Greek scholars such as Pythagoras traveled to Africa to learn from the creators of the world's first colleges who happened to be Black. "The Greeks saw Egypt, an African country, as the cradle of wisdom and knowledge." (Asante, pg. 64, 1990).

African Americans were denied accurate information about African History for generations. These suppressive efforts helped set the stage for the creation of self-determined Black educational spaces like HBCUs. The recognition and preservation of these realities of Black History have been an ongoing subject of considerable contention throughout the life of this national experiment we call America. Growing from an optimistic collection of Colonies to the current Republic, the education of African/African American people has collided with whitewashing efforts, intentional erasure, and purposeful patriotic delusion. In response to these and other challenges to African American's accessing education, HBCUs were established wherever large Black populations resided, such as in the southeast, southwest, and the northeast.

There are numerous reports of individuals preventing Black students from attending schools (Rich, Candipan & Owens, 2021) and incidences of all-Black schools being physically destroyed (Lieberman, 2022).

"Hostile Southerners frequently harassed teachers and students and burned or vandalized school buildings. These acts were widely known, publicized not only by government reports but through oral traditions, missionary organizations, the African American press, sympathetic Republican newspapers, and Thomas Nast's political cartoons. All these sources established school-burning as an iconic image of the postwar era." (Scribner, (2020 p. 470)

Rampant racism manifested through acts of racial suppression contextualize the birth of HBCUs within the massive Black desire to learn and grow. This passion fuels new student interest and alumni support helping these institutions to continue persevering and prospering beyond misunderstandings, stereotypes, and other manifestations of racist resistance

The Value of HBCU History

Demonstrations of the value of education persisted through the fall of ancient Kemet, multiple invasions, and the transporting of Africans to the so-called New World known as the Maafa (Thompson, 2008) Since the era of enslavement in the Americas, African prisoners of war were forced to labor in strange lands and dissuaded from becoming educated under the threat of physical violence and other legislative restraints. Enslaved Africans were determined to

overcome obstacles of intimidation and racist complications that hindered their learning opportunities. Through various clandestine movements which later developed into organizational education efforts, a new narrative of Black education took shape. “Black education was a cooperative venture involving the Freedman’s Bureau, benevolent societies, and the corps of teachers that by July 1870 numbered 3,500 (Williams 2009 p.3).” These organizations, loosely affiliated literacy networks and early learning institutions servicing African Americans were critical precursors to HBCUs. It is important to recognize the agency of African Americans who courageously pursued intellectual development in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. This bold and undaunted spirit created a fierce academic appetite which gave rise to the birth of HBCUs.

Although, many historians believe that racial conditions for African Americans and those classified as Black within the Americas have improved more than available data reflects, many continue to seek out culturally sensitive safe spaces such as HBCUs. Understanding the importance of these academic enclaves displays the value of widespread support from students and others. These values and high regard for the transformative potential of education were motivating factors for the origins of institutions of higher learning that focused on Black students. “Education, then, according to the more liberal and dominant segments of missionary philanthropists, was intended to prepare a college-bred Black leadership to uplift the Black masses from the legacy of slavery and the restraints of the postbellum caste system” (Anderson, 1988, pp. 240–24).

The value of HBCUs however, extends far beyond serving as a refuge away from the insensitivity and potential marginalization of predominantly white institutions of higher learning. The desire to experience Black culture within an institutional setting centering on the Black experience, networks, and excellence continues to appeal to the thousands of potential college students internationally every year. This question of HBCUs, Black culture, and their premium importance within black life cannot be overstated. Beyond the academic development and phenomenal networking opportunities exists the potential for an experience that can leave an indelible imprint on members of the HBCU community and those they go on to serve. A major distinction of the type of service provided beyond the traditionally educational involves the unique cultural legacy of these historically Black institutions. These schools exist as shining

examples of the power of applied Black culture which has directly and indirectly helped to shape the nation and the world.

