

Excellence, Pride, and Tradition: The Value of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the 21st Century and the Continuous Need to Advocate for Them

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Introduction

Attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) is like no other experience. From being founded out of necessity to sustainment across centuries through consistently adapting to the ever-changing culture of America, HBCUs matter! While they were founded to educate Black students, contemporary HBCUs are a place for everyone to be accepted, become educated, and transform into the best version of themselves. The current special issue aims to shine a light on HBCUs and contribute to the existing literature on higher education, HBCUs, and the various needs of students, faculty, and staff in the American higher education system.

The History of HBCUs

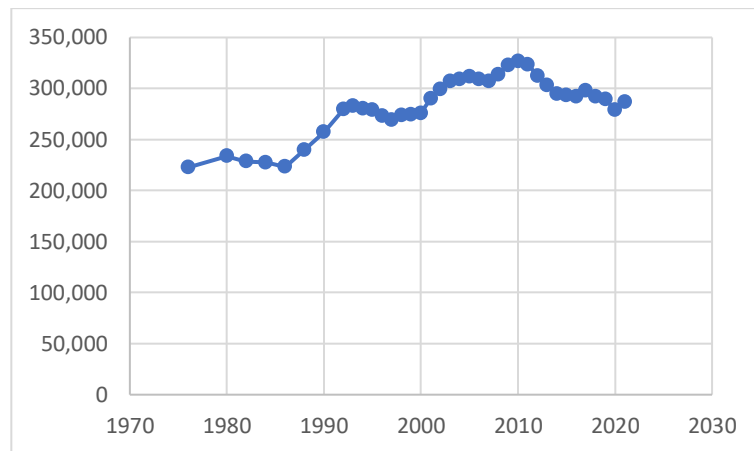
Post the Civil War, there was a need to educate the now formerly enslaved people. HBCUs were established mainly in the Southeast, Southwest, and Northeast parts of the United States as this was where large populations of Black people lived (Evans et al., 2002). The original intent of the creation and support of HBCUs by white people was not to develop college educated Black people but rather to create alternative institutions so that Black students could not matriculate into white colleges and universities. Across the years, HBCUs grew from teaching basic math, English grammar, and trade skills to being strong academic institutions producing some of America's greatest doctors, lawyers, teachers, and philosophers. Until 1964, America kept segregated schools where white students were separated from Black students (Lovett, 2015). After the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas ruling of 1954 & later the Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools throughout the United States desegregated. As this was not normal for that time period, the federal government created the title Historically Black College or University (HBCU) as a way to designate colleges and universities that were educating Black people before integration. This designation allowed them to maintain their mission as true integration would take time.

The Current State and Legacy of HBCUs

The main reason students choose an HBCU is because it matches their cultural frame of reference (Clayton et al., 2022). Students expect to have a great experience in college and thus will more likely bear greater financial burdens (i.e., take out loans, work extra jobs) and accept considerable short-term debt in order to complete their degree there. Since *Brown V. Board*, HBCUs have continued to produce many well-educated individuals in all fields and from all races and ethnicities. There currently exist 107 HBCUs. As showing in Table 1 (US Department of Education, 2022), the number of HBCU students increased by 47% between 1976 and 2010, then decreased by 11 % between 2010 and 2022.

Table 1.

Enrollments at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (1970-2021)



As suggested by the data, throughout the 20th and 21st century, HBCUs played a crucial role in providing access to thousands of students and are still the top producers of Black college graduates (Freeman et al., 2016). They also continue to be a staple and cultural epicenter in the Black community throughout the American South. Likewise, many famous Black Americans such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (Morehouse College), Oprah Winfrey (Tennessee State University), David Banner (Southern University and A&M College), Eddie Robertson, Sr (Grambling State University), Kamala Harris (Howard University), Jessie Jackson (North Carolina A&T State University), Megan the Stallion (Texas Southern University) and numerous others attended an HBCU. This small list is a testament to the power they have to change America. Whereas many mainstream colleges and universities have had centuries of adequate funding and alumni donorship, HBCUs are well respected for financially sustaining themselves and continuing to produce thousands of graduates who are changing the world while also being

heavily underfunded, under resourced, and yet still held to the same standards by the federal and state government and accreditation agencies (Gasman & Esters, 2024). This has resulted in the need to better advocate for their necessity in the American higher education landscape.

Advocating for HBCUs

The current special edition continues to highlight the value of HBCUs through presenting research on a range of topics related to unique issues facing these institutions. We start this issue with Flippin Wyn who suggests HBCUs are essential within the higher education landscape because they serve as means for academic excellence and cultural empowerment. She argues for key foundational elements that have sustained HBCUs and considers why these institutions remain relevant in equipping graduates with the skills to consistently succeed and strive towards academic excellence and cultural empowerment.

