

From Oppressed to Obsessed: The HBCU Way

By Shemari Salkey

What are HBCUs? Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were one of the few options for Black Americans seeking a college education. These educational establishments provided African Americans with opportunities to enhance their education, seek professional occupations, and get graduate degrees in a welcoming environment that developed communities based on culture and history. Due to segregation, Black students were once prohibited from enrolling in standard schools and universities; This led to the creation of HBCUs. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the first HBCU, was established in 1837. Today, HBCUs provide an extensive cultural heritage and teach a student body that is diverse in terms of race. These historical institutions have been a staple of black culture and are the most important and influential to society. How, you may ask? Let's take a deep dive into the HBCU way.

HBCUs were born out of necessity during a time when racial segregation and discrimination denied African Americans access to mainstream educational institutions. These schools became sanctuaries of learning, providing an education to those who were systematically excluded elsewhere. Over the years, HBCUs have evolved into dynamic hubs of academic excellence, producing leaders, innovators, and change-makers across various fields. One of the distinctive strengths of HBCUs lies in their nurturing and supportive environments. Smaller class sizes, close-knit communities, and faculty who are deeply invested in the success of their students create an atmosphere conducive to academic achievement and personal growth. HBCUs have been instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging, identity, and pride among students, helping them navigate the challenges they may face both inside and outside the classroom.

Moreover, HBCUs have been pioneers in cultivating a diverse and inclusive educational experience. These institutions have welcomed students from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, fostering a rich tapestry of perspectives and ideas. In doing so, HBCUs contribute not only to the academic advancement of their students but also to the broader goal of promoting diversity and understanding in society. In recent years, HBCUs have garnered attention for their role in producing a significant portion of African American professionals, including doctors, lawyers, scientists, and entrepreneurs. The notable alumni of HBCUs, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Oprah Winfrey, and Kamala Harris, serve as a testament to the profound impact these institutions have had on society at large.

However, despite their storied history and undeniable contributions, HBCUs face challenges, including financial constraints and resource disparities compared to predominantly white institutions. It is crucial for policymakers, philanthropists, and the broader community to recognize the importance of investing in HBCUs to ensure their continued success and to address historical inequities in higher education. The black community has a long history of receiving excellent education from HBCUs. Their dedication is to elevate black success and enhance the quality of life for African Americans around the country. This is only one of the many reasons why HBCUs are essential to the African-American collegiate experience.

As we reflect on the enduring legacy of HBCUs, it is essential to celebrate their achievements, acknowledge their resilience, and actively contribute to their sustained growth. These institutions not only embody the triumph over adversity but also represent beacons of hope, empowerment, and educational excellence. In recognizing the value of HBCUs, we affirm our commitment to a more inclusive, equitable, and enlightened future for all.