Black Culture

HBCUs are successful because they serve as the Mecca of Black culture and community (Allen, 1992; Brown & Davis, 2001). (Moore et al 2018, P. 21) These historic institutions have always functioned as cultural hubs while providing opportunities for academic and intellectual development. HBCUs have a rich history of promoting success in social mobility, providing access to higher education, and developing leaders within the Black community (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Historically, HBCUs, the creators of the open enrollment system (Thomson, 1978), provided opportunities for Blacks to gain a college education. The one theme that unites all HBCUs is that they have traditionally accepted students who otherwise would not have gone to college (Coaxum, 2001 p. 580; Kannerstein, 1978). Authors have explored various aspects of HBCUs cultural impacts including social mobility as these institutions are responsible for catapulting great minds like Booker T Washington from a slave plantation to international prominence (Hammond et al., 2021). Increasingly, we are witnessing top athletes such as Eric Phoenix, JaVonnie Gibson, Darius Fox and Destiny Howell choosing to align their athletic journey's with HBCUs. (Jones & Bell, 2016). There are also differences in how HBCU faculty and potential faculty perceive their professional experiences at Black institutions. "Also, many Blacks are uncomfortable with mostly white males determining whether they will receive tenure. (Jackson, 2002 p.182).

Another major institutional distinction can be found in testimonials of Black excellence resulting from the unique sense of community reported on HBCU campuses. Studies confirming the effectiveness of this cultural phenomena continue to produce evidence of its significance (Brooks, 2024; Williams et al., 2021). HBCUs exist as invigorating places for students desirous of intimately embracing the diverse aspects of their Blackness while further developing the fullness of Black intellectualism and professionalism. These institutions serve to encourage students seeking to embody the phrase, "too Black, too strong", and too smart to be limited by the ignorance, xenophobia, or racial insecurities of others. HBCUs often allow for an exponentially more nuanced set of Black experiences where the collective expressions of Blackness are not directed by consistent daily engagement with a majority white demographic.

This degree of cultural insulation and demographic dominance increases opportunities for Black agency.

Thus, our collective support for HBCUs should reflect the all-encompassing benefits derived from those who directly access the positive elements of the HBCU experience before engaging in a life of service, inspiration, and innovation which directly contributes to uplift of African-descended people everywhere. HBCU graduates such as Du Bois, King, and Washington are all dully affiliated with African American elevation, genius, and pursuits for empowerment and liberation. We must all contribute to the creation and cultivation of future leaders, and proponents of Black culture, life, and humanity through our support of HBCUs. These efforts will not be conducted without expected attempts to distract, disrupt, and destroy our momentum and movement. Historically, issues of Black identity and academic ascension have encountered conflicts, primarily among those who mistakenly associate scholarly proficiency with whiteness or fail to appreciate the value of Black institutions. Enemies of Black progress constitute a potentially daunting, confusing, and dehumanizing daily struggle.

Some voices from within the Black community are unfortunately among those leading the adversarial charge against HBCUs. Many of these outspoken, commodified critics are comforted by the blissful ignorance of racial tokenization and assimilationist aspirations. Having no conflict between identity and intellect was particularly expressed by Du Bois when describing his transformative experience at Fisk. Resisting the perils of double consciousness through stellar proficiency as a double major. HBCU provides much-needed balance and wholeness in the world constantly seeking to force contradictions of compartmentalization on African Americans. We often hear about the value of representation within various professional positions. Black students engaging with Black deans and directors allows them to see and engage with tangible, real-time examples of the heights they can reach and the impact they could make to maximize the opportunities provided by their beloved institutions of higher learning. As massive political struggles to dismantle diversity equity and inclusion programs, ban books, and even attempt to do away with Black studies as an educational option HBCUs remain extremely vital.

Upholding the educational agency protected by academic freedom requires a level of institutional flexibility and support which is effectively fostered within the HBCU network. HBCUs' commitment to serve the disadvantaged may have made these institutions susceptible to a history of negative media representation and underfunding (Gasman, 2009). The typical

indicators of performance are graduation rates, first-year retention, and salary upon graduation (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). HBCUs tend to lag behind PWIs on these measures. The most popular college ranking publication, “U.S. News and World Reports’ Best Colleges”, calculates the quality of institutions largely based on these outcome variables, which results in lower ranks for HBCUs without much consideration to the populations served (Jaschik, 2018). This negative portrayal may discourage prospective students and their parents from choosing HBCUs (Hardy et al. 2019 p. 470; Jones, 2016)).

