

## WHY HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE NEEDED IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

AN ESSAY BY JOHN K. PIERRE<sup>1</sup> AND CHARITY R. WELCH<sup>2</sup>

We must rally to the defense of our schools. We must repudiate this unbearable assumption of the right to kill institutions unless they conform to one narrow standard.<sup>3</sup>

It would be ironic to say the least, if the institutions that sustained blacks during segregation were themselves destroyed in an effort to combat its vestiges.<sup>4</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

There are currently more than one hundred Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Approximately half of the HBCUs are publicly funded and half are privately funded. At the beginning of the twenty-first century HBCUs comprised only three percent of the nation's two and four-year higher education institutions, but they produced twenty-eight percent of all bachelor degrees, fifteen percent of all master degrees and seventeen percent of all first professional degrees earned by African Americans. During that same period, HBCUs enrolled approximately twenty-six percent of African Americans attending four-year colleges or universities.<sup>6</sup>

---

1. Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Law at Southern University Law Center.

2. Executive Assistant to the President and Title III Coordinator at Suffolk County Community College. Dr Welch earned a B.S and M. Ed in Special Education from Coppin State University and a doctorate in Education and Education Policy Studies from the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

3. W.E.B. Dubois, Schools, 13 *The Crisis* 111, 112 (1917).

4. Justice Clarence Thomas concurring opinion in *United States v. Fordice*, 505 U.S. 717, at 749 (1992).

5. See *List of HBCUs—White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, U.S. DEPT. OF EDUC. (Jan. 1, 2010), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whhbcu/edlite-list.html>.

6. *Id.*

A review of discipline specific degree attainment revealed notable results showing that HBCUs graduate approximately fifty-two percent of African Americans receiving pharmacy degrees, thirty percent of African Americans receiving degrees in theology,<sup>7</sup> fifty percent of African Americans in mathematics, and forty percent of African Americans who earn doctorates in physics.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, fifty percent of African American teachers with a four-year college degree earned their degrees from an HBCU.<sup>9</sup> In the natural sciences, fifty percent of all bachelor degrees earned by African Americans are from HBCUs, while slightly more than twenty-five percent of bachelor degrees earned by African Americans in engineering are from HBCUs.<sup>10</sup> Even more compelling is the fact that between 1986 and 2005, seventy percent of master's degrees and sixty-one percent of all doctorates earned by African Americans were earned at HBCUs as well.<sup>11</sup> HBCUs produce nearly thirty percent of all undergraduate degrees earned by African American students in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines.<sup>12</sup> In addition, these institutions award eighty-five percent of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degrees acquired by African Americans.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the overwhelming laudable accomplishments of HBCUs, historically and in a contemporary sense, today they are a source of bewilderment for many policy makers, higher education leaders, and decision makers in the public sector. In the twenty-first century, HBCUs are facing many challenges, threats, and opportunities. Budgetary pressures resulting from the worst recession in seventy years and the changing political landscape are forcing many to question the relevancy, role, and need for HBCUs.

---

7. Mary Beth Gasman, *Essay Review—Education in Black and White: New Perspectives on History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, TEACHERS COLLEGE RECORD, Jan. 25, 2006.

8. Letter from Lezli Baskerville, President & CEO of the Nat'l Ass'n For Equal Opp. in Higher Educ. (NAFEO), to President Barack Obama Response to College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (June 9, 2009) (on file with authors).

9. *Id.*

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.*

12. Dr. William R. Harvey, Op-Ed., *To the Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 4, 2010, available at [http://www.hamptonu.edu/news/hm/2010\\_1104\\_op\\_ed.cfm](http://www.hamptonu.edu/news/hm/2010_1104_op_ed.cfm).

13. *Id.*

These institutions are forced to deal with the pain from the recession and other institutional challenges. For example, publicly funded HBCUs in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia are expected to weather significant budget shortfalls due to state revenue decreases. Coincidentally, it is noteworthy that African Americans in those states are among those who experience the largest disparities in degree attainment.<sup>14</sup> Budgetary pressures in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia have placed HBCU institutions in a precarious predicament as policymakers openly argue for mergers of HBCUs with Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs). In Louisiana, the stakes are even greater because proposed changes to publicly funded HBCU institutions could also include consolidations, realignments, and ultimately the elimination of the Southern University System, the *only* HBCU system in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

The role of HBCUs actually befuddles some policy makers, and, as a result of tough economic times, there are critical questions to be answered about their future role, mission, and scope in U.S. postsecondary education. Tough economic times have caused many to critically examine HBCUs against the backdrop of legal, racial, economic, political, and social contexts. The continued viability and necessity of HBCUs have been openly questioned.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding criticism and questions about their relevance in the twenty-first century, HBCUs have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of critical issues confronting higher education in America. The value of HBCUs in U.S. higher education, the nation, and the world is reflected in their irrefutable accom-

---

14. Laura W. Perna et al., *The Status of Black Undergraduates in Public Higher Education in the South: Still Separate and Unequal*, 47 RES. HIGHER EDUC. 197 (2006).

15. SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM, <http://www.sus.edu/AboutUs.asp> (last visited Feb. 22, 2011).

16. See, e.g., Jason Riley, *Black Colleges Need a New Mission: Once an Essential Response to Racism, they are Now Academically Inferior*, WALL ST.J., Sept. 28, 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704654004575517822124077834.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>; Richard Vedder, *Why Do We Have HBCUs?*, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC. (D.C.), Oct. 18, 2010, available at <http://chronicle.com/blogs/innovations/why-do-we-have-hbcus/27506>. Those opinions drew a vociferous response from HBCU leaders and other ardent supporters, see, for example, *HBCU Leaders Respond!*, NAFEO, [http://www.nafeo.org/community/web2010/news\\_vedder.html](http://www.nafeo.org/community/web2010/news_vedder.html) (last visited Feb. 22, 2011).

plishments noted herein. HBCUs have been leaders in providing higher education access to low-income students, have functioned as economic engines, have enhanced racial and ethnic diversity in higher education, and have prepared students for careers in education, business, politics, science, technology, medicine, and law.

#### IMPACT OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

In order to argue for the preservation of HBCUs, one must recognize that all but two were created after the Civil War to provide African Americans opportunities for education.<sup>17</sup> In 1950, the percentage of African American students enrolled in HBCUs was approximately ninety percent.<sup>18</sup> By 1960, six years after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*,<sup>19</sup> the percentage of African American students enrolled in HBCUs dropped to seventy-five percent.<sup>20</sup> The elimination of de jure segregation in education by the *Brown* decision, coupled with the admission of large numbers of African American students to TWIs over the past fifty years, caused a decline in the percentage of African American students enrolled in HBCUs. Despite the decline in the *percentage* of African American students enrolled in HBCUs, the *number* of students enrolled in HBCUs continued to increase from 70,000 in 1954, to 200,000 in 1980, to a current all-time high enrollment of 300,000 students in various undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs.<sup>21</sup> In southern states, however, HBCU institutions currently enroll twenty-eight percent of African Americans in those states who are enrolled in postsecondary education.<sup>22</sup> The percentage in the southern states is higher than in other regions of the country.

---

17. U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, EQUAL PROTECTION OF THE LAWS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION (1960).

18. James T. Minor, *Segregation Residual in Higher Education: The Tale of Two States*, 45 AM. EDUC. RES. J. 861 (2008).

19. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

20. Minor, *supra* note 18.

21. *Id.*; see also Susan T. Hill, *The Traditional Black Institutions of Higher Education*, NAT'L CENTER FOR EDUC. STAT. (1985), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs84/84308.pdf>.

22. *Id.*

## THE HBCU MISSION

While it is clear that HBCUs are now one of many higher education choices for African American students, HBCUs are not just race-based institutions in higher education; the reality is that HBCUs are mission-based institutions in higher education. Founded before 1964, HBCUs are legislatively designated by Congress through the Higher Education Act of 1965 (as amended in 1986) as institutions whose principal mission was, and is, the education of African Americans.<sup>23</sup> HBCUs, unlike most higher education institutions, have been open to all persons who meet their multi-faceted admissions criteria without regard to race, ethnicity, socio-economic strata, religion, gender (except in the case of three gender specific HBCUs), or some other non bona-fide considerations.<sup>24</sup> In fact, four HBCUs, West Virginia State University, Bluefield State University in West Virginia, Lincoln University of Missouri, and Saint Phillips College in San Antonio, Texas, do not have a majority African American enrollment, and Kentucky State University is almost evenly divided between African Americans and students of other races. HBCUs are clearly not homogeneous. HBCUs are the most diverse group of higher education institutions in the United States.<sup>25</sup> HBCUs, as a universe of two and four-year colleges, universities, graduate and professional schools have, on average, thirty percent student diversity and in excess of forty percent faculty diversity.<sup>26</sup> Student diversity is also reflected among the six HBCU law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA). Three of the six ABA accredited HBCU law schools, Florida A&M College of Law, North Carolina Central School of Law, and University of the District of Columbia's David A. Clarke School of Law, are not majority African American, and Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law is almost evenly divided between African American and other race students.<sup>27</sup> Other race students at the

---

23. Press Release, Lezli Baskerville, President & CEO of the Nat'l Ass'n For Equal Opp. in Higher Educ. (NAFEO), Responds to Richard Vedder's opinion, *Why Do We Have HBCUs?*, available at [http://www.nafeo.org/community/web2010/news\\_vedder.html](http://www.nafeo.org/community/web2010/news_vedder.html).

