The Community Screening Guide for *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities* is a tool to facilitate dialogue and deepen understanding of the history, growth, and current challenges facing historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The film and guide also offer a different perspective on the pervasive inequities institutions of higher education address. The content is intended to be flexible and adaptable for multiple audiences and formats from theaters, to community screenings, to classrooms. You may choose to use the entire guide or select sections to support your screening and engagement goals.

Keep in mind that the history and story of HBCUs may be very familiar to some and unfamiliar to others. This guide is developed to support *all audiences* as they gather to learn, discuss, and reflect on their own education and the connections it may, or may not, have to HBCUs.

“Until racism in this country ends, we’re going to need HBCUs.”
**STANLEY NELSON**
Director, *Tell Them We Are Rising*

“Black colleges were redefining what it meant to be Black in America. You weren’t doing something with your hands, you were pursuing a career where education and intellect mattered. Black people were in charge. Black people were in control. Black people were writing the checks.”
**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX**
CEO, United Negro College Fund

“That spirit of being at an HBCU is very, very different. It’s like you have a match and you want to start a fire but you have no fuel whatsoever. All you have is that one match. This HBCU experience has shown me and taught me that anything is possible as long as you have that one spark.”
**CALVIN LONG**
Student, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
FILM INTRODUCTION

*Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities* is an American story. A haven for Black intellectuals, artists and revolutionaries—and path of promise toward the American dream—Black colleges and universities have educated the architects of freedom movements and cultivated leaders in every field. Established over 150 years ago to educate formerly enslaved African Americans who were barred from public schools, HBCUs were for a century the only option for African American students to obtain a college education. Since colleges were desegregated in the 1950’s, HBCUs remain unapologetically Black spaces of learning for students who choose them.

African Americans who were able to attain a higher education played an enormous part in propelling the epic journey toward liberation for Black people in the United States. Beginning with Cheyney University of Pennsylvania founded in 1837, HBCUs played a central role in the shaping of Black life and identity, creating a Black middle class and dismantling segregation. Today, they continue to be an engine for Black economic progress and incubators of the ongoing movement for justice. Through this rich tapestry of never before seen or heard media—including archival photos, letters, diaries, and film footage—memorable first-hand testimonials with key students, staff, faculty, and alumni, *Tell Them We Are Rising* brings into sharp focus the pivotal role the HBCUs have played in American history, culture, and national identity and illuminates the critical considerations these institutions are facing for their future survival.

Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities is the first and only feature documentary and multi-platform project to research, gather, and share a rich mosaic of stories that relay the history and legacy of historically Black colleges and universities.

“There’s something very different about coming into an environment where you know that everyone around you has the same chance of being successful as you are without negative implications associated with race. What the black college experience provides them is a place to be finally at some point in the majority. They look around and see people who share common experiences. That is such a unique and empowering experience.”

JOHNNY C. TAYLOR, JR.
Former President, Thurgood Marshall College Fund
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

My parents were the product of HBCUs. For generations, there was no other place our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents could go to school. Yet, higher education has always been a prerequisite for entering and competing in mainstream American society. So, in many ways, historically Black colleges and universities form the foundation of the African-American community. The sacrifices made to create these institutions are significant, and are what compelled me to capture this essential chapter of American history. I set out to tell a story of Americans who refused to be denied a higher education and—in their resistance—created a set of institutions that would influence and shape the landscape of the country for centuries to come. In particular, it was essential that this film highlight authentic, personal accounts alongside archival footage, letters, diaries, and photographs of the people who have lived the HBCU experience. The legacy of these institutions is not marked only by milestones and achievements; it is encapsulated by the minds and lives of the people who walked those storied halls.

If education is a cornerstone of society, then HBCUs are the groundwork for advancing justice in America. Thoroughly examining the history of HBCUs not only allowed me to highlight their importance within black communities, but demonstrate how they were instrumental to the formation of protest movements across the United States. The ground was ripe on these campuses. There is a distinct reason, imbued by the institutional legacy of HBCUs, that the challenge to school segregation and the sit-in movement had to come out of Black schools. These were places where African-American students could, for once as the majority, talk about issues that affect the African-American community. That atmosphere is what I sought to capture in the film in order to give audiences a sense of the energy that emerged out of HBCUs.

