



Dreaming and Doing

A Brief History and Continued Relevancy of HBCUs in 'Post-Racial' America

By Kristen Broady, Ph.D.

“While Dreaming is necessary, it is not sufficient; Doing also is required.”

This quote is from the 2014 inaugural address of Dr. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith,¹ Ninth President of Fort Valley State University (FVSU) and Tenth Vice Chancellor and Principal of The University of Guyana. In his address, Dr. Griffith cited numerous examples of the work that had taken place at FVSU during the course of the University’s more than 120-year history of graduating hundreds of distinguished educators,

entrepreneurs, athletes, dentists, physicians, and scientists. The dreaming and doing that Dr. Griffith believes in is not limited to FVSU, but takes place at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) across the country. Even as critics routinely dismiss and attack them, HBCUs are striving.

According to Section 322 of Title II of the Black College and University Act, a “historically Black college or university” is defined as:

“any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of

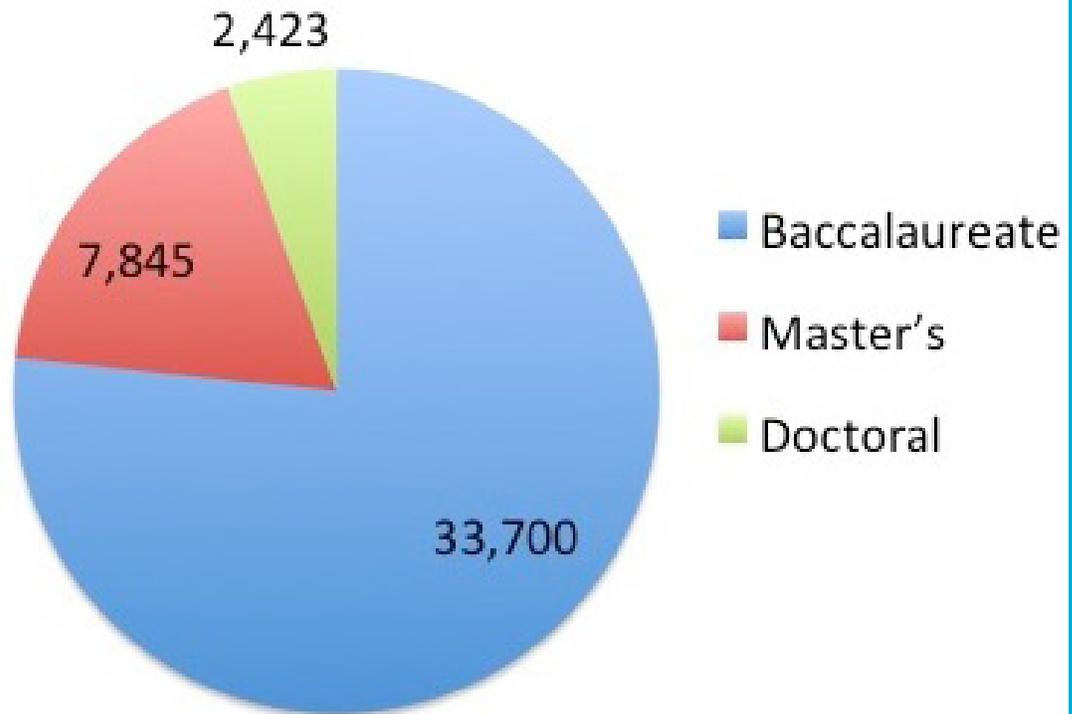
Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.”²

Since their establishment 180 years ago, HBCUs have provided African American students with the best mechanism, and, for some, the only opportunity to receive a collegiate education. The first three HBCUs were founded in the north³:

- The Institute for Colored Youth (later Cheyney University) was founded in Cheyney, PA, in 1837, with funding provided by Richard Humphreys, a Quaker philanthropist from the West Indies, with the intent to address the struggles of African Americans who could not obtain jobs due to lack of education⁴.
- Lincoln University, also located in Pennsylvania, was founded in 1854 and has the distinction of being the first degree-granting HBCU in the United States⁵; and
- Wilberforce University, founded in 1856 in Wilberforce, Ohio, was the first HBCU to be owned and operated by African Americans⁶.

Today, 101 HBCUs, located in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands⁷, continue the dreaming and doing that Dr. Griffith believes

Degrees Awarded by HBCUs in 2014



- National Center for Education Statistics

in. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 294,316 students were enrolled at HBCUs in 2014. During the 2013 – 2014 academic year, 33,700 baccalaureate, 7,845 master's, and 2,423 doctoral degrees were conferred by HBCUs.

Critics argue that there is no longer a need for separate institutions of higher education for African Americans, as past inequalities in access and opportunities that racial and ethnic minority groups have suffered have been remedied and no longer require attention or redress⁸. To the contrary, though, racial discrimination against African American students and faculty, segregation tactics, and lack of access for African American students at predominately white institutions

of higher education continue today.