Although there exists much debate about which institution was truly the first HBCU among Lincoln Lions and Cheney Wolves, or who is the real HU among Howard University Bisons and Hampton Pirates, other aspects of HBCU life and culture are far less contentious. A more widely agreed upon topic is the importance of HBCUs as institutions of higher learning that powerfully address the unique cultural needs within the context of a particular historiography. The culmination of nuanced aspects of these institutions and the pride imbued to the populations they have traditionally served has given rise to a phenomenon that has come to be known as the HBCU experience. This blend of Black academic and cultural excellence has been infused with a sense of pride which has proven positively transformative, culturally enlightening, and racially reaffirming. There are potentially advantageous examples and effects, indicative of these institutions which are worthy of emulation for the benefit of Black society far beyond the bounds of academia. Examples of these progressive patterns include representing Black excellence knowing and loving yourself, understanding what you are capable of and the heights of greatness you are expected to reach as a student and alumnus of an HBCU.

As an Afrocentric scholar who attended a predominantly white institution, I have developed a unique appreciation for the power of being centered within your own cultural and historical narrative which Afrocentric methodology encourages. When someone is not a subject of their matrix of experience, engagement, and interpretation they are at greater risk of becoming perceived as an object on the periphery of European thought and imagination. I believe that Historically Black Colleges and Universities play a key role in welcoming, providing and developing main character energy for those blessed by the instruction they provided. This for us-by-us style of learning and growing is indicative of the independence spirit which fueled the creation and maintenance of several old Black towns during the reconstruction era shortly after the emancipation proclamation was assigned and fully announced.

The HBCU tradition celebrates a people who remain self-defining, self-empowering, and intellectually liberated. Even as we endured some of the worst treatment of human beings in the history of humanity, African Americans recognized that our circumstances were not our identity nor our destiny. We realized that the intellectual light inside of us could not be extinguished by hatred, ignorance, racism, intentional mischaracterizations, or even death. This inner light was magnified through the process of culturally edifying institutions of Higher Learning. However, the transformative development synonymous with the HBCU experience came with many obstacles and vocal detractors.

Critics, Haters and Negativity

There have been great debates considering such institutions will still receive special funding designated for HBCUs originally earmarked to support African American students. This unique institutional evolution After decades of successfully educating Black Americans, HBCUs may be threatened. However, most efforts toward Black self-determination in the United States have been met with considerable resistance. Discouragement has manifested through mundane critical opinions, undeniably consequential legislative barriers to Black progress, and widespread acts of racial terror. A mix of self-hatred, historical confusion about African Americans and Education, and a lack of effective systemic analysis often contribute to many critical opinions about HBCUs from outside and within the African American community. As integration in schools increased, new opportunities were coupled with emerging challenges. “The competition that HBCUs currently face to attract and educate African American and other students presents both challenges and opportunities. Although numerous studies have found that HBCUs are more effective at retaining and graduating African American students than predominately white colleges, HBCUs have their detractors. Perhaps because of the increasing pressures on state governments to assure that public HBCUs receive comparable funding and provide programs that will attract a broader student population (Betsey, 2011; Williams & Palmer, 2019 p. 2). Recognizing the widespread opposition to the Black academic ascension, often centralized and HBCU can serve as motivation for those who engage these institutions directly and others to coalesce around the ideals, opportunities, and missions of predominantly African American institutions of higher education.

Understanding the history of negativity launched towards HBCUs (prejudiced evaluations of HBCU credentials and discriminatory federal and state funding (Crawford,

(2017). throughout their existence can help to create and customize strategies to offset the impact of attacks that would seek to distort the purpose and power of HBCUs:

Often, HBCUs are depicted as the poor stepchildren of American higher education. As a group, they are portrayed as being unable to manage finances and having weak leadership, unresponsive alumni, and low graduation rates. Some HBCUs have one or more of these attributes, but the same is true of historically white institutions (HWIs). The notion that HBCUs “never measure up” or are a “lost cause” permeates the media narrative, and as a result, the public, the higher education community, and even some African Americans have negative perceptions of HBCUs (Gasman & Bowman, 2011 p. 2).