It is impossible to capture the entire breadth of HBCU history in under two-hours. My hope is that the film reaffirms the indisputable relevance of HBCUs. With on-going campus racism and an increasingly hostile national climate for communities of color, the need for institutions that prioritize a quality educational, cultural, and social climate for Black people is as important as ever.
SCREENING GUIDE OVERVIEW

The screening guide for TELL THEM WE ARE RISING supports:

• Dynamic conversations about the history and role of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in American history
• Widespread understanding of and appreciation for HBCUs among diverse communities
• An examination of past and current educational inequities in the United States with specific attention on access to higher education
• Understanding that African American students were and continue to be at the vanguard of social change in this country

Preparing to Watch and Discuss the Film

TIPS FOR FACILITATING OPEN DIALOGUE

PREPARE YOURSELF:
Reflect upon how the documentary touches upon your own personal experience. As a facilitator, recognize what emotions or responses may come up for you given the content of the film. In doing so, you can anticipate questions or topics that may feel personally challenging and think through ahead of time some appropriate responses. Give yourself time to reflect so you aren’t dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

Be knowledgeable. You don’t need to be an expert on any one issue in the film to lead thoughtful and meaningful conversations. Watching the film, reading through this guide, and familiarizing yourself with the issues can help guide the discussion and support individual reflection, small group discussion or school-wide or community-wide dialogue.
Preparing to Watch and Discuss the Film

Set the Tone and Encourage Multiple Perspectives. Be clear about your role as a facilitator. Staying neutral and facilitating the discussion without imposing your views is your priority. It is important to remember that the issues raised in the film cross into many communities, and there may be differences in perspectives and viewpoints. Your priority is to create a space where everyone feels safe to share. Be okay with silence and leave space for audiences to process their thoughts and feelings. Most importantly, remember that as a facilitator, this is not about you. It’s about your audience.

TIPS FOR SETTING UP COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL BASED SCREENINGS

The film can have a major impact on any viewer and provide an enlightened space for meaningful discussion and sharing on the contribution of HBCUs in American History.

In thinking about how to use the film, consider your intended audience and then determine the appropriate partners and screening objectives in which to bring people together for dialogue.

Events can include:
- general community screenings
- campus, youth and educational screenings
- college or university alumni gatherings
- house parties
- faith-based gatherings
- national, state, and local conferences or conventions
- public policy forums on education
Pre-Screening

Before viewing the documentary, take a moment to share and discuss the following questions posed from historian Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in *Tell Them We Are Rising*.

- “What is education’s purpose?”
- “Who controls it?”
- “What is the relationship [of education] to the broader aspirations of our people?”

DISCUSSION

If time and opportunity permit, you may also choose to frame your pre-screening discussion using these questions:

1. What life experiences inform your own perspectives on the value and purpose of education?
2. Who and what are colleges and universities for? When communities do not have full and equal access to higher education what is the cost to them? What is the cost to our nation?
3. What are the multiple perspectives on the value of educational institutions centered on a specific race, gender, or religion, versus one focused on a more general population?

INFORMING THE DISCUSSION

Framing the context of HBCUs within the larger story of American History from the 19th through the 21st Century is a critical element in recognizing and celebrating the contributions of these institutions throughout our country. Whether your audiences are unfamiliar or familiar with HBCUs, use these foundational resources to deepen knowledge and set the context and tone of your screening event.

TIMELINE OF HBCUS AS REPRESENTED IN THE FILM

The HBCU timeline helps build a useful context for *Tell Them We Are Rising* as audiences will have a range of familiarity and fluency with the history, current role and future of HBCUs. We hope *Tell Them We Are Rising* will catapult cities, organizations, and individuals to reflect upon and learn from the experiences of others. [www.hbcurising.com/explore/](http://www.hbcurising.com/explore/)
HBCUs IN THE US

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines an HBCU 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 is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency. As of 2015 there are over 100 in the United States, including public and private institutions, community colleges, four year institutions, medical and law schools. Although they are located across the country, most of them are concentrated in the Southern States of Alabama, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

