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No, HBCUs Don't Need Saving. Here's Why They Still Matter More Than Ever.

Every few years, someone writes the "Are HBCUs still relevant?" think piece. Let's retire that question for good.

By Dre Drye | 7 min read | LEGACY Blog

Every few years — usually during homecoming season or after a marching band goes viral — somebody with a platform and a deadline decides to ask the question: *Are HBCUs still relevant?*

The question always arrives dressed in concern. It points to enrollment dips, endowment gaps, and building renovations that haven't happened yet. It compares HBCU budgets to Big Ten budgets like that's a fair fight. And it always, always forgets to mention that

these institutions were never built with the same money, the same infrastructure, or the same head start — and they've still been producing excellence for over 150 years.

So let's not answer the relevance question. Let's bury it.

The Numbers Speak. Loudly.

HBCUs make up just 3% of colleges and universities in the United States. Read that again. Three percent. Now look at what that 3% produces.

40%

of Black engineers in the U.S. graduated from an HBCU.

50%

of Black lawyers and doctors got their undergraduate degrees at an HBCU.

80%

of Black judges in America are HBCU alumni.

That's not a relevance problem. That's an efficiency rate most Fortune

500 companies would beg for.

The Experience Nobody Can Replicate

There's a version of the college experience where you never have to explain your hair. Where your professor looks like your uncle and holds you to a higher standard because of it — not in spite of it. Where homecoming isn't just a football game, it's a family reunion with a drumline and a purpose.

HBCUs don't just educate Black students. They *invest* in Black students. There's a difference. At a time when Black students at predominantly white institutions are still navigating microaggressions, imposter syndrome, and the quiet loneliness of being "the only one," HBCUs offer something no amount of DEI programming can manufacture: belonging that doesn't require a disclaimer.

You can fund a diversity initiative. You can't fund the feeling of walking across a campus where excellence looks like you in every direction.

The Innovation Nobody Covers

While the "relevance" discourse cycles through every few years, HBCUs have been quietly evolving. Bowie State launched one of the first cybersecurity programs at a historically Black institution. Morehouse became the first all-male HBCU to establish a human rights major. Spelman has produced more Black women who go on to earn PhDs in STEM than any other institution in the country. Florida A&M's journalism program has placed graduates in every major

newsroom you can name.

These aren't schools clinging to the past. They're building futures with a fraction of the resources and ten times the intentionality.

THE LEGACY PIPELINE

There's another layer to the HBCU conversation that doesn't get enough attention: the alumni network. HBCU alumni don't just graduate and disappear. They come back. They mentor. They hire. They fund scholarships named after grandmothers who never got to go to college themselves. The HBCU pipeline isn't just academic — it's generational. It's the aunt who pledged at Spelman making sure her niece knows she has options. It's the Howard alum reviewing your resume even though they've never met you, because somebody did the same for them.

That kind of ecosystem doesn't show up in a U.S. News ranking. But it shows up in careers, in families, in communities — every single day.

So, What's the Real Question?

The question was never whether HBCUs are still relevant. The question is why they've had to prove relevance with a budget that wouldn't cover one semester of a Power Five school's athletic department. The question is what would happen if these institutions received the funding, the coverage, and the respect that matched their output.

We already know the answer. They'd do what they've always done — just louder.

HBCUs don't need saving. They need investment. They need visibility. And they need prospective students to know that choosing an HBCU isn't a fallback plan — it's one of the most powerful decisions you can make for your future.

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