'Saving' Education

Religion and/in Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Edited by

Anthony B. Pinn

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Higher Education Leadership & Study of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Series Editor
Hakim J. Lucas
Virginia Union University, USA

The series in Higher Education Leadership and Study of Historically Black Colleges and Universities aim at disseminating knowledge about the continuity between the leadership practices in Higher Educational management of historically Black Colleges and Universities. The series show that managing historically Black colleges and universities requires, on one hand, abiding by the mission of the founding fathers of these institutions and requires a unique style of leadership, while striving to educate students to compete and meet the demands of the 21st century labor market

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FOREWORD

Blest Be This Tie: Historically Black Colleges
and Universities and the Black Church.
Hakim J. Lucas

The African American Heritage Hymnal #341 reflects the thoughts of John Fawcett, orphan tailor preacher born in 1782 and converted in a methodist revival. Fawcett pens words that have been orphaned, tailored and preached by African American religious and education leaders for over 200 years:

> Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers; our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comfort and our cares. We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flow the sympathizing tear. (1987)

Mindful of these words, I propose that the historically Black college and university (HBCU) and the Black Church (Church) are organizational siblings. Fraternal twins, they were born within seconds of each other. Birthed to their parents, Black justice and Black empowerment in the cradle of American slavery and injustice. The HBCU and Church have an interesting history together and apart. Oftentimes hard to distinguish, these anchors of African experience in the United States have guided the maturation of Black people who have wrestled with the multiple continuous macro- and micro-aggressions of systemic white racist oppression. Courageously, these institutions have found comfort one to the other. This comfort, though tempered by the social, political, economic and ethical turbulences of the day, has and continues to force an evolution in mission, focus, ideology and practice.

The HBCU and Church connection is identified in their meaning-making power. This shared power is the ability to provide a lens and platform for pulling on the binding tie—freedom. Freedom in its simplest form: to write, wrestle, inquire, critique, reimagine and empower. The impact of the Black Church on HBCUs is profound, shaping their founding principles, educational mission, community engagement, leadership development, cultural expression, and social activism. While some aspects have evolved, the legacy of a wonder working power that binds the continued pursuit of freedom continues to be a significant part of the identity and mission of many HBCUs.

This book is a collection of essays that, in the tradition of HBCUs and the Black Church, pull on the binding ties of the African American's maturing conceptualization and living of freedom. I believe it offers readers a good sense of some of the major issues and opportunities related to the intersections of religion and HBCUs. There is much to gain by reading these essays. And, as you read, please know that this volume in the Series is dedicated to ancestral, present and future warriors of the HBCU and Black Church family—blest be this tie!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not exist without the hard work of the staff of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning (CERCL). In particular, Maya Reine—the Associate Director of the Center—not only worked out the logistics for the conference related to this project, but she also prepared the book files for submission. In addition, Hassan Henderson-Lott, my graduate student, played an important role in working through the logistics for the conference. Thank you both! Of course, a huge thank you to my colleagues who contributed to this volume. In addition, I must thank President Reginald DesRoches (Rice University) and President Hakim Lucas (Virginia Union University) for their support of the partnership between CERCL and the Center for the Study of HBCUs at Virginia Union University that guides this book and others to come. Finally, I want to express my appreciation for Suad Kamardeen, Poppy Pearce and everyone else at Emerald Publishing for moving this book from a set of files to this published product.

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INTRODUCTION: CONNECTING RELIGION AND EDUCATION

Anthony B. Pinn
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ABSTRACT

After offering context for the volume, the author examines briefly the emergence of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) within the historical context of white supremacy and racial trauma. Related to this, the author argues that HBCUs played a significant role in not only offering academic opportunity but also nurtured a population of African Americans who understood themselves as obligated to the betterment of their community. In a word, HBCUs have been vital with respect to the advance of African Americans. Furthermore, the author gives attention to the manner in which the work of these HBCUs is tied to religious organizations in that denominational support was vital during their initial development. But more than a financial tie, the author notes that HBCUs also often draw their moral and ethical sensibilities from religious communities—thereby tying educational advancement to the full well-being of the larger African American community. Finally, the author summarizes the various chapters in light of this connection and with respect to a range of questions guiding the book—e.g., How do some of the significant figures formed within associated socio-cultural, intellectual, and theological environments define these educational communities and their mission(s)?