We continue with Horne, Ensley, White-Longhorn, Mayo, and Thesus who believe that HBCUs are more than just institutions of higher learning; they are cornerstones of their communities, contributing significantly to the economic, social, and educational fabric. Their work aims to provide an inclusive analysis of the multifaceted impact of HBCUs, investigating the unique pedagogical approaches employed by HBCUs, such as culturally relevant curricula, mentorship programs, and close faculty-student relationships, that contribute to student success. It will also examine the role of HBCUs in addressing educational disparities and promoting equity in higher education, illuminating their often-overlooked role as catalysts for individual and community empowerment.

Malone provides us an insider perspective on her HBCU experience at Southern University and A&M College. Through her story detailing her path through higher education—from feeling invisible in some White spaces to discovering true belonging at her HBCU, she demonstrates how the journey to finding one's place in academia can be complex. Yet, the transition from being unseen and unheard to understood transformed her academic experience and professional growth.

Slaughter, McClendon, and Marshall continue with the theme of student success through maintaining that HBCUs continue to be a hub and model for Black student success. Specifically, for Black women, HBCUs have pronounced effects on personal identity and professional development. Their work highlights how HBCUs influence and support Black women throughout the trajectories of postsecondary education, their careers, and lifestyles.

Specks takes a different perspective through his work on persistence in cultivating lifelong transition support. He believes this work to be vital to a student's success, especially for those with diverse learning needs and intersecting identities, such as those who identify as racially and ethnically minoritized and as a student with disabilities. His position paper aims to investigate the strengths, challenges, and opportunities confronting HBCUs in cultivating lifelong transition support as they prepare students with diverse learning needs for future work.

Hooper offers a viewpoint on the experiences of Black women who are nontraditional students and enrolled in a traditional teacher education program. Through her research, she seeks to help readers understand non-traditional Black women teacher candidates' perspectives for selecting an HBCU teacher education program and how their academic and professional experiences influenced their conceptions of teaching and being a teacher. The findings of her study show the ways the participants were intrinsically motivated to successfully complete the teacher education program to meet their professional goal.

Page and Caldwell contribute an ethnographic case study offering a description of an alternative teacher certification program within an HBCU-based teacher preparation program at Xavier University of Louisiana. Their work indicates the areas in which continued knowledge is desired by teachers. Likewise, the ways in which the alternative certification program prepares students to effectively teach and how the schools in which the educators teach should continue to offer more support, resources, and trainings needed to ensure comprehensive understandings of these areas.

Alexander explores the role of critical pedagogy at HBCUs in shaping global leaders who graduated between 1900 and 1980. Her research examines how an education grounded in social justice principles influenced the careers of seven global leaders. This work ultimately provides findings that highlight key implications for higher education and global leadership, underscoring the potential of HBCUs to foster more inclusive approaches to diplomacy.

The work of Fox, Littleton, and White describes the powerful work of Dr. Daniel Black of Clark Atlanta University. During his tenure, Dr. Daniel Black has played a pivotal role in educating and mentoring countless students, fostering their academic and spiritual development. In May of 2024, Black delivered his widely acclaimed commencement address, "Here They Come," which garnered a lot of attention within the HBCU community. Their work presents a

reflective essay grounded in Afrocentric theory, centering on Dr. Black's pedagogical approach, and examining its profound impact on the next generation of Black Studies scholars.

Taylor and Stan take a unique approach to faculty issues at HBCUs by exploring salary differences between faculty (multiple ranks) and staff (multiple classifications) at HBCUs and peer institutions. While they find that HBCU staff and faculty salaries lag considerably behind salaries at peer, non-HBCU institutions, this information suggests that financial inequities experienced by HBCUs may carry into compensation for faculty and staff, possibly limiting the impact that HBCUs can have within the Black community and beyond. Their work pushes for changes in federal funding mechanisms and a push for private industry partnerships that could help provide HBCUs with the financial support they deserve to compensate HBCU faculty and staff equitably.

This special issue ends with Smith who contextualizes and conveys the vital importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. His work aims to enlighten and inspire the reader towards a greater appreciation of the value of these institutions while encouraging that readers take action to assist in their maintenance and expansion. His intention, as well as that of the other authors, is to elicit massive support through enlightenment and promotion of the rich history and boundless potential of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The Future Value of an HBCU Education

Earning a degree from an HBCU is a different educational experience. They are known for their academic rigor, family atmosphere, and providing a rich culture of pride and excellence (Gasman & Esters, 2024). One common joke in the HBCU world is that you do not walk on the grass at your HBCU because life will never provide shortcuts; thus, learn to take the sidewalks everywhere as working harder is the proper path to success. From what you wear, to how to speak, and even down to the way you introduce yourself, HBCUs train their students for success in life both inside and outside of the classroom.

In the 21st century, while the mission of these institutions has not changed, the context of race in America has. Thus, the focus for leadership at HBCUs now centers on maintaining enrollments, retaining students, and graduating competent, ethical alumni of all races (Evans et al., 2002). As it pertains to enrollment and retention, finances and student financial aid options play a key role. There is a correlation between federal political affiliation and funding increases and decreases to Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As society advances into the 21st

century and more alternatives to attending an HBCU increase, the future leadership at these institutions will have to grapple hard with funding allocations in relation to recruitment and retention efforts to maintain student enrollment.

