

# African American Access to Higher Education: The Evolving Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Throughout their history, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have had to satisfy the aspirations of their students and the demands of a society that offers only limited support for HBCUs and limited opportunities for their graduates. In many ways, these institutions have done quite well. From the late nineteenth century through the mid twentieth century, historically Black colleges and universities enrolled more than 90 percent of African American postsecondary students educated in this country. From their humble origins through the 1950s and 1960s following the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision, HBCUs served as a key access point for African Americans who sought to achieve political and social mobility through educational attainment. Created as a byproduct of systemic social discrimination, historically Black colleges and universities prepared African American students for leadership positions, primarily within the African American community. Since the last part of the twentieth century, however, in the aftermath of desegregation, many HBCUs have suffered stagnant or declining enrollments. Reductions in the purchasing power of federal aid have been a major factor in this, as have reductions in the level of state support on a per-pupil basis.

Faced with numerous obstacles, HBCUs have often been lightning rods for criticism. Opponents of the Black college model criticize the integrity of its academic programs, particularly in light of the challenges of a new millennium. The recurring question remains: is the need for historically Black colleges and universities as pressing today as was the case a century prior? If so, how might these institutions be adequately supported in their mission to educate African American students in the twenty-first century?

This article argues that, despite the impediments they face, HBCUs continue to play a critical role today. They enroll 13 percent of Black undergraduate students

but produce approximately 22 percent of Black baccalaureates.<sup>1</sup> HBCUs also award approximately 11 percent of the master's and doctoral degrees obtained by African American recipients.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, compared to African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees from predominantly White institutions (PWIs), those who graduate from HBCUs have higher rates of job satisfaction and participation in community service after graduating.<sup>3</sup> One reason for the success of HBCUs is that they provide a supportive culture for learning that studies have found to be important for African American student achievement. In this regard, they can serve as models for other institutions. The time has come for historically Black colleges and universities to receive the respect and support that they deserve.

## **Segregation to Desegregation and Beyond**

In 1837, in the area immediately southwest of Philadelphia, the first historically Black institution, Cheyney State Teachers College, was established through a grant by Quaker Richard Humphreys, a philanthropist who bequeathed a large portion of his estate towards the education of colored youth. Cheyney was followed shortly thereafter by Lincoln University and, by 1920, more than 100 colleges and universities for African American students had been founded in the United States. For scores of African American families encumbered by bigotry, discrimination, and poverty, the establishment of a culturally congenial academic home base meant that they too were provided access to an academic equity afforded other Americans. Within the African American community, the very names of these institutions spoke of a means to a better way of life: Morehouse. Spelman. Fisk. Howard. These colleges and universities were a reservoir of African American talent and leadership, producing such luminaries as Booker T. Washington, Betty Shabazz, W.E.B. Dubois, Toni Morrison, Ruth Simmons, and Martin Luther King, Jr., among many others.

By the mid twentieth century, however, the significance of these institutions was soon challenged by an unlikely foe: collegiate desegregation. While *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* overturned the doctrine of "separate but equal" established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* more than a half century prior, the impact of this ruling was restricted to primary and secondary schools until the landmark case *Hawkins v. Board of Control*. Decided in 1956, the *Hawkins* case introduced the issue of desegregation among institutions of higher education for the first time, though a vague Supreme Court decision on the matter failed to dismantle the existing exclusionary system. This resolution was not evident

until 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson enacted the Civil Rights Act which, among other mandates, initiated a variety of programs designed to promote the recruitment and retention of students of color to predominantly White colleges and universities.

A flurry of legal attacks soon followed. *Knight v. Alabama*, a desegregation lawsuit initiated in 1971, attacked the vestiges of discrimination, most notably the *Lid Bill* (which provided inequitable funding rates for poor and lower-middle-class children). Also significant was *Ayers v. Thompson*, initiated in 1975, in which the plaintiffs, after 30 years and countless appeals, won a \$503 million settlement against the state of Mississippi based upon the underfunding of Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State University. Simultaneously, these efforts to dismantle the dual systems of higher education sparked several large predominantly White colleges and universities to identify talented African American students and offer them an opportunity to enroll. The ultimate goal of these initiatives was twofold, providing opportunities for students of color to partake of the rich resources of the nation's largest and most prestigious universities while also allowing these universities to gain from the perspectives and experiences of a more diverse student body.