Keywords: Black religion; Reconstruction; vision; mission; philanthropists; pedagogy

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These conference proceedings stem from an effort to rethink the nature of interaction between predominantly white institutions and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Beginning with Rice University and Virginia Union University, the goal has been to amplify areas of shared interest while also recognizing differences. For some, this work might seem obvious, a longstanding exchange; however, is that really the case? And, to the degree there are such connections, have they been maximized?

There is need still for imaginative and creative transformations of higher education—guided by a central aim of fostering academic leadership with the capacity, skills, and vision necessary to address the challenges of anti-Black racism and other modes of injustice infecting our society and its institutions. And, it is useful to move beyond such effort siloed on individual campuses and to engage instead in ways that serve to bridge the communicative divide between historically Black institutions of higher education and predominantly white institutions of higher education.

The partnership between Rice University and Virginia Union University in the form of a new program—Black Leadership Across Campuses (BLAC)—is meant as an intervention related to this much needed work. It serves as a pilot initiative with the potential to grow to include an expansive array of national partners.[1] To be sure, the claim isn't that Rice University and Virginia Union University have invented a unique process of collaboration, but rather that such collaboration has great potential particularly in this historical moment—with its challenges to critical thinking and the presentation of accurate history marked by the continuation of anti-Black racism. BLAC supports its mission through careful and creative attention to and implementations of a set of goals, including conferences meant to generate publications addressing key issues.

During the Fall of 2022, BLAC sponsored its first conference composed of a group of scholar-teachers and administrators exploring dimensions of a central theme: "Religion and HBCUs: History, Mission, and Impact." In extending the invitation to potential participants, the focus wasn't their personal relationship to HBCUs in an affective sense, but rather the manner in which their professional work speaks to the general theme. And, the theme was somewhat vague in order to allow for wide-ranging conversation.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to the emergence of HBCUs educational attainment for African Americans had to involve informal processes that, if discovered, could result in physical threat, harm, or death. The general logic of white supremacy and white privilege in the United States reasoned that educated African Americans were *dangerous* African Americans, who would

not be content to maintain a subordinate socio-economic and political position. And, this logic was to be enforced through violence when more moderate approaches failed. The Civil War and Reconstruction altered the practices of public and private life to some degree with an increase in the number of institutions of higher learning meant for African Americans. At least in theory, the end of formal slavery meant opportunity for education that would result in a range of advancements meant to represent inclusion in a "revised" national narrative. Of course, segregated life arrangements remained in place. Reconstruction failed to establish new structures for socio-political and economic arrangements in the South (and North for that matter). And, with the removal of union troops there was limited attention to the safety and general well-being of African Americans as they worked to establish themselves in light of the rhetoric of change. Still, even in this context of new modes of dehumanization and ostracization, schools developed.

Beginning with Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (1837), HBCUs existed to provide educational advancement (and its larger benefits) in a country that denied African Americans access to white institutions of higher learning. And, from that beginning to the present, there has been no doubt that HBCUs have played a major role—one beyond their resource base—in the educational and general advancement of African Americans (and over the years a large number of non-African American students and faculty). Although these institutions of higher learning make-up less than five percent of colleges and universities in the United States (roughly 100 institutions in roughly 20 states), they produce roughly twenty percent of all African American college graduates.[2] The numbers are even more impressive when one considers particular professions. For example, according to the National Science Foundation, "of the top eight institutions that graduate Black undergraduate students who ultimately go on to earn doctorates, seven are HBCUs—one-third of all Black students who have earned doctorates graduated with bachelor's degrees from HBCUs."[3] Of course, such success isn't limited to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in that HBCU graduates who have transformed socio-cultural, political and economic life based on their training in the Humanities and Social Sciences constitute yet another impressive list.

The development of institutions like Cheyney University afforded a space in which to experiment with new ideas of life, new visions for inclusion and opportunity, and a deeper sense of one's place in the history (and future) of civilization. To think through the socio-political context for these institutions, I turn to W. E. B. Du Bois. A product of an HBCU, his written reflections on these schools (combined with having taught at several of them) offers keen insights still relevant.[4] For example, reflecting on the brutalization of Black life, Du Bois, in 1933, speaks to the ongoing nature and meaning of the HBCU when saying,

> We have no assurance this twentieth century civilization will survive. We do not know that American Negroes will survive. There are sinister signs about us, antecedent to and unconnected with the Great Depression. The organized might of industry North and South is relegating the Negro to the edge of survival and using him as a labor reservoir on starvation wage. No secure professional class, no science, literature, nor art can live on such a subsoil. It is an insistent, deep-throated cry for rescue, guidance, and organized advance that greets the black leader today, and the college that rains him has got to let him know at least as much about the great black miners' strike in Alabama as about the age of Pericles.[5]