Despite, Jim Crow, Black Codes, lynching, segregation, cross burnings, and blocking the entrances of countless educational institutions throughout the United States, HBCUs have persevered. The test of time has borne fewer negative consequences in the contemporary context than financial strains which could close the doors of many well-known HBCUs. There have been instances where institutions classified as HBCUs are now demographically predominantly white. In recent decades, 12 HBCUs have closed, several have been on the verge of closing, and countless others have faced serious challenges (Suggs, 1997b). While the biggest threat is the intense financial pressure felt by these institutions, predominately as the result of lower-than-average endowments, other sources of concern cited are a lack of leadership, inadequate and outdated programs, deficient resources, and philosophical changes in their missions, HBCUs are facing a turning point as they strive to fulfill their missions while at the same time competitively preparing for the future. (Van Camp et al., 2009 p. 457). This preparedness, however, could not dissuade the emergence of a constant flow of critical voices targeting HBCUs. Despite HBCUs’ historical successes, their efficacy, compared with that of non-HBCUs, has been a recurring source of controversy and criticism for several decades. The most famous of these critiques may have been the 1967 article in *The Harvard Educational Review* by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman labeling HBCUs as “academic disaster areas”. Thomas Sowell later affirmed their review as an “honest assessment” of HBCUs. A more recent, high-profile criticism comes from a *Wall Street Journal* editorial by Jason L. Riley lamenting that Black colleges need a new mission and pointing to comparatively low graduation rates as evidence of HBCUs’ troubles. This charge was soon echoed in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by HBCU critic Richard Vedder

(Richards & Awokoya, 2012 p. 9). Recent political threats from the office of the President, targeting diversity, equity, inclusion and the department of education have created a paradigm shift, (Salajan & Jules, (2024) repositioning the national HBCU conversation. Attacks on Black books, Afrocentric curriculum and difficult racial conversations highlight the need for safe and empowering Black spaces such as HBCUs. Having an institution where Black people are in the majority on every level of education and leadership creates uniquely empowering communal bonds.

UNITY

Another powerful distinction between the HBCU and PWI experiences extends beyond the reaffirming of collective self-determination. Although most of these institutions were founded by or with the help of European benefactors the mission and meaning has always been determined by mainly African American students, faculty members, board members, and university presidents in supportive Black college communities. Authors (Murty & Payne, 2021; et al. 2019; Wilson, 2015) have written about the role of HBCU unity in the classroom through the new student recruitment process and in response to the most recent pandemic. Countless famous and influential educators, innovative pioneers, and titans of industry have also delivered HBCU commencement addresses (e.g., Chadwick Bosman at Howard, Michelle Obama at Tuskegee, Robert F. Smith at Morehouse). The recent collection of keynote presenters is impressive considering the percentage of institutions classified as HBCUs. 107 Black institutions of higher learning in a nation of around 6,000 colleges, HBCU's have disproportionately produce Black lawyers, doctors and leaders of industry. These are the HBCU narratives which must be more consistently promoted

Historical reflections and contemporary testimonials thus reveal the ways HBCUs positively impacted the lives and communities of those they were designed to serve. In some instances, this sphere of influence is from HBCUs throughout the globe. My definition of success involves finding ways to redistribute the investments made into a person's character, consciousness, and creativity for the benefit of the communities and institutions that originally helped to develop their potential. This Sankofa energy marks the distinction between succeeding and simply achieving.

An amazing example of this type of glorious return was manifested when award-winning actress Phylicia Rashad accepted the position of Dean of Fine Arts at Howard University.