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.*

27. LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS COUNCIL, ABA-LSAC OFFICIAL GUIDE TO ABA-APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS (Wendy Margolis ed., 2009).

six ABA accredited HBCU law schools account for forty-eight percent of the student population.<sup>28</sup>

#### HBCU DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC RESULTS

##### *Engineering, Sciences and Health*

HBCU institutions, collectively and individually, are producing admirable results. For example, North Carolina A&T State University, Tuskegee University, Florida A&M University, Spelman College, Tennessee State University, Prairie View A&M University, Morgan State University, Howard University, Alabama A&M University, and Southern University and A&M College cumulatively graduate more than thirty percent of all African Americans who receive engineering degrees.<sup>29</sup> Individually, North Carolina A&T State University is the largest producer of African Americans with bachelor and doctorate degrees in engineering.<sup>30</sup> Consider that, of the top ten producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in biological and biomedical sciences, eight are HBCU institutions: namely, Xavier University of Louisiana, Howard University, Jackson State University, Hampton University, Alabama A&M University, Spelman College, Morgan State University, and Alcorn State University. In addition, Florida A&M University, Winston Salem State University, Howard University, Southern University and A&M College, Prairie View A&M University, and Texas Southern University are among the top ten producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in health professions and related clinical sciences. Tougaloo College in Mississippi ranks among the top 50 institutions in the United States whose graduates earn doctorates in the sciences and engineering disciplines. Furthermore, over forty percent of Mississippi's practicing African American physicians, dentists, other health care professionals, and attorneys are graduates of Tougaloo College.

---

28. *Id.*

29. Harvey, *supra* note 12.

30. *Id.*

*Mathematics, Statistics, and Agriculture*

In the disciplines of mathematics and statistics, Morehouse College, Fort Valley State University, South Carolina State University, and Alabama State University are the top four producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees.<sup>31</sup> Three of the top six producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in agriculture, agriculture operations, and related sciences are HBCU institutions.

*Education and Psychology*

Six of the top ten producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in education are HBCU institutions namely, Jackson State University, Albany State University, Alabama State University, Florida A&M University, Mississippi Valley State University and Virginia State University. Hampton University and North Carolina A&T State University are two of the top five producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in psychology.<sup>32</sup>

*Social Sciences*

Two HBCUs, Howard University and Spelman College, are ranked in the top ten as producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in the social sciences and history.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Florida A&M and Coppin State University in Maryland earned rankings in the top five as producers of African Americans with master degrees in this same discipline.<sup>34</sup>

*Physical Sciences*

The top twelve producers of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in the physical sciences are HBCU institutions, namely Xavier University of Louisiana, Tennessee State University, Spelman College, Howard University, Morehouse College,

---

31. *Top 100 Degree Producers, Graduate and Professional*, DIVERSE ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUC.,  
<http://diverseeducation.com/top100/GraduateDegreeProducers2010.php>.

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

Florida A&M University, Texas Southern University, Hampton University, Alcorn State University, Norfolk State University, Grambling State University, and North Carolina A&T State University. HBCUs also hold the distinction as the top four producers of African Americans with master degrees in the physical sciences.<sup>35</sup> Those institutions are: Florida A&M University, North Carolina Central University, Norfolk State University, and Fisk University.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, HBCU institutions take up three of the next seven spots as top producers of African Americans with master degrees in the physical sciences.<sup>37</sup> Those institutions are: Delaware State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and Jackson State University.<sup>38</sup> Also worthy of acknowledgement are Spelman College and Bennett College, two all-female HBCU institutions that produce more than fifty percent of African American women who eventually pursue doctorate degrees in the sciences.<sup>39</sup>

*Medicine, Dentistry, and Law*

Howard University School of Medicine, Meharry Medical College, and Morehouse School of Medicine are HBCU institutions that are three of the top four producers of African Americans with medical degrees.<sup>40</sup> For eighteen years in a row, Xavier University, located in New Orleans, Louisiana, has been the top producer of African American students attending medical schools in the United States.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, ninety-two percent of those Xavier graduates complete medical school and pass medical boards.<sup>42</sup> Xavier also holds the distinction as the top producer of African Americans with undergraduate degrees in the biological

---

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.*

37. *See Top 100 Degree Producers, supra* note 31.