Among the first to recognize that desegregation would have dire consequences for HBCUs was Benjamin Mays, longtime president of Morehouse College. Mays saw the implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a direct attack on the existence of historically Black colleges and universities, openly questioning "...how long before all public historically Black colleges are under siege?"<sup>4</sup> These words proved prophetic: by the late 1960s and early 1970s HBCUs throughout the country were engaged in a recruitment war for their very survival with predominantly White colleges and universities eager to attract academically talented Black students. No longer the sole access point for African Americans seeking to obtain college degrees, HBCUs saw their enrollment growth decline precipitously. While PWIs experienced a 40 percent growth in Black enrollment through the 1970s and 1980s, HBCUs reported an enrollment growth of less than half that amount.<sup>5</sup> This growth was due for the most part to a 3 percent increase in the enrollment of White students in HBCUs since 1976.

As large numbers of African Americans gained access to predominantly White institutions, the legal battle over desegregation took a new turn. In 1972, Marco

DeFunis, a rejected law school candidate at the University of Washington, filed suit, claiming that he was the victim of affirmative action policies. His complaint, which focused upon the university practice of setting aside 20 percent of the places in its entering class for students of color, asserted that he, as a White person, had been discriminated against. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas voiced a vehement objection to the university's practice of setting aside places in the incoming class for minority students, arguing that this was in fact a quota system that limited the opportunities of White students.

In a similar case in 1974, Allan Bakke, after being rejected by the University of California medical school, filed suit that he too, as a White man, had been turned away based upon his race. In 1978 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor, striking down the university's affirmative action practices. In the aftermath of *DeFunis* and *Bakke*, affirmative action programs, which served as a key initiative for Black students seeking to enter predominantly White institutions, were in a more tenuous state than at any other time since their inception. A clear present-day manifestation of this can be found in Florida governor Jeb Bush's "One Florida" plan, introduced in 1999, which eliminated race and ethnicity as factors in university admissions and barred racial set-asides and quotas in contracting decisions—essentially ending affirmative action in state programs throughout Florida. And most recently, a majority of voters in Michigan backed a ballot initiative to ban racial and gender preferences at public colleges and state agencies—essentially overruling the Supreme Court's 2003 landmark affirmative action decision involving the University of Michigan.

With this philosophy as a framework, voices that cried for equal access to higher education were drowned out by other voices with a new vocabulary, introducing terms like "reverse racism" and "racial quotas." Very quickly, enrollment gains for Black students at PWIs, gains that had spiked in the 1970s, began to level out and decline.<sup>6</sup> However, the shifting enrollment patterns had already taken their toll on historically Black colleges and universities. By 2001, only 13 percent of African American college students were enrolled at HBCUs, which awarded slightly less than 22 percent of the bachelor's degrees earned by African American students<sup>7</sup>—compared with 1976-1977 during which 35 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded to Blacks were from HBCUs.

## **Financial Support**

From the inception of historically Black colleges and universities, funding has been a key issue. Many of these institutions, including Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Atlanta University, and Spelman College, were established by wealthy White philanthropic investors and organizations for the sole purpose of educating newly freed slaves. Others were developed and maintained due to the benevolence of Black philanthropists; among this group are Bethune-Cookman College, Talladega College, and Jackson State University. This generosity allowed many of these schools to cultivate beautiful campuses, acquire valuable literary collections, and secure accreditation. By the 1920's, however, many of these benefactors withdrew previously offered support, leading to the closing of almost 100 HBCUs throughout the country. The Great Depression in the 1930's provided yet another formidable obstacle to growth and development, with the existing colleges and universities suffering through diminishing tuition dollars and a dearth of private donor contributions. Those who survived this period depended heavily upon the selfless determination of faculty and staff, creatively cutting costs to stay afloat.

A big change occurred starting in 1958, when President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act providing scholarships, grants, and loans for higher education in response to Cold War concerns. This, in turn, paved the way for the enactment of the landmark Higher Education Act of 1965, which explicitly addressed the concerns of burgeoning HBCUs. Specifically, Title III of the Act designated funds to "assist developing institutions [HBCUs] directly" while Title IV provided student financing through grants, student loans, and work study opportunities.

In 1972, Congress established the Basic Education Opportunity Grant (BEOG), one of five major types of assistance offered by the U.S. Department of Education. This grant program awarded need-based funding to students who were enrolled at least half time in an accredited college or university. The BEOG (which was later renamed the Federal Pell Grant) attempted to address racial inequality in higher education by providing funding in inverse relationship to one's ability to finance a college education.