ALABAMA
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Alabama A & M University
Alabama State University
Public, 2 Year Colleges:
Bishop State Community College
Gadsden State Community College
Shelton State Community College
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Concordia College-Selma
Miles College
Oakwood University
Selma University
Stillman College
Talladega College
Tuskegee University

CALIFORNIA
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science

DELARWE
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Delaware State University

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
University of the District of Columbia
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Howard University
Howard University College of Medicine
Howard University School of Law

FLORIDA
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Florida A&M University
Florida A&M University College of Law
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Bethune-Cookman University
Edward Waters College
Florida Memorial University

GEORGIA
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Albany State University
Fort Valley State University
Savannah State University
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Clark Atlanta University
Interdenominational Theological Center
Morris Brown College
Paine College
Spelman College

KENTUCKY
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Kentucky State University
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Simmons College of Kentucky

LOUISIANA
Public, 4 Year Colleges:
Grambling State University
Southern University and A&M College
Southern University Law Center
Southern University at New Orleans
Public, 2 Year Colleges:
Southern University at Shreveport
Private, 4 Year Colleges:
Dillard University
Xavier University of Louisiana

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THE LEGACY OF HBCUs: CELEBRATING ALUMNI

HBCUs in the U.S. have produced African American alumni (and alumni from other racial and ethnic groups) who are leading thinkers, politicians, business people, judges, artists, athletes and who have immeasurable influence in American society:

JAMES JENNING
Deputy Director of NASA’s
John F. Kennedy Space Center
1973 – Alabama A&M University

OLA M. LEWIS DALEY
First African American woman judge in the state supreme court and the youngest judge appointed in North Carolina’s history
1986 – Fayetteville State University

JENNIFER HUDSON
Grammy Award-winning recording artist, Academy Award-winning actress, spokesperson, finalist on season 3 of American Idol
2001 – Langston University

JOHN LEWIS
Congressman, Civil Rights Activist
1963 – Fisk University

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ERYKAH BADU
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Inviting audiences to connect, engage, and be in dialogue on the rich history and issues included in *Tell Them We Are Rising* allows them to look at American History through a different lens. Use the headline topics and the content included as suggested guideposts to organize your post-screening event and discussion.

Each section includes:
- Framing language and background information to set the context for discussion.
- A curated selection of quotes from scholars in the documentary to spark or return to a critical point of focus for discussion.
- Questions for audiences to delve deeper into discussion and listen to multiple perspectives on the role and legacy of HBCUs in the United States.
TELL THEM WE ARE RISING: 
THE BEGINNING OF HBCUs

“General O. O. Howard for whom Howard University is named, he was going around looking at the plight of African Americans, and he ran across students and he asked what shall I tell the people up North about the plight of the former slaves? And the 13 year-old Richard Robert Wright rose and said, “Tell them we are rising.”

JAMES ANDERSON

“No men, or community of men, can elevate another. Elevation must come from within. What the North and South, however, can do is to seize their injustice and allow the Negro to educate himself.”

BISHOP BENJAMIN TANNER AME Church

Background

Prior to the Civil War, African slaves were prohibited from learning to read and write, and in some areas teaching an enslaved person to read was a criminal offense. Denying literacy was purposeful. It was another way to maintain white supremacy and to deny power. As Historian Edna Medford says in the film, “It’s happening all over the country. This discrimination, this repression, this desire to make sure that black people remain subordinate to whites is something that’s national. It’s not just Southern at all, and I think that we sometimes forget that.”

With very few exceptions, Black people did not have access to higher education prior to emancipation. However after emancipation, and for the next 30 years during Reconstruction, Black colleges thrived. Institutions such as Howard University, established on March 2, 1867, were founded by ex-union officers who felt there was a need for an institution of higher learning to help ex-slaves and freedman become educated. At the same time northern Christian churches and missionaries, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), and other leaders in the Black community initiated their own Black institutions.

