

Why We Need Black Colleges

Contributed by Kevin McGhee -- Black College Wire
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Racial inequality still exists in America

There has been much talk about whether there is a continued need for historically black colleges and universities. Most agree that they played an instrumental role in the development and integration of blacks into American society, but now, some say our society has matured past the point of needing these institutions.

Lincoln University, then called Lincoln Institute, was established by the 62nd United States Colored Infantry after the Civil War and stands as a testament to black people's resolve and forward thinking. It is a pillar in the capitol of Missouri that stands for change. This was also evident in 1954 when Lincoln University began to allow all qualified students to apply and attend.

One justification for this type of thinking is the decreased enrollment in HBCUs. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1972 over 35 percent of all black students that received a college degree received them from HBCUs. In 2001 that percentage had fallen to under 25 percent. Some say this decrease in enrollment leads to admission purely for the purpose of receiving tuition and aid from the federal government.

Some other arguments are that affirmative action allows blacks better access to majority-white institutions, and that socially Americans have grown to the point that these schools are not needed.

All of these arguments are true and seem to suggest that there is less of a need for HBCUs now than in the past, but there are other issues to consider. According to data from the last census 30 percent of blacks who hold doctorates degrees, 35 percent of black lawyers, 50 percent of Black engineers, and 65 percent of black physicians currently in the field all received their educations from HBCUs.

These Institutions have also helped to shape some of the greatest African American minds of the past and today. Oprah Winfrey graduated from Tennessee State University, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. went to Morehouse College, and Sean "Diddy" Combs attended Howard University. Black colleges produce some of the best and brightest of each generation.

Lincoln is still proud of its foundation as a historically black university. It has value in the community as an institution created after blacks were freed in the United States. Many HBCUs have historical values in their community and in the nation as a whole. For instance, as was shown in the movie *The Great Debaters*, Wiley College was one of the first Black Colleges to debate a White school.

There are 106 HBCUs in the United States and Virgin Islands. Collectively they enroll more than 370,000 African American students annually. The opportunity to receive a college education would not be available to all these students if it were not for these institutions.

One reason so many black students attend these schools is because they do not meet the requirements to get into the majority-white colleges. This comes from the discrepancy in the education received to that point especially early childhood education. Even those who do well enough to get into those schools are sometimes unable to because of the cost. There is an entire group of people that fall victim to this, but still want an education.

NCES reports that only 18 percent of African American people that are in four-year colleges or universities attend HBCUs. This is a testament to their success. A large portion of today's black middle class have been HBCU graduates. The continued existence of these schools will help to continue this trend.

Race is a touchy issue for many Americans. Some people feel that to keep these institutions is the perpetuation of the same racial inequality that they were created to overcome. America has come a long way from slavery times, but the job is not done. Statements such as the one Rush Limbaugh made about Donovan McNabb, and Don Imus about the Rutgers University women's basketball team, is proof that the fight is not over. Even blogs about the Jena 6 showed defined racial lines.

Historically black schools were not built to put up walls. They were built to tear them down, and as long as racism exists in this nation, they will always have a place here.

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