This strategy was rooted in the recognition that there is a clear relationship between student enrollment and the provision of federal aid. For African American

students, this correlation is especially important. By the mid- to late 1970s, as the median income of Black families had “risen” to only about 60 percent of the average for White families, the availability of need-based funding was an essential component in the effort to meet the cost of higher education and level the playing field for African American students.

With the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, however, the role of the federal government in facilitating the aspirations of students of color was noticeably reduced, as Pell Grants and other special compensatory programs aimed to recruit African American students to institutions of higher education were cut or altogether eliminated. This philosophical shift was specifically manifested in two major thrusts: the reduction of the federal role in financing education and the elimination of race as an identifiable characteristic in public policy decision-making.

Because the Pell Grant program targets a specialized group—poor and disenfranchised families—it was and is highly vulnerable to attacks and cuts. In 1981, President Reagan’s first proposal to Congress was to limit the amount of Pell Grants as part of a series of cuts that eventually reduced the Pell Grant fund by \$200 million. Although funding for Pell Grants did recover a bit in the late 1980s and 1990s, the increases in funding lagged behind inflation and rising tuition costs. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, between 1975 and the turn of the century, the average cost of attending a four-year undergraduate institution rose from \$2,277 to \$11,227 per year. By 1995, the worth of the Pell Grant had decreased to about half of its original purchasing power.<sup>8</sup> In 2000, George W. Bush proposed that he, upon entering office, would raise the maximum Pell Grant amount to just over \$5,000 for incoming freshmen. Unfortunately, that promise remains unfulfilled. For example, the 2004 Education Funding Bill limited the maximum amount for Pell Grants to more than \$1,000 per student *below* the amount promised by President Bush. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show that the maximum Pell Grant will only cover about 42 percent of the typical costs of attending a four-year institution.

With increasing costs and insufficient grants, many Black students, particularly those of low socioeconomic status, face a difficult choice: incur large debts or discontinue their enrollment in college. In a meta-analysis of 25 research

studies, researchers compiled a statistic known as the student price response coefficient (SPRC), which indicates the change in the college participation of 18-to-24 year-olds. It was determined that every \$100 increase in tuition results in a one percentage point decline in enrollment.<sup>9</sup> This data may explain, at least in part, the extremely low graduation rates for African American students enrolled at predominantly White institutions. As a group, these students are particularly vulnerable to changes in the cost of tuition and the distribution of financial aid.

Increased costs and insufficient support have also taken their toll on historically Black colleges and universities, institutions that already had fewer resources than their predominantly white counterparts. Declining enrollments have culminated in a loss of tuition dollars, forcing many of these institutions to depend heavily upon state funding, a rather tenuous position at best. Sadly, additional support is not likely to be forthcoming. For every federal dollar that is provided to public HBCUs, states pay 50 cents, while PWIs receive five to seven dollars for each federal dollar.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, recent data indicates that less than 2 percent of the more than \$140 billion in federal grants for science and engineering were awarded to HBCUs in the 1990s. Additionally, in 2001, historically Black colleges and universities (along with Indian tribal institutions) were removed from the list of institutions that the House Committee on Higher Education considered for additional government funding.

The disparity in support contributes to an abundance of problems that plague HBCUs and taint perceptions of their relevance and effectiveness in the twenty-first century. Due to funding difficulties, all but the wealthiest of historically Black colleges and universities have been forced to either reconstitute as more multiracial institutions, as was the case with both Maryland State College and Bluefield State College in West Virginia; cut vital educational programs and faculty, as was the case with Clark Atlanta University in 2003; or close their doors altogether, as was unfortunately the case with Bishop College in Dallas and was nearly the case with Fisk University. Further, according to data garnered by the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, most HBCUs suffer from a “digital divide,” finding themselves ill equipped with respect to Internet access, computer equipment, technical training for faculty, and technological support. Challenges such as these, coupled with decreased public funding and increased operations costs, have placed the presidents of many HBCUs in an almost perpetual cycle of fundraising.