The gendered language used by Du Bois falters and doesn't capture the extent of the dilemma, one that requires the full participation of all those educated within the walls of HBCUs. For example, keep in mind that long before Du Bois wrote the words above, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training Institute for Negro Girls (1904), which, through a merger, would eventually become Bethune-Cookman University, with this as its mission: "…to educate a diverse community of learners to become responsible, productive citizens and solution seekers through the promotion of faith, scholarship, creative endeavors, leadership and service." The linkage between faith (in this case Black Christianity) and advancement is explicit with Mary McLeod Bethune, who argued for religiosity as grounding for all her school's efforts. This connection is evident in both her personal thinking and her theory of education. In a letter written in 1946 to Josephine T. Washington, she said,

> …my philosophy of education is the basic principle upon which my life has been built—that is the three-fold training of head, hand, heart. I believe in a rounded education with a belief in the dignity and refinement of labor—in doing well whatever task is assigned to me. A belief in a spiritual undergirting [*sic*] of all my efforts and a clear, sane mental development.[6]

Mary McLeod Bethune reminds that there is something in the stories of HBCUs suggesting a transformative ethos that entails more than a call for material success. It also encourages a deeper growth that targets something beyond the physical. One might think of this growth as related to the "soul"—the genius—of African Americans made famous by Du Bois.[7] What he says with respect to Atlanta University could be used to frame in general terms of university praxis the inner impulse I'm trying to capture:

> Not only is Atlanta University a school and a home; it is in the large sense of the word, a church. I do not mean by that anything narrow or sectarian…As the larger home, then, of its sons and Daughters, Atlanta University, is, and always has been, a teacher of religion and morality.[8]

In this way, these universities and colleges combined intellectual rigor with moral growth and ethical strength. Whether education was thought of as "classical" training, or more technical and industrial, opportunity for intellectual and practical advancement informed a sense of personhood, and of collective meaning and purpose.

Granted, not all HBCUs were founded explicitly by churches and other religious organizations. For example, there were also state and federal development institutions (e.g., Texas Southern University and Florida A&M University) as well as those organized by various philanthropists. Still, the question of religion's relationship to the mission and meaning of these institutions is worth attention. Some dimensions of the religious orientation, or ethos, of HBCUs is obvious—e.g., founded by churches, religious services as a dimension of campus community engagement, ministerial advocates. Related to this, one might think of Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary (housed in Friendship Baptist Church) founded by Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles in 1881, with the named changed to Spelman College in 1924. It was financed in part by the American Baptist Home Mission Society and John D. Rockefeller. Augusta Institute, which would become Morehouse College also was started in a church basement (1867) by three ministers, and with support from Henry Lyman Morehouse of the American Baptist Home mission Society.

Perhaps there were ways in which the religious inclinations of many of the sponsoring institutions and individuals also meant attention to filtering this educational vision—these new patterns of thought and practice—through a theological lens that framed history as teleological in nature and the advancement of African Americans as God's promise being fulfilled. The material presence of these institutions also spoke a word concerning the undergirding theology meant to link intellectual development and moral-ethical correctness. What impact did theological concerns and changes resulting from the promise and pain of Reconstruction and Jim/Jane Crow have on the ethos of these institutions and the posture toward the world of their students? How do some of the significant figures formed within associated socio-cultural, intellectual, and theological environments define these educational communities and their mission(s)? What are some of the dynamics of critical thinking needed within a predominately Black educational context, and how does critical thinking and socio-cultural critique impact pedagogy? What influence does the university or college chapel have on the nature of HBCUs and their presence in the world?

While not necessarily explicit in the following essays, such questions and the considerations they prompt do inform this slim volume composed of five essays. In fact, the above questions shadow a more general query undergirding the conference and these pieces: In relationship to this complex connection to religion, how might one describe the history, mission, and impact of HBCUs?

Taken as a whole, these essays explore both the personal and communal dimensions of the general theme, and offer insights and challenges across a range of concerns related to the various responsibilities assumed by HBCUs—particularly in light of their connection to religious thought and practice. Read together they offer a layered and multidisciplinary examination of the impact of religion on the mission and activities of HBCUs expressed over the course of centuries. It is my hope these essays that sparked rich conversation during our conference will also generate productive questions and considerations for readers.