This historical attempt at empowerment and the causes for its downfall are important to note. Being chronically underfunded, lack of willing and capable personnel, and perhaps most consequential racist political subversion all contributed to the downfall of the Freedmen's Bureau and its many projects. We must effectively contextualize lessons of the past to create contemporary cooperative climates that will endure obstacles that previously stifled Black progress. As a result, we must be prepared and willing to participate in and make the sacrifices required to ensure that HBCUs never go the way of the Freedmen's Bureau or countless other organizations and institutions that helped Black people until they no longer existed. This clarion collegiate call is not hyperbolic, we must support our institutions. We must recognize the multifaceted efforts afoot to reduce the academic and political agency of African/African American/Diasporic people throughout the United States.

The educational component of this initiative would involve curriculum changes which would serve to educate a new generation of potential HBCU students. We will work towards offering more workshops, clinics, and college tours. These increased efforts would all be standard in promoting the history, opportunities, and unique cultural benefits that comprise the Black college experience. Institutionalizing the general understanding of what HBCUs are and offer would create a more informed populace while empowering existing scholarly institutions.

These efforts could eventually be coupled with other legislative efforts to provide reparations to a population significantly denied and disenfranchised in several ways. From criticisms of supposed DEI (Diversity Equity Inclusion) hires, rightwing, racist support of book banning, to uninformed yet passionate objections to the teaching of critical race theory, the battle rages on. The intersection of race and education remains a political touchstone in America that must be understood and engaged strategically. Our beloved HBCUs represent a pivotal piece on the 3-dimensional chessboard of our protracted beautiful Black struggle.

We should explore ways to transfer portions of estates to institutions that we trust and have proven records of success. All too often, when someone passes there are insurance issues a will or lack thereof which results in a significant portion of the estate going to the state and being absorbed in the probate process. Simply having our affairs for after we are gone can create revolutionary change for HBCUs. Having a life insurance policy, making the payments, and having established legally sound will create billions in additional funding within the next decade.

Conclusion

The altruism displayed by HBCU founders must be emulated within the contemporary context of service and development of HBCUs. We must be mindful to support our institutions whether we attend them or not. This is the noble communal charge we must accept to adequately meet the moment and challenges we are currently facing as a community. Historically this degree of collective, communal uplift has been a cultural staple. After the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation the Freedmen's Bureau was established to assist formerly enslaved Africans and poor Europeans in America who sought economic stability and financial self-determination after the Civil War. This communal and cooperative economic institution provided food assistance, set up schools, offered medical support, and chartered a private Freedmen's savings bank.

I'm advancing a proposal to help promote, maintain, and expand HBCU's academic reach and cultural impacts. This multi-faceted approach includes cooperative economics, educational, legislative, and marketing approaches. The most memorable model for collective financial support throughout my childhood were the ads, telethons, and other opportunities to support the United Negro College fund. Support was not predicated upon being in college or having a young person in your life who benefited directly from the (UNCF). Millions were asked to show support because it was promoted as the right thing to do, and the mind was not something designed to be wasted (to paraphrase). There was a general understanding that increasing educational support and opportunities for some of us could improve the living conditions and other quality-of-life metrics for the rest of us. Black culture is a terrible thing to waste.

Great ways you can support HBCUs include:

1. Attend an HBCU. Moving beyond the rhetorical and theoretical into the tangible realm of practical application is a vital component in the success of this initiative.
2. Encourage others to apply to HBCUs. These efforts, like the institutions they are designed to uplift, require massive collective effort to maintain financial and cultural viability.
3. Support government policies that support the maintenance and growth of HBCUs. The Emancipation Proclamation, Land Grants for Colleges (19 of which are HBCUs) (Jenkins, (1991) the Voting Rights Act and the current executive orders rolling back

various protections disproportionately impacting Black people all show the importance of political and legislative engagement and influence.

4. Support businesses with HBCU partnerships. The relationships between corporations and Universities are essential for institutions such as HBCUs with much smaller endowments than Ivy league schools (ex. Harvard 50.9 billion vs Howard 865 million)
5. Dedicate your time supporting HBCU initiatives and programming. We must do more than send our dollars, we must dedicate our time and attention to our beloved HBCU network, beyond homecoming.
6. Put your money where your mind is and donate directly to HBCUs. In the contemporary financial sense, HBCU also stands for, helping Black colleges and universities. This is done through frequent and generous donations.

This is how we can and must unite! This is the HBCU Imperative.

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