## Critiques of HBCUs and Responses to Them

The fact that many historically Black colleges and universities receive inadequate resources and have very small endowments is scarcely a cry for their irrelevance and dissolution, but a testament to the viability of these institutions, which have been successful with so little for so long. Nevertheless, many among a conservative political leadership base have questioned the relevance of HBCUs for the twenty-first century. Those who do so launch attacks on the nature and mission of historically Black colleges and universities on a number of fronts, but the most vocal criticism of the twenty-first century HBCUs centers on a perceived lack of academic rigor. Critics of HBCUs point to an achievement gap between Black students who attend HBCUs and those who attend PWIs, specifically alluding to the underperformance of HBCU students with respect to undergraduate admissions tests (even after controlling for household income), SAT scores, and high school grade point average. Critics also assert that inadequate financial resources prevent HBCUs from offering effective instruction. Noting that the total instruction-related expenditures of HBCUs are much lower than those of PWIs, the critics argue that inadequate resources and poor facilities impede the efforts of HBCUs to prepare young minds to think and act critically in the twenty-first century.

These charges require careful consideration.

Concerning the lower average SAT scores among Black students attending HBCUs relative to their counterparts in PWIs, it should be noted that Black students who attend HBCUs are less likely to be the children of married parents who have themselves attained college degrees than are the children of Black families who attend predominantly White institutions. As such, they may be at a disadvantage in preparing for college. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that students in Black colleges produce comparable academic outcomes with respect to writing ability and mathematical reasoning.<sup>11</sup> Other researchers have reported favorable scores among Blacks at HBCUs as compared with those who attend PWIs with respect to performance on standardized writing and science assessments.<sup>12</sup> Still other studies report significant cognitive gains and higher levels of academic engagement among Black students at HBCUs even when compared with predominantly White institutions. For example, a study by Wenglinsky (1996) examined five specific student outcomes: grade point average, leadership potential, educational aspirations, career aspirations and willingness to

participate in community service. The conclusion was that students in HBCUs were both more academically motivated with respect to their educational goals and more likely to achieve their professional aspirations than African American students at other institutions.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, in a study of the academic skills of college freshmen at both predominantly White institutions and historically Black institutions, Pascarella et al. (1996) reported greater improvement among Black students at HBCUs in both writing and science reasoning abilities, as operationalized by scores on the *Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency*, an instrument developed by the American College Testing Program.<sup>14</sup>

Still other researchers investigated the effectiveness of undergraduate programs of study for economics at historically Black institutions. A 2001 examination of the pre- and post-test scores of students in comparable Principles of Macroeconomics courses revealed that, while Black economics students at HBCUs began their program of study with significantly lower scores than their White counterparts at PWIs the two groups achieved similar post-test scores in this course.<sup>15</sup>

Viewed collectively, the studies cited above suggest that historically Black colleges and universities succeed in addressing any academic deficiencies in the students they admit. But it also should be noted that HBCUs attract exceptionally strong students as well as those who are academically challenged. For example, Florida A&M is consistently among the top recruiters of National Achievement Scholars, and Morehouse College produces many Rhodes scholars. North Carolina A&T attracts exceptional students with its excellent engineering program, and Howard University attracts them with its world-renowned law school.

Concerning the charge that predominantly White institutions have higher instruction-related expenditures than historically Black colleges and universities and so are better able to educate African Americans: the record tells a different story. Certainly administrators at HBCUs would like to have the financial resources that PWIs command; nevertheless, HBCUs consistently outperform PWIs in their retention and graduation rates for African American students.<sup>16</sup> A 2004 Education Trust report revealed that only 39 percent of Black students who enroll in college finish their degree (as compared with 57 percent of White students). The rates are lower still at PWIs. Of the 772 four-year colleges and universities in the United States where at least 5 percent of the student body is

African American, 299 report a graduation rate that is under 30 percent for African American students; 164 report a rate that is under 20 percent; and 68 report a graduation rate that is under 10 percent.<sup>17</sup> These graduation rates for African American students at PWIs are particularly troubling when contrasted with the much higher rates at HBCUs. Several well known Black institutions stand out among this group, notably Spelman College, which reported a graduation rate of 77 percent in 2005, and Morehouse College and Fisk University, each of which graduated 64 percent of its Black student body within six years of initial enrollment. Additionally, in a study of 41 historically Black colleges and universities, 26 reported an increase in their graduation rate between 1998 and 2005.<sup>18</sup> This record of accomplishment makes clear that historically Black colleges and universities still serve a crucial role in providing African American students access to postsecondary education.

How are historically Black colleges and universities able to promote this high level of achievement? HBCUs strive to provide an affordable and supportive academic and social environment for a wide range of students. Students point to numerous mentoring programs, support from culturally-centered organizations and programs, and a higher percentage of African American faculty members than that of many predominantly White universities as variables that promote the satisfaction, development, and future success of HBCU students. A substantial body of research supports these observations.