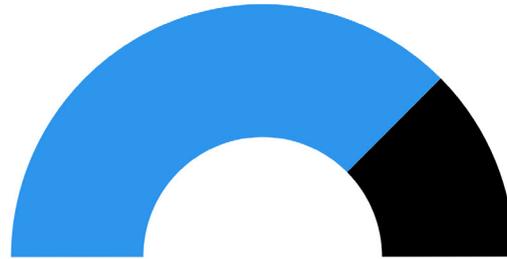
Critics also argue that HBCUs are ineffective at providing a quality education for students, as evidenced by their lower undergraduate retention and graduation rates, lack of financial autonomy, and higher student loan cohort default rates. However, in the 1991 report, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Higher Education Desegregation*⁹, the U.S. Department of Education buttressed the case for HBCUs, finding:

- o More than 20% of all African Americans who received degrees in medicine and dentistry were trained at the two traditionally black institutions of medicine and dentistry— Howard University in Washington, DC and Meharry Medical College in Nashville, TN.

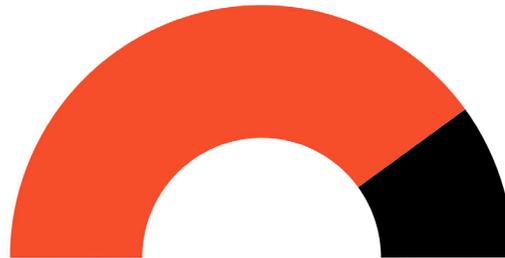
- o HBCUs have provided undergraduate training for three-fourths of all black people with a doctorate degree; three-fourths of all black officers in the armed forces; and four-fifths of all black federal judges.

- o HBCUs are leading institutions in awarding baccalaureate degrees to black students in the life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, and

HBCUs have conferred undergraduate degrees to:



3/4 of Blacks with Ph.D.s



4/5 of Black Federal Judges



3/4 of Black Military Officers

engineering.

- o Fifty percent of black faculty in traditionally white research universities received their bachelor's degrees at an HBCU.

Nearly 20 years later, in their seminal report *The State of Blacks in Higher*

*Education*¹⁰, Darity et al. (2009) offered updated findings:

- o The number of African Americans awarded bachelor's degrees increased 73% compared to 25% for non-African Americans. At the doctorate level, African Americans had an increase of 56% compared to 6% for non-African

Americans.

- o HBCUs increased both the number of degrees they awarded and the diversity of their student bodies at the bachelor's and doctorate degree levels. The increase in bachelor's degrees at HBCUs was 39% compared to 33% for all schools.
- o At the doctoral level, HBCUs had a 67% increase compared to 14% for all schools.
- o Although HBCUs account for only 3.3% of all institutions of higher education, they awarded nearly 50% of all bachelor's degrees received by black students in the natural and physical sciences, a little more than 25% of all bachelor's degrees in engineering, and nearly 25% of all bachelor's degrees awarded to black Americans.

More recently, a 2015 Gallup-Purdue University Poll¹¹ found the following:

- o Approximately 55% of African American HBCU graduates said they strongly agreed that their college or university "prepared them well for life outside of college," compared to less than 30% of non-HBCU African American graduates.
- o More than half of HBCU graduates reported "thriving in purpose and well-being," compared to 43% of African American graduates from non-HBCUs. In addition, almost half of African American HBCU graduates said their college or university was "the perfect school" for them, compared to 34% of non-HBCU African American alumni.
- o Almost 50% of African American HBCU graduates said they couldn't "imagine a world" without the HBCU they attended. Only 25% of African American graduates of predominantly white institutions felt the same.

As Dr. Curtis Todd writes in *Dreaming and Doing at Georgia HBCUs: Continued Relevancy in 'Post-Racial' America*,

"The well-preserved intentions of HBCUs since their founding has been to provide African Americans and other minority groups a seat at the proverbial table of higher education and to make possible life altering opportunities beneficial for their families, communities, as well as for

America and the world. Although their product is well documented, the viability of HBCUs, their relevancy and need to exist continues to be questioned by oftentimes ill-informed pundits, detractors and factions armed with marginalized, poorly considered and constructed arguments with dubious validity."

In defiance of political tactics to close and merge them, and despite the confluence of lower average admission requirements, less funding for institutional scholarships, limited technological resources, and smaller operating budgets, the nation's HBCUs have persevered in providing higher educational opportunities not only for African Americans, but for students of all races and ethnicities¹².

Works Cited

1. Griffith I. Dreaming and doing in the valley: a vision for excellence engagement. Investiture Address of Ivelaw L. Griffith. Fort Valley State University; 2014.
2. Higher Education Act of 1965, Title II, §322(2), 20 U.S.C. 1061(2); 1965
3. Carter, M. L. (2010). Black females in college. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of African American education*. (pp. 81-86). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
4. HBCU Lifestyle. Oldest HBCUs in the United States. <http://hbculifestyle.com/oldest-hbcus-in-the-united-states/>
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_313.10.asp?current=yes
8. Chang M. *A compelling interest: examining the evidence on racial dynamics in colleges and universities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 2003.
9. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Higher Education Desegregation*. Washington, D.C; 1991. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq9511.html>. Accessed 16 May 2016.
10. Darity WA, Sharpe RV, Swinton OH. *The state of blacks in higher education*. Inc, New York: Beckham Publication Group; 2009.
11. Gallup-Purdue University Poll: The Relationship Between Student Debt, Experiences and Perceptions of College Worth. 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/services/185924/gallup-purdue-index-2015-report.aspx>.
12. Broady, K. E., Todd, C. L., & Booth-Bell, D. (2017). Dreaming and Doing at Georgia HBCUs: Continued Relevance in 'Post-Racial' America. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 1-18.