As scholar Johnetta Cole shared, “They wanted those schools to be as free as possible from paternalism, from racism, whether subtle or

2 The exception being 40 who did graduate before 1865 were from colleges largely in the North including Middlebury College, Vermont (1823 Alexander Lucas Twilight), Amherst College, Massachusetts (1826 Edward Jones), Bowdoin College, Maine (1826 John Brown Russwurm), Dartmouth College, New Hampshire (1828 Edward Mitchell), Oberlin College, Ohio (est. 1833-from its founding the college is open to Blacks and women.)
https://www.jbhe.com/chronology/

3 The original founders of Howard University were white and all university Presidents up to 1926 were white. When Howard opened it was open to everyone, irrespective of race. Quoted from Clifford Muse, university archivist, Howard University.
http://www.americanradioworks.org/the-living-legacy-transcript/
blatant.” With these hopes and commitments in place, HBCUs became (and continue to be) a pillar of strength and autonomy in the Black community alongside Black churches and the Black Press.

**Quotes for Discussion**

“A slaveholder could do virtually anything to his slave. He could work his slave to death. He could rape his slave. He could sell a slave. “It’s my property” the argument was, so I can do whatever I want to with my property except one thing I can’t do to my property, I can’t teach my property. I can’t teach my slave how to read or write. An educated black population could not be an enslaved black population.”

**PROFESSOR KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW**

“I had no schooling whatsoever while I was a slave. On several occasions I went as far as a schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses. I had the feeling that getting into that schoolhouse would be the same as getting into paradise.”

**BOOKER T. WASHINGTON**

“The more that a system denies you the chance to read and to write, the more that thing, reading and writing, becomes valuable, becomes precious, becomes a prize that you must have.”

**JONATHAN HOLLOWAY, DEAN OF YALE COLLEGE**

“In the immediate years after the war, one of the first things that formerly enslaved people did was to open schools.”

**PROFESSOR CRYSTAL SANDERS**

“They (African Americans) feel if they can get an education, if they can get knowledge, then other things will follow. This is the beginning of education in the South.”

**PROFESSOR MARGARET WASHINGTON**

**Delve Deeper**

The first quote above from historian Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw is powerful and deeply painful. In the opening of *Tell Them We Are Rising*, the denial of education during slavery is explained as a systematic and systemic control mechanism used to perpetuate subordination.
And Professor Shawn Alexander states that “between 1866-1872, approximately 20,000 people are killed, blacks and whites in the South. All because of this perceived threat that education will unlock something.”

Discuss the range of reasons you understand that an educated African would be a threat to white slave owners?

• Read, project, or pass out copies of any one or all of these excerpted quotes from the documentary included in this section. Ask your audience for their reactions to these statements. What quote stands out? What questions, if any, do they provoke?

• Take a moment to reflect upon your own education and return to Professor Crenshaw’s opening questions in the film, “What is education’s purpose? Who controls it? What is the relationship to the broader aspirations of our people?”

How would you respond to these question after viewing the film?

Read the following statements from Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois.

“As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past in nursing your children, watching by the sick bed of your mothers and fathers, we shall stand by you ready to lay down our lives if need be in defense of yours. In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

“There is among educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land, a feeling of deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which Mr. Washington’s theories have gained. Mr. Washington’s program practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro race.”

W.E.B. DU BOIS

• From the film quotes, and any previous background knowledge, explain in your own words the different educational philosophies of these two influential leaders.
• Professor Edna Medford said, “I think it was just that Booker T. Washington felt that black people were not at present capable of doing anything more than that. And as a consequence of taking that perspective, black people suffered. So he did a great deal of damage.” What is your reaction to Professor Medford’s analysis? Do you agree or disagree and why?

• Dean Jonathan Holloway says, “Washington dies in 1915. It is a moment in American culture and society. He’s one of the last generations of African Americans born into slavery. You can read that funeral as a moment of bearing witness to change. A change is coming.”

• Do you agree with Holloway’s assessment of this moment being significant for American culture and society? How do you understand the significance of Washington being one of the last generation of leaders born into slavery?

HBCUs: REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANT TO BE BLACK IN AMERICA
THE NEW NEGRO: GAINING AGENCY

Background
Returning from World War I, African Americans were emboldened with a new sense of American identity after loyally serving their country as soldiers and supporting the country as citizens. Dean Jonathan Holloway explains:

“African American returning veterans were often beaten at the train stops when they arrived. They were attacked by their fellow veterans who were white. They were attacked by civilians. Twenty-eight cities burned during the famous Red Summer of 1919. Although we refer to them as Race Riots, they were often small, race wars. The black veterans were shooting back.”

