

Historically Black Colleges: A National Treasure . . .  
Toward the Dynamics of Understanding Why "They Keep Coming".

Presidential Address

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Ladies and gentlemen, they keep coming, the students keep coming, they keep coming to black American colleges because they know that these cathedrals of learning can offer them the intellectual and cultural fortitude that will help blacks to survive. They keep coming - they keep coming to become more knowledgeable about social trends, economic trends, technological trends and scientific trends. Essentially, the historically black colleges have long been the cohesive force in helping blacks to unify minds, bodies and spirits. Historically, black colleges have further been the force to

help this noble race of beautiful black people to triumph, endure and prevail. Because of this sustained force, black colleges are indeed a national treasure — a treasure that for more than a century has been the major resource for educating blacks. Most black colleges were founded right after the Civil War. Their sole mission at that time was to provide "training for newly-freed slaves."

After two noted black colleges were founded before the Civil War — Lincoln University in 1854 and Wilberforce University in 1856, the idea gained momentum and colleges both public and private multiplied between 1865 and 1900. The list is long but it includes such colleges as

Virginia Union and Shaw University - <sup>18</sup>1965

Fisk - 1866

Talladega and Howard - 1867

Benedict - 1871

Prairie View - 1878

Tuskegee - 1881

The list also includes Paine College in Augusta, Georgia and Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee which both celebrate a century of service to black humanity this year.

For over one and a quarter century, these colleges and nearly a hundred more have made an indelible impact on society by educating a countless number of blacks. For over one and a quarter century, these colleges have been beckoning black students and they keep coming!

The road from there to here or the road from then to now has been fraught consistently with insufficient funds for programs, equipment, materials and scholarships. Low salaries often created a brain drain which saw many outstanding personnel leave the profession. But in spite of the many set-backs, the transition from "training schools" to first-class institutions did occur.

Tuskegee Institute, I believe, epitomizes this transition very well. When the school was founded in 1881, it was typical of the "training schools" of that period. The school

was designed to train blacks — train them in useful skills like bricklaying, broommaking, mattress making, etc. — basically training that came from the outside in which often required little thinking but much skill. Now Tuskegee and many other similar black colleges have become outstanding educational institutions — educating rather than training — educating black people from inside out requiring more brain and less skill.

The boys and girls kept coming — coming for the unique education specifically designed to meet the needs of a people with a history of oppression, suppression, repression and depression.

Our black colleges have provided many opportunities by developing traditional and non-traditional practices and programs. Of necessity, the colleges had to be ingenious and creative in order to help black youth. Here again Tuskegee provides the best example. Booker T. Washington should perhaps be called the "Patron Saint" of the work-study concept

as it has emerged today. Tuskegee's "5 year plan" allowed students with limited financial resources to work and study at the same time. This plan became a part of the total education concept of many colleges like Tuskegee. I need not expound on how this concept grew so much until the Federal government got the idea and began to support such practices with assistance.

These same black institutions are treasures to us today. They are treasures because they have produced about 75% of all black public officials. They have produced about 81% of all black professionals. Black colleges are treasures because they contributed significantly to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They are treasures because slightly over 100 relatively small black institutions continue to produce nearly the same number of educated blacks as 1500 predominately white institutions. Black colleges are a national treasure because they continue now as they did when they were founded — they continue to make significant contributions to the dreams

of black youth needing and wanting educational opportunities. We know that these colleges continue to impact the education of black youth for they keep coming . . . .

They keep coming to the institutions that graduated

Martin Luther King  
Booker T. Washington  
W. E. B. DuBois  
Thurgood Marshall  
Patricia Harris  
Maynard Jackson  
Jesse Jackson  
Hugh Gloster  
E. Franklin Frazier  
James Weldon Johnson

and many other very outstanding lawyers, doctors, teachers, bankers, engineers, educational administrators and thousands of others who have helped to make this country great. The measure and merit of any academic institution is the quality of its graduates and for years many leaders of this nation have been produced in black colleges. Their record is unparalleled and unequalled. And the students keep coming ---

Since they keep coming, the itinerary for the National Association of College Deans, Registrars and Admissions Officers for the mid-80's must include an appeal to the public, to the business sector and especially to alumni to help us by supporting our efforts to prepare students for living as well as for a living. We must beseech them to be ever conscious of our respect for our heritage and our traditions.

Our organization must take the leadership role in negating the premise that black colleges should be eliminated rather than elevated. We must take the leadership in stopping the needless proliferation of new programs just for the sake of having new programs. We must recognize that the most is not necessarily the best — and we must strive for the best not the most.

We must help to strengthen and undergird the present educational structures by gaining the respect of and confidence in our ability to concentrate on academics by sending out the best



scholars and by making over-achievers out of formerly non achievers.

Members of NADRACO, we must be the first to recognize our students and concentrate more on teaching students and not courses. We must realize that our students have feelings, emotions and frustrations — frustrations at not being able to accomplish goals without suffering. Our students often come to us with many problems. These frustrating problems sometimes manifest themselves in an antagonistic attitude toward us. As public servants, we must learn to deal with these problems. In the difficult days ahead, Reaganomics will compound old problems and create new ones. As educational leaders, we must be prepared to offer a kind word in the right way that helps to assuage old problems and not create new ones. The momentum in the job market place is changing and the education that black colleges offer must continue to transform disadvantaged students into students who are advantaged — advantaged socially, culturally and economically. College officials

must be prepared to reassure the students of their worth and to facilitate their positive entry into society.

During this meeting, I hope we can look at our problems and our goals dispassionately in a scientifically objective manner. But I also hope we can bear witness to the truth that we as black college officials are concerned with Aristotle's principle that "there is a life which is higher than the measure of humanity. Men live it not by virtue of their humanity, but by virtue of something in them that is divine."

It is my wish that those of us here will be able to differentiate between what is and what ought to be; I also hope we will be able to help our students to stop pretending and start being. When we do these things and do them well, we can be assured of offering help to those who keep coming. Further, we can be assured of helping to maintain our black colleges as national treasures — treasures to which they keep coming. I thank you.