In a key study of African American student engagement, Jacqueline Flemming compared Black students attending historically Black colleges or universities with their peers in comparable White institutions. Males and females were surveyed during their freshmen year in college and again in their senior year with respect to their academic confidence and career aspirations. Based upon the results of these surveys, she concluded that HBCUs were more effective than PWIs in promoting confidence and high aspirations; HBCUs also better prepared their students to compete in the professional world than did PWIs.<sup>19</sup> Flemming also found a higher level of intellectual engagement among Black students attending HBCUs than among those attending PWIs, a finding that was later replicated in numerous Black colleges and universities.<sup>20</sup> In a study of academically talented postsecondary students enrolled in both HBCUs and PWIs, high achieving students in HBCUs reported a more positive self-image and adjusted better to college life than did their counterparts who attended PWIs.<sup>21</sup> These reports stand

in stark contrast to findings which suggest that many Black students on the campuses of predominantly White institutions experience a disconnect between their professional aspirations and the opportunity to integrate themselves academically into the culture of the institution.<sup>22</sup>

This is not surprising. In an examination of the degree to which African American students interact with members of the faculty both inside and outside of the classroom, Douglass Guiffrida (2005) concluded that Black students perceived other African American faculty as far more likely to provide them with personalized advising and active support; students also noted that African American faculty demonstrated a higher level of confidence in the students' abilities than did White faculty.<sup>23</sup> Further, Guffrida found that African American student organizations provided a viable avenue for Black student collaboration and promoted academic persistence.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, other research efforts report that Black students on White college campuses often experience feelings of alienation and exclusion.<sup>25</sup> In an unpublished dissertation which examined differences in climate between an historically Black university and a predominantly White institution in Ohio, Helen Elaine Key writes that "students on the HBCU campus did indeed perceive their campus to be more nurturing, would attend their college again, considered that they had received a viable education due to the rigors of their academic programs and would remember their college years as the best time of their lives so far whereas African American students on the PWI campus, while acknowledging the awareness of the vast numbers of services, organizations, and programs available on their campus, were less involved in these social supportive services, were less prone to return to their university, would not remember their college experience favorably, did not have a support person, and took longer to complete their degree requirements."<sup>26</sup> Other researchers have reflected that HBCUs provide a more welcoming racial climate for Black students, a climate in which they experience a lower level of on-campus racial tension. Traditionally, these institutions have provided African American students with a strong academic foundation while sheltering these students from negative images of Blacks, instilling in their place a sense of pride in the Black culture. The need for such nurturing is as important today as ever, as African Americans continue to strive to overcome a preponderance of stereotypically negative depictions and expectations regarding the educational prowess of people of color.

## **Recommendations**

HBCUs should command a greater share of resources than they currently receive. A call to arms must first go out to those who have benefited most directly from their existence: the alumni of historically Black colleges and universities. It is crucial that HBCUs foster a culture of giving among their graduates, insisting that they contribute to their alma mater as do the alumni of notable predominantly White institutions across the country. Unfortunately, endowments for HBCUs, which are extremely rare, are often a mere fraction of those bequeathed to predominantly White institutions. There are certainly exceptions: particularly noteworthy are Drs. William and Camille Cosby, who in 1980 bequeathed \$20 million to Spellman College in Atlanta; and Richard Hazel, formerly the president of PepsiCo, who in 2004 contributed \$3 million to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (which is still the largest contribution ever made to a Black college or university in Maryland). While the generous contribution of individuals like the Cosbys and Hazel are certainly commendable, most HBCUs continue to wait for other individuals to step forward in a similar manner. Indeed, to date the total endowment for *all* historically Black colleges and Universities combined is less than \$2 billion dollars, a pitiful sum when compared to the endowment for Harvard University alone, which totals almost \$30 billion.

Certainly there are organizations that attempt to fill this void. For the past 60 years, the United Negro College Fund, the nation's largest and oldest organization providing assistance to African American students, has provided more than \$2 billion towards scholarships, internships, and facilities for students at its 39 member institutions. Similarly, the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, inaugurated in 1987 to honor the legacy of the famed Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, has awarded more than \$50 million in scholarship and funding to 47 historically Black colleges and universities. While this is cause for optimism, it is vital that efforts such as these are duplicated within the private sector of the African American community.