38. *Id.*

39. Laura W. Perna et al., *The Contributions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities to the Preparation of African Women for STEM Careers: A Case Study*, 50 RES. HIGHER EDUC. 1 (2009).

40. *See Top 100 Degree Producers, supra* note 31.

41. Marybeth Gasman & Noah D. Drezner, *A Rising Tide: New Orleans's Black Colleges and Their Efforts to Rebuild After Hurricane Katrina*, 16 MULTICULTURAL REV. 34 (2007), available at

[http://www.mcreview.com/members\\_login/2007/spring/rising.pdf](http://www.mcreview.com/members_login/2007/spring/rising.pdf).

42. *Id.*

and physical sciences.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Xavier University has educated nearly twenty-five percent of the approximately 6,500 African American pharmacists practicing in the United States.<sup>44</sup> In dentistry, Howard University's School of Dentistry and Meharry Medical College rank as the top two producers of African Americans who become dentists.<sup>45</sup>

HBCUs have been a prominent force in educating African American attorneys. Four of the top five producers of African Americans with law degrees are HBCU institutions; namely, Howard University School of Law, Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law, Florida A&M University College of Law, and Southern University Law Center.<sup>46</sup> North Carolina Central University has been twice rated as the best value law school in the United States.<sup>47</sup> In Louisiana, nearly eighty percent of African American practicing attorneys are graduates of the Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Nationwide, Howard University is the number one producer of African Americans with degrees in law, medicine, and dentistry.<sup>48</sup>

#### U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS FINDINGS REGARDING HBCUS

The aforementioned quantitative evidence presented in support of the accomplishments of HBCUs is indicative of their positive impact on the lives of African Americans. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) recently found that HBCUs produce disproportionately higher shares of degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. The Commission also confirmed that African American students at HBCUs reported higher levels of academic involvement in their studies and in faculty research projects than African American students at non-HBCU institutions.<sup>49</sup> The Commission urged

---

43. See *Top 100 Degree Producers*, *supra* note 31.

44. Gasman & Drezner, *supra* note 41, at 35.

45. See *Top 100 Degree Producers*, *supra* note 31.

46. *Id.*

47. Jennifer Pohlman, *Best Bang for Your Buck*, NAT'L JURIST, Sept. 2009, at 26, available at <http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/cypress/nationaljurist0909/#/26>.

48. See *Top 100 Degree Producers*, *supra* note 31.

49. See U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, *Encouraging Minority Students to Pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Careers* (2010); see also

researchers to study HBCU success to help other schools emulate their best practices in producing graduates, particularly in STEM fields.<sup>50</sup> The Commission's findings are instructive in light of the various reports asserting that there is a need in the United States to increase the production of highly educated workers in STEM fields.<sup>51</sup>

The Commission's findings are buttressed by research which shows that students who attend HBCUs perform better academically, are far more engaged, and have higher professional aspirations than African American students at TWIs.<sup>52</sup> Researchers have concluded that HBCUs create an environment where African Americans are educated irrespective of socio-economic status, social environmental circumstances, standardized test scores on college entrance examinations, and less than optimal academic preparation.<sup>53</sup> The Commission's findings further reaffirmed research that concluded HBCUs foster a nurturing environment where faculty members are very supportive of their students.<sup>54</sup>

Prior to the most recent findings of the Commission relative to the role of HBCUs in encouraging minority students to pursue STEM careers, the Commission articulated significant findings relative to the educational merit and health of HBCUs.<sup>55</sup> Those findings may play a prominent role in future policy debates about the value and role of HBCUs in the U.S. higher education landscape. An HBCU was defined as a college or university that existed before 1964 with an historic and contemporary mission of

---

U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, *The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (2010) [hereinafter *Effectiveness*].

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

52. Wade M. Cole, *Accrediting Culture: Analysis of Tribal and Historically Black College Curricula*, 79 SOC. EDUC. 355 (2006).