However the HBCUs these men and others turned to for advancement were largely led by white men resistant to the desires and demands of
the New Negro. Because of this HBCUs at this time became contested spaces pitting paternalistic white leaders against the attending students. Rules and restrictions were implemented to control Black students on campus, restrict their involvement in clubs and sports with the apparent desire to impose a code of moral conduct.

Black leaders began to criticize and students rose up. We see an example of this tension in a speech given by W.E.B. Du Bois at the graduation of his daughter Yolanda from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. In it he publicly criticized Fisk for inadequately preparing the next generation of Black students for the challenges ahead.

“I have come to criticize. In Fisk today, discipline is choking freedom. Ironclad rules, suspicion, are almost universal. The Negro race needs colleges. We need them today as never before. But we do not need colleges so much that we can sacrifice the ideals of the Negro race.”

Black student protests at Fisk University followed and were part of the larger climate of racial violence that occurred during and after the “Red Summer” of 1919. Black and white Race riots broke out on campuses, across the nation over labor shortages and the racial tensions caused by the Great Migration of African Americans leaving the south to seek work and opportunity elsewhere in the nation.

Delve Deeper

• How did historical events such as World War I affect the growth and evolution of HBCUs and the students attending?

How would you explain the mentality of African American veterans entering college after serving their country during war? In what ways may veterans expect more from their education and their country as a result of their military service?

• The protests at Fisk sparked a national student movement at HBCUs. Historian G. Briggs says, “It shows that the modern New Negro student, right, it will no longer stand for the Victorian atmosphere of their predecessors.”
Historian Jonathan Galloway says, “The New Negro has no fear is a reflection of this changed sensibility. It’s a militant New Negro, it’s one that’s going to stand up for his or her rights after all these black soldiers had fought for those rights and died for those rights over in Europe, and by God, they’re going to get them.”

With these two scholars in mind, how do you understand the term the “New Negro?”

THE GOLDEN AGE OF HBCUs: 1930s & 1940s

Background
During the period leading up to World War II, young African American people who wanted to study had very few options other than the HBCUs. There was enormous discrimination in the housing, job and education policies of the New Deal era that maintained segregation and limited upward mobility for African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups. And yet during this same time, the HBCUs thrived and flourished.

The HBCUs were a necessity borne from racial discrimination and they provided a safe and nourishing space where students could be protected from it.

Quotes for Discussion
“Black colleges were educating future doctors and future lawyers and future teachers and nurses and judges and they were responsible for lifting African Americans out of poverty and they started to create the Black middle class as we know it.”

Professor Marybeth Gasman

“It was a protective, insulated environment where (African American students) could talk. They could exchange ideas, they could be themselves and at least for that time period, for those moments, they didn’t have to deal squarely with segregation and inequality. Once they left campus they were right back into the kind of segregation, the kind of humiliation and so it was a special place.”

Professor James Anderson
Delve Deeper

• Though HBCUs incubated critical intellectual and social success for African Americans, they were a necessary function of an unjust system. As a group, create a list of the positive effects of HBCUs in providing a protected and proud space for Black thought and culture, and the potential negative effects of HBCUs as institutions of segregation.

• During this period, for the first time HBCU students were taught by African American professors and professionals in colleges that are run by African American leadership.

• From the students’ perspective, what kind of psychological shift might have resulted from seeing themselves reflected in their schools’ leadership? Break into small discussion groups to reflect on and share the role models that shaped your dreams and ideals.

AN AUDACIOUS PLAN: HOWARD LAW SCHOOL AND BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

“The game changer in the 20th Century was Brown v. Board of Education. It took lawyers not at an elite school, but at a law school that was put together by spit and glue and hard work that would be the space that would create a legal revolution that all Americans now benefit from. This is an educational institution, at its best, not just creating knowledge for the sake of having it but creating knowledge in order to do something concrete with that knowledge. That’s what Howard Law School represents.”

