



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

ACKNOWLEDGING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs)

We are perhaps all informed that the month of February is recognized as Black History Month. This month is also referred to as African American History Month, and by some is celebrated as a time for recapitulating the accomplishments of blacks to this nation. The month-long designation, grew out of a period formerly recognized as “Negro History Week,” as founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a renowned historian and academician.

In spite of how the month is referenced, the month-long acknowledgement is meaningful and remains important because it provides us with a monumental context of the contributions of a people who were once considered disenfranchised. It also showcases historically and factually how blacks and now other ethnicities were interwoven into the foundation of America’s beginnings and continuity. And, although there were historical moments of struggles that were both challenging and concerning, such struggles are now accountable to the formation of a resilient nation with successes that make up the fabric of a powerful national society. We all should be reminded that many historical incidents that have occurred cannot be changed, but we should also be admonished to remembering that such events have led to our contemporary strengths and weaknesses and they should not be relived.

In recognition of Black History Month, I want us to pause for a moment and reflect on the development of institutions that for more than a century have influenced the growth and development of a people. I want us to briefly learn of the importance of what we now proudly refer to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (or HBCUs).

We are reminded that the designation of HBCUs grew out of the desire of a people who wanted to learn and grow both academically and vocationally, for the purpose of a better life. And, in many instances there were efforts to thwart this from occurring by way of Jim Crow Laws, threats and practices of discouragement. We may also know that the formation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities were not officially recognized by the federal government until 1964, as the nation assisted with a definition to recognize that at that moment such institutions (many without federal support) could be established to provide an education for Blacks. To date, there remains approximately 104 institutions (both public and private) with this designation of HBCU that serve students of all races.

As president of Texas College, an HBCU in Tyler, Texas, we are proud of having a rich history that sought to serve what was once an underreported population in East Texas, who desired to receive an education. The founding of Texas College by ministers from the once called Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church) invested time, energy and resources to make



alive and possible the dream of an education. With this as the founding ideal of a motto was shaped which now reads, “Give the People Light and They Will Find Their Way.” This motto stands as the mantra of the college, which has now stood in its founding location for 128 years; for more than a century.

Now today, the historical meaning of the founding of HBCUs often seems forgotten and less appreciative. To this end, it is advisable that we keep the history of our institutions alive and resurrected. It is also proposed that we periodically share the institution’s mission, core values and vision with our various publics so they will understand the importance of our founding and history. Further, it is from the founding principles that we continue to share the relevance of HBCUs today. So briefly, I want to recapitulate the relevance of HBCUs who embrace Black History Month as our having stood on the shoulders of giants for hundreds and thousands of years.

To this end, in a 2021 “Economic Report of the President,” President Biden reported facts that are of significant importance for HBCUs. The report noted, “One example of higher education institutions delivering a high return for their students is that of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. HBCUs have played a crucial role in expanding educational opportunity for all students, especially African American students who make up 76% of their populations. As of 2019, there were 101 accredited HBCUs across the United States. HBCUs enroll over 300,000 students including around 80,000 non-African Americans (as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics 2020). According to a 2017, economic impact report produced by the United Negro College Fund, HBCUs generate an employment contribution of 134,000 jobs, work-life earnings of \$130 billion for HBCU students, and a total economic contribution to the U.S. economy of \$14.8 billion (page 389).” It was further noted that “although HBCUs account for a mere 10 percent of the African American college student population, in 2014 they represented 17 percent of bachelor’s degrees and 24 percent of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) degrees earned by African Americans. And, from 2002 to 2011, the top eight institutions where African Americans earned PHDs in science and engineering were HBCUs (page 390).” Additionally, it was noted that, “Although non-HBCU graduates initially benefit, on average, from higher incomes than do HBCU students, [the data shows] that HBCU graduates tend on average to experience greater annual growth in income than non-HBCU graduates. Thus, over the long run, alumni of HBCUs will tend to experience rates of return comparable to those for non-HBCU alumni. This shows that from a productivity standpoint, HBCUs can deliver comparable returns at a lower cost.

So, as we reflect on the month of February, you are encouraged to do so with thoughts about HBCUs as institutions that have and continue to do so much, for so many, and for so long...for such a time as this.

An Abridged Review by:

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