53. See, e.g., Walter R. Allen & Joseph O. Jewell, *A Backward Glance Forward: Past, Present and Future Perspectives on Historically Black Colleges and Universities* 25 REV. HIGHER EDUC. 241 (2002); Mikyong M. Kim, *Historically Black vs. White Institutions: Academic Development Among Black Students*, 25 REV. HIGHER EDUC. 385 (2002); Mikyong M. Kim & Clifton E. Conrad, *The Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities on the Academic Success of African-American Students*, 47 RES. HIGHER EDUC. 399 (2006).

54. See, e.g., Mary Beth Gasman & Robert Palmer, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: The Role of Social Capital in Promoting Academic Success for African American Men at a Black College*, 49 J. C. STUDENT DEV. 52 (2008).

55. See *Effectiveness*, supra note 49.

educating African Americans while being open to all students.<sup>56</sup> A significant commission finding was that many distinguished and highly successful Americans have graduated from HBCUs including high percentages of African American congressmen, professors, CEOs, lawyers, and judges.<sup>57</sup>

Another was that, although HBCUs have generally less funding and fewer support resources for their students than comparable non-HBCUs, there are no significant differences in academic outcomes between HBCUs and their wealthier comparable non-HBCU institutions.<sup>58</sup> Additional significant findings worth mentioning include the following:

- (1) Forty percent of all African American engineers receive their degree from HBCUs;<sup>59</sup>
- (2) Seventeen of the top twenty-one undergraduate producers of African American undergraduates that go on to complete Ph.D.s in science were HBCUs.<sup>60</sup>

The findings of the Commission clearly rebut the uninformed opinions of those who openly question the existence of HBCUs. The interesting point here is that conservative Republican Party appointees who serve on the Commission conveyed the findings.

#### *Post-Racial Controversy*

Despite all the evidence presented concerning the contributions of HBCUs, questions still arise about the need for these institutions in a time that is referred to as a “post racial” era. While legal barriers to equality have been eliminated, socioeconomic barriers to equality still exist. Disparities are present in educational opportunities, educational attainment, and access to health care for racial minorities. Furthermore, the disproportionate impact of the economic downturn on minority homeownership and the economic well being of racial minorities suggests

---

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. *Id.*

that issues affecting racial minorities did not magically evaporate with the election of President Barack Obama. In fact, the arrest of noted African American scholar Dr. Henry Louis Gates in July 2009, and the abrupt termination of Shirley Sherrod in 2010, along with the resulting debate about race seem to debunk the notion that we are living in a post-racial era.

*President Obama's Education Goal and the Role for HBCUs*

While the United States led the world during the last quarter of the twentieth century in the proportion of young people in college, today, the United States ranks tenth in the percentage of young people (ages 25-34) with a postsecondary degree.<sup>61</sup> More alarming is the fact that the United States ranks fifteenth globally among industrialized nations in the awarding of undergraduate degrees in STEM fields.<sup>62</sup> To rectify the situation, President Obama has set a goal for the United States to lead the world in the proportion of students graduating from college by the year 2020. His goal of having roughly sixty percent of Americans with a two or four-year degree is ambitious, bold, and unprecedented. President Obama's goal cannot be reached without educating more minority and disadvantaged students, especially when minorities account for eighty percent of the population increase in the United States.<sup>63</sup> Without a doubt, better-educated young minority students are absolutely necessary if the United States is to achieve a goal of creating a more highly educated and skilled population. Hence, it is especially important for HBCUs to continue to be part of the fabric of higher education so that economic growth, innovation, and global leadership will continue to be fostered in the future.

A key point to be made is that HBCUs have disproportionately helped students achieve success in college who have lower levels of academic preparation for college and are more likely to come from low-income households and high poverty areas.<sup>64</sup> A higher percentage of students who attend HBCUs are first gener-

---

61. See Perna et al., *supra* note 39.

62. *Id.*

63. Marybeth Gasman, *Minority-Serving Institutions: The Path to Successfully Educating Students of Color*, LUMINA FOUND. (2009), available at [http://www.luminafoundation.org/grants/information\\_for\\_grant\\_seekers/Minority-Serving\\_Institutions\\_Report.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/grants/information_for_grant_seekers/Minority-Serving_Institutions_Report.pdf).

64. *Id.*

ation college students as compared to non-HBCU institutions. Consequently, HBCUs continue to be gateways to success and opportunities for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Having such education gateways will increase the ability of the United States to remain competitive in the global economy, especially when it is estimated that the number of educated workers and professionals that will be needed to replace those retiring over the next quarter century is somewhere around fifteen million.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the number of minorities who will need a college education or postsecondary training to reduce the educational equity gap between whites and minorities in the United States will equal or exceed twelve million.<sup>66</sup> Current trends presented in this essay provide evidence that HBCUs are viable and poised to meet those aforementioned challenges.