Conclusion

Per The One Hundred and Seven (n.d.), the following institutions share the federal designation of a “Historically Black College or University”, commonly known as an “HBCU”. This manuscript and all others in this special issue refer to one or more of these institutions. Whether you did or did not attend one of these institutions, donate your money, time, social capital, and all other resources you possess to the one nearest you to ensure their longevity.

Alabama

Alabama A&M
University- Huntsville
Alabama State University-
Montgomery
Bishop State Community
College - Mobile
Concordia University-
Alabama- Selma (closed
2018)
Gadsden State College-
Gadsden
J.F. Drake State Technical
College- Huntsville
Lawson State Community
College- Birmingham
Miles College- Fairfield
Miles School of Law-
Fairfield *
Oakwood University-
Huntsville
Selma University- Selma
Shelton State Community
College- Tuscaloosa
Stillman College-
Tuscaloosa
Talladega College-
Talladega
Tuskegee University-
Tuskegee
H. Councill Trenholm

State Community College-
Montgomery

Arkansas

University of Arkansas at
Pine Bluff- Pine Bluff
Arkansas Baptist College-
Little Rock
Philander Smith College-
Little Rock
Shorter College- North
Little Rock

Delaware

Delaware State University-
Dover

District of Columbia

University of the District
of Columbia
Howard University

Florida

Bethune Cookman
University- Daytona Beach
Edward Waters University-
Jacksonville
Florida A&M University-
Tallahassee
Florida Memorial
University- Miami
Gardens

Georgia

Albany State University-
Albany

Carver College*- Atlanta
Clark Atlanta University-
Atlanta
Fort Valley State
University- Fort Valley
Interdenominational
Theological Center-
Atlanta
Johnson C Smith
Theological Seminary*-
Atlanta
Morehouse College-
Atlanta
Morehouse School of
Medicine- Atlanta
Morris Brown College-
Atlanta
Paine College- Augusta
Savannah State University-
Savannah
Spelman College- Atlanta
Kentucky
Kentucky State University-
Frankfort
Simmons College of
Kentucky- Louisville
Louisiana
Dillard University-New
Orleans
Grambling State
University- Grambling

Southern University and
A&M College- Baton
Rouge
Southern University New
Orleans- New Orleans
Southern University-
Shreveport- Shreveport
Xavier University- New
Orleans

Maryland

Bowie State University-
Bowie
Coppin State University-
Baltimore
University of Maryland-
Eastern Shore- Princess
Anne
Morgan State University-
Baltimore

Michigan

Lewis College of
Business- Detroit (Closed
2013)

Mississippi

Alcorn State University-
Lorman
Coahoma Community
College- Clarksdale
Hinds County Community
College- Utica
Jackson State University-
Jackson
Mississippi Valley State
University- Itta Bena
Rust College- Holly
Springs
Tougaloo College-
Tougaloo

Missouri

Harris-Stowe State
University- St. Louis
Lincoln University-
Jefferson City

North Carolina

Barber-Scotia College**-
Concord

Bennett College-
Greensboro
Elizabeth City State
University- Elizabeth City
Fayetteville State
University- Fayetteville
Hood Theological
Seminary*- Salisbury
Johnson C. Smith
University- Charlotte
Livingstone College-
Salisbury
North Carolina Central
University- Durham
North Carolina A&T State
University- Greensboro
Shaw University- Raleigh
St. Augustine's University-
Raleigh
Winston-Salem State
University- Winston Salem

Ohio

Central State University-
Wilberforce
Payne Theological
Seminary*- Wilberforce
Wilberforce University-
Wilberforce

Oklahoma

Langston University-
Langston

Pennsylvania

Cheyney University-
Cheyney
The Lincoln University-
Lincoln University

South Carolina

Allen University-
Columbia
Benedict College-
Columbia
Claflin University-
Orangeburg
Clinton College- Rock Hill
Denmark Technical
College- Denmark

Morris College- Sumter
South Carolina State
University- Orangeburg
Voorhees University-
Denmark

Tennessee

American Baptist
University- Nashville
Fisk University- Nashville
Knoxville College**-
Knoxville
Lane College- Jackson
LeMoyne Owen College-
Memphis
Meharry Medical College
Tennessee State
University- Nashville

Texas

Huston-Tillotson
University- Austin
Jarvis Christian
University- Hawkins
Paul Quinn College-
Dallas
Prairie View A&M
University- Prairie View
Southwestern Christian
College- Terrell
St. Philip's College- San
Antonio
Texas College- Tyler
Texas Southern
University- Houston
Wiley University-
Marshall

US Virgin Islands

University of the Virgin
Islands- St. Thomas & St.
Croix

Virginia

Hampton University-
Hampton
Norfolk State University-
Norfolk
Saint Paul's College-
Lawrenceville (closed)

2013)
Virginia State University-
Petersburg
Virginia Union University-

Richmond
Virginia University of
Lynchburg- Lynchburg
West Virginia

Bluefield State College-
Bluefield
West Virginia State
University- Institute

Asterisk denotes the institution is no longer open.

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