Contributions from the private sector notwithstanding, HBCUs must ultimately turn to the federal government for major financial support. Federal grant aid and Title III assistance should be increased substantially. Students who attend historically Black colleges and universities should be supported at a rate commensurate with the unwavering commitment these institutions have shown to their students. Specifically, they must be equipped with the means to provide

technological resources that will enable their students to access information and prepare to compete in a global economy. This initiative provides an opportunity for the current administration to make good on its promise to support the efforts of historically Black colleges and universities.

In 2000, the National Telecommunication and Information Administration coined the term “digital divide” to describe the discrepancy between those who have access to technology and those who do not.<sup>27</sup> According to a survey-based study, African Americans are far less likely to have access to the Internet than Whites in this country. This same report assessed the resources and connectivity of 74 historically Black colleges and universities and concluded that none of these HBCUs required students to own computers, less than 25 percent of their students actually owned computers, and only 3 percent of HBCUs provided funding for students to obtain computers. Furthermore, the authors of this report determined that HBCUs must “focus institutional resources to address 1) the improvement of high speed connectivity rates; 2) student-to-computer ownership ratios; 3) improvement of the strategic planning process; and 4) the incorporation of innovative technologies into campus networks.”<sup>28</sup>

While a number of existing programs work to close the digital divide—among this group are the National Science Foundation and the Executive Leadership Council and Foundation, both of which work to sustain existing technology on the campuses of HBCUs—funding towards this end must become a priority. HBCUs should become full participants in the digital era to continue to attract quality students and to meet their academic needs. The federal government can facilitate this process by setting aside grant-based funding to enhance the availability of technological resources at these institutions. Specifically, this should entail funding the purchase of hardware for students and the provision of training to support its utilization by both students and faculty.

In a review of the availability and utilization of technological resources at Black colleges and universities, Daphne Ntiri comments that “those who cannot purchase a computer or pay for Internet access and those who attend schools that offer minimal education in computer skills are finding themselves on the less-advantaged side of the great prosperity divide.”<sup>29</sup> This is particularly troubling given that many students who attend HBCUs are first-generation college students who have had little or no prior opportunity to interact with key techno-

logical resources. To address this problem, some HBCUs, including Johnson C. Smith University and Morris Brown College, have recently required that incoming freshmen purchase personal computers. While this is certainly a reasonable requirement for students, it is a requirement that may add \$1,000 to the cost of attending college. The financial hardship this obligation will impose may be unrealistic for families of lower socioeconomic status, some of whom elect to attend an HBCU because of the comparably low tuition cost relative to that of many large, predominantly White institutions. Additionally, a recent study by the United States General Accounting Office concluded that less than half of HBCUs employed an adequate instructional technology support staff and that faculty development in the implementation of technological resources was often not provided. Further, while respondents ranked as high priorities technological goals such as improving Internet access and faculty training in the use of information technology, more than 80 percent indicated that these steps were hindered due to limited funding.<sup>30</sup>

In *Serving the Nation: Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Information-Serving Technology at Minority-Serving Colleges and Universities*, the authors assert that the underfunding of HBCUs renders the acquisition of vital but expensive technology nearly impossible. These resources are key if HBCU graduates are to enter the professional world on equal ground with their peers from predominantly White institutions. The report goes on to state that:

Many impressive accomplishments have been achieved by minority-serving institutions in the use of technology despite limited funds. . . [A]s institutions that play a major role in the nation's emerging minority populations, HBCUs are integral to the country's potential and promise. That potential and promise can be fulfilled in part by making the needed investments now for the economic and social security of the nation over the long term.<sup>31</sup>

Allen and Jewell (2002) write that “the Black struggle for higher education is an apt metaphor for the larger Black struggles for citizenship, self-determination and personhood in this society,” and those who fight these battles often find themselves “revisiting the same battlefields.”<sup>32</sup> As such, in the early twenty-first century, historically Black colleges and universities again finds themselves

pressed to defend their relevance as vital access points of higher education for African American students. Black colleges and universities have traditionally enrolled students who may have been shunned by other universities due to financial, social, or academic deficiencies. On threadbare budgets, these institutions continue to mold, nurture, and develop Black talent and leadership. The time has come for these institutions to receive the respect that they deserve, manifested in an unwavering financial commitment to their continued growth and development.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>18</sup> "Black Student Graduation Rates Remain Low, but Modest Progress begins to Show," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 2005).

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