#### *HBCU Economic Impact*

Lastly, it is significant to note that most HBCUs are economic engines in their communities and in the national economy. A college or university's economic impact is broadly defined as a change in overall economic activity associated with an institution.<sup>67</sup> In terms of economic output, HBCUs have a significant economic impact on their surrounding or host communities. For example, the combined economic impact of North Carolina's ten accredited HBCUs was \$1.6 billion in 2007, and the rolled up or collective employment impact of those ten HBCUs including multiplier effects was 18,369 full and part-time jobs.<sup>68</sup> Nationally, according to a National Center for Educational Statistics report the annual economic impact of HBCUs is \$10 billion with a rolled up or collective employment impact that exceeds 180,000 full and part-time jobs.<sup>69</sup>

---

65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. Jeffrey Humphreys, U.S. DEPT. OF EDUC., NCES 2007-178, *Economic Impact of the Nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (2006), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007178.pdf>.

68. Andrea Harris, President, NC Institute of Minority Economic Development, Community Engagement, Presentation at the North Carolina Central University HBCU Symposium: Setting the Agenda for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (June 4, 2010), available at <http://web.nccu.edu/hbcu-conference/speeches/HarrisPaper.pdf>.

69. See Baskerville, *supra* note 8; Harvey, *supra* note 12.

*Final Thoughts*

HBCUs have earned a meaningful distinction in the higher education landscape. The relevance of HBCUs is evident in the breadth of their accomplishments as cited in this essay. Recently, President Obama bestowed praise on HBCUs for helping millions to achieve their dreams and giving so many young people a chance that other institutions of higher education would not give them.<sup>70</sup> HBCU accomplishments in STEM disciplines, medicine, dentistry, and law confirm assertions that HBCUs create a pipeline of highly prepared, diverse professionals. It is striking that fifty percent of all African American professionals are HBCU graduates. Many of these graduates rank among the most prominent and highly respected alumni in the country with far reaching impact on the economy, the nation and the world.<sup>71</sup> If HBCUs were eliminated or merged, an important demographic of students could be denied access to postsecondary education opportunities.

Inherent in the HBCU mission is an emphasis on granting access to a broader segment of the population. Given that this population of students are often less prepared and require additional resources to persist, it is well worth mentioning that HBCUs receive the least amount of funding to educate the least prepared students.<sup>72</sup> Although faced with this conundrum, HBCUs have outperformed TWIs in producing STEM graduates and in graduating African American students who go on to earn doctorates in science, technology, engineering, and math fields.<sup>73</sup> This accomplishment is significant when one considers President Obama's priority on STEM preparation, 2020 graduation goals and the demand to educate more students in STEM disciplines.

---

70. Exec. Order No. 13532, 67 Fed. Reg. 6823 (Feb. 12, 2010).

71. *Id.*

72. Marybeth Gasman, Assoc. Professor, Univ. of Pa., Comprehensive Funding Approaches for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Presentation at the North Carolina Central University HBCU Symposium: Setting the Agenda for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (June 4, 2010), available at <http://web.nccu.edu/hbcu-conference/speeches/GasmanPaper.pdf>.

73. Joan Burrelli and Alan Rapoport, *Role of HBCUs as Baccalaureate-Origin Institutions of Black S&E Doctorate Recipients*, NAT'L SCIENCE FOUND. (2008), available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf08319/nsf08319.pdf>.

For decades, HBCUs confronted daunting challenges that threatened the foundation on which they stood and evoked uncertainty about their existence. Despite challenges and threats, HBCUs continued to be triumphant in their mission.<sup>74</sup> Moving forward, it would be advantageous for HBCUs to promote widespread understanding of their accomplishments, benefits to society, economic impact, and strategies for students' success. Considering challenges facing this nation and the world in the twenty-first century, it is imperative that postsecondary education opportunities are increased and not diminished. Postsecondary education is a valuable commodity and we must continue to fight for access and opportunity to that commodity for all American citizens. Given that HBCUs have and continue to provide access and opportunity for all Americans, they will be a critical provider of that commodity and an essential postsecondary education option in the twenty-first century.

---

74. Reginald S. Avery et al., *Colleges We Can't Afford to Lose*, WASH. POST, Feb. 17, 2008, at B08, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/15/AR2008021503140.html>.