PROFESSOR KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

Background

The groundbreaking Brown v. Board of Education decision stated that segregation, in itself, is not equal. John Hamilton Houston founded the Howard Law School with the intention of building the case to end segregation, in a sense, to make its own existence obsolete.
By documenting the difference between conditions of Black and white schools in the South, attorneys Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall constructed the case that led to the end of legal public school segregation in the US.

Quotes for Discussion

“The plan to change racial segregation could only have found its seed and borne fruit at a black college like Howard University. They had a commitment around these issues that even well-meaning liberal whites and white institutions would not have developed.”

PROFESSOR WALTER ALLEN

“In reality it was impossible to actually maintain equal schools that were separate. It would be way too expensive. The brilliant thing that Charles Hamilton Houston set in motion was this was not going to be a one game struggle, this wasn’t going to be a one case. The idea was to build a steady drumbeat from one state to another establishing the principle that separate was never equal.”

PROFESSOR KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

Delve Deeper

• Talk about John Hamilton Houston’s commitment to end segregation. What was the driving factor behind his leadership? Why do you think Historian Walter Allen argued that this commitment could have only come from a Black college? Why do you think he says this dream would not have been realized at a predominantly white institution?

• Given our country’s past, what does integrating public schools symbolize for the country as a whole? What is the value of integration to African American students? To white students? To students of other races and ethnicities? How does integrating our public schools reflect our aspirational values as a nation?

• The pushback against integration was violent and fierce in many parts of the country. Discuss how the Brown v. Board of Education decision set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement.
“WE WANTED FREEDOM NOW:”
HBCUs AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Background

Students at HBCUs have consistently been at the vanguard of social change in the United States. HBCU graduates helped launch the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. In the 1960s, as HBCUs thrived and African Americans gained in income and professional opportunities, the disconnect between the freedom and acceptance at HBCU campus and the restrictive realities of the Jim Crow south, race-based segregation, and discrimination throughout the country became too difficult to reconcile. Students grew impatient with the inequities they faced and wanted to directly challenge the power structure.

Quotes for Discussion

“There was a famous man who once said, “There’s nothing on earth so powerful as an idea whose time has come.” And I think the centuries of discrimination and segregation and ill treatment and the lynchings, I think the time had come for the war to be waged to end segregation. We wanted freedom now. Not twenty-five years from now.”

LONNIE KING Student at Morehouse College

“If you weren’t out demonstrating, something was wrong with your school.”

JOHNNY PARHAM Graduate Student at Atlanta University

“This was an opportunity to make a difference. And we felt it was incumbent upon us because we were young people, we were students and we had a responsibility and we were going to be the future leaders so now was a good time to begin to demonstrate what good leaders we could become.”

DOLORES FINGER WRIGHT Student at Bennett College

“Black college campuses in the 1960s is getting more and more complex. They’d been already trying to change the world outside, changing a society that was about separation of the races. We get to the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, that energy for change starts to turn inward.”

JONATHAN HOLLOWAY Historian
“Black colleges give us something very different. They give us the armor to continue to deal with race and racism, and marginalism and determination to fight back.”

DR. MICHAEL LOMAX United Negro College Fund President

Delve Deeper

• Why do you think young people, and college students in particular, are so often the leaders of social movements? What do you think makes challenging the status quo more difficult as people age? Why did so many African American students step forward to take the lead in demanding more equity on and off campus?

• The 1960s and 1970s were a time of great social upheaval, with HBCU students calling for an end to Jim Crow segregation off campus, followed by calls for Black Studies departments that reflect their growing political consciousness on campus. On both fronts their peaceful calls for change were met with fierce violence by local and state police.

Discuss the different tactics and strategies the students used to confront conservative policies and laws on and off campus. What shared values informed the on and off campus activism? Why do you think the response to HBCU student activism was so repressive? Why do you think HBCU students in particular have been so visible in the fight for social justice in this country?