NOTES

1. For more information on BLAC, go to the Rice University's Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning Website: https://www.cercl.rice.edu/black-leadership-across-campuses.
2. https://uncf.org/the-latest/the-numbers-dont-lie-hbcus-are-changing-the-college-landscape#:~:text=Though%20HBCUs%20make%20up%20only,financial%20obstacles%20Black%20students%20face
3. https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/announcements/081920.jsp
4. This would include *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Library of America, 1990), but his relevant work isn't limited to this text.

   In mentioning DuBois, readers shouldn't assume a rejection of advocates for more technical education, like Booker T. Washington; instead, I'm simply offering one of many possible examples of how HBCUs were viewed during their key decades of development—in relationship to religious organizations and in light of the pressing (and often deadly) consequences of anti-Black racism.
5. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro College", *The Crisis* (1933, August) [Reprinted in David Leering Lewis, ed., *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995): 72–73].
6. https://www.cookman.edu/history/our-founder.html
7. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Library of America, 1990). While the meaning of "souls" is located throughout the text, readers should pay special attention to the first chapter—"Of Our Spiritual Strivings", pp. 7–15.
8. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Atlanta University", in *From Servitude to Service: Being the Old South Lectures on the History and Work of Southern Institutions for the Education of the Negro* (Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association, 1905) [Reprinted in David Leering Lewis, ed., *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995): 248].

CHAPTER 1

TRIANGULAR TRADE TO PRODUCTIVE EXCHANGE: 150 YEARS OF BLACK CHURCH/ HBCU COLLABORATION IN TEXAS

Karen Kossie-Chernyshev
Texas Southern University, USA

ABSTRACT

This essay provides a historical description of the synergy between Black churches and historically Black colleges and universities. In so doing the author highlights Texas by discussing the manner in which its Black Baptist churches helped to foster both higher education and more general socio-economic and political well-being. For example, by exploring the relationship between Mt. Gilead Baptist Church and Prairie View A&M University, the author highlights the longstanding commitment to education held by many Black Christians. The author uses this case study and two others to unpack the manner in which the relationship between churches and institutions of higher learning informed and influenced the full range of life experiences for African Americans in the deep south resulting in the growth of a Black professional class.

Keywords: Trans-Atlantic slave trade; emancipation proclamation; protest; Baptist Student Union; Mt. Gilead Baptist Church; Houston

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Discussions about African American history often begin with a focus on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the resulting dispersals of people of African descent throughout the Americas, including "Tejas, Mexico," now Texas, United States of America. Notwithstanding the historical significance of an exchange that endured for approximately 400 years, research affirms that emancipated Blacks in Texas took measurable steps to lift themselves out of poverty by creating and nurturing a dynamic educational and professional exchange comprised of interconnected individuals and organizations committed to progress. The educational, professional, and political exchanges examined in this essay emerged out of the "Black Church," which W. E. B. DuBois famously referred to as "the birthplace of the Negro Masses."

Black churches in Texas, often established by formerly enslaved men and women, became launchpads for non-profit and for-profit institutions, including schools, universities, burial societies, insurance agencies, newspapers, hat shops, restaurants, and beauty and barber schools. Most of these churches had humble beginnings shaped by determined members who pooled their resources together in creative ways. The degree to which their undertakings were successful depended on church leaders' educational attainment, members' individual and collective commitment to educational outreach and social advancement, organizational culture, and the geopolitical environments in which they operated.[1]

Texas was a fertile field for imagining, encouraging, and creating opportunities for vibrant social and political exchange. The Emancipation Proclamation and General Order 3, the acclaimed Juneteenth document, effectuated the release of approximately 250,000 Blacks in Texas. In the early years of the 20th century, Black migrants also poured into Texas from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and other former slave states. By 1906, people of African descent formed majorities in 14 counties along the Texas coast, in the Brazos River valley, and in Northeast Texas, and constituted 40–50% of the population in 13 other East Texas counties.[2] According to "Progress of the Negro in Texas," a report prepared for the Bureau of the Census by Charles E. Hall, the Black religious community was diverse and dynamic. Hall noted the following:

> …in 1926 there were 3,910 black churches in Texas with a total membership of 351,305. Of the 3,539 church edifices, 3,506 reported a total value of $10, 587, 143 or an average of $3,020 per church. The 3,376 churches reporting Sunday schools contained 26, 297 officers and teachers and 167,193 scholars. The Baptist bodies led in the number of members, followed by the African American Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of God in Christ.[3]