HBCUs TODAY: CHALLENGES AND CHANGES AHEAD

Background

HBCUs, where African American culture and thought are nurtured and celebrated, continue to be one of the pillars of the Black community in the United States. HBCUs graduate:

• More than 50 percent of African American professionals
• 50 percent of African American public school teachers
• 70 percent of African American dentists
• More than one-third of degrees held by African Americans in the natural sciences
• One-third of undergraduate degrees held by African Americans in Mathematics.⁴

Today there are over 100 historically Black colleges and universities in the U.S., down from the peak number of 121 in the 1930s. Before higher education was desegregated in the 1950s and ‘60s, almost all African Americans college students enrolled in HBCUs. However starting in the 1970s HBCUs began experiencing competition from predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education. With African American incomes rising and PWIs making cultural and financial changes to increase opportunities for African American students on their campuses, there has been a decrease in the percentage of African Americans who choose HBCUs over PWIs. For example, in 1980, 17% of African Americans enrolled in degree-granting college were at HBCUs, compared to 9% in 2015.⁵

Additionally, HBCUs are struggling financially. Compared to PWIs, HBCUs tend to have smaller endowments, and while they enjoy a high percentage of alumni who give, the alumni do not give as much. State and federal funding for HBCUs is less per student than at PWIs. And, recent changes in the credit criteria for federally-supported student loans disproportionately exclude African American families and students.⁶

At the same time, enrollment of students who do not identify as Black is increasing at HBCUs. In 2015, 22% of students enrolled at HBCUs do not identify as African American. This increase may in part be due to HBCUs’ history of serving students who are the first in their family to go to college, who come from families with lower income, or for some other reason are at higher risk of not graduating. Since many federal and state funding agencies, as well as other philanthropic agencies, measure higher education institutions’ success only by their graduation rate, HBCUs do not appear at the top of those lists, and do not receive the same resources.⁷

Yet in 2016 HBCUs also saw an increase in the number of students enrolling. With racial unease and an increase in hate crimes across the

country occurring, many students cited the social environments at PWIs as the reason for their choice to attend a HBCU.\(^8\)

As long as our nation struggles with racial tension and inequity, HBCUs will remain relevant and stand as a beacon and a haven for young African American students and others to grow intellectually and as leaders in the United States.

Quotes for Discussion

“Black colleges are spaces where black people are affirmed.”

**TELL THEM WE ARE RISING**

“We wanted to better ourselves. We wanted to have an institution where there are people like us all wanting to be more than the status quo.”

**ALVERSKIA WADE** Student

“I just feel like I found myself through being a student at FAMU (Florida Agricultural and Mechanical.) I hope that the future of HBCU’s is a positive one and one that will bring a lot of experiences to more people, but I’m fearful that it’s not going to be that way.”

**JESSIKA WARD** *Tell Them We Are Rising*

Delve Deeper

- What role do HBCUs continue to play in American society? Why is it important to support HBCUs?

- What stands out to you from the student quotes included in the guide? (Alversia Wade, Jessika Ward, and Calvin Long from the beginning of the guide.)

- Though segregation in public schools legally ended with the Brown v. Board of Education decision, discuss why HBCUs remain an important resource and foundational part of America's higher education system.

- What are ways you think HBCUs can continue to serve a new generation of students?

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE


National Center for Education Statistics


PBS NewsHour, “Historically black colleges see a spike in enrollment from racial unrest,” October 5, 2016.


NATIONAL PARTNERS

These organizations have partnered with Firelight Media to deepen our understanding and move audiences and communities to action on the issues discussed in the film.

Akila Worksongs www.akilaworksongs.com

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. www.aka1908.com

Association for the Study of African American Life and History www.aka1908.com

Campaign for Black Male Achievement www.blackmaleachievement.org

Color of Change www.colorofchange.org

HBCU Green Fund hbcugreenfund.org

MomsRising www.momsrising.org

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. www.naacpldf.org

National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. www.nphchq.org

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture www.nypl.org/locations/schomburg

The Black College Fund www.gbhem.org/education/bcf

Thurgood Marshall College Fund tmcf.org

United Negro College Fund www.uncf.org
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AMERICAN GRADUATE: LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN
American Graduate is a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to help local communities across America find solutions to address the dropout crisis. The initiative builds on public media’s long-standing commitment to education by convening conversations and strengthening partnerships between public radio and television stations and local schools, businesses and community organizations to help students stay on the path to a high school diploma.

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