

An HBCU is a Historically Black College or University, but each word in that name carries legal and historical weight. Under federal law, an HBCU is an accredited institution of higher education established before 1964 whose original and continuing principal mission includes educating Black Americans. “Accredited” means an outside educational agency recognized by the federal government has evaluated the institution and determined that it meets established standards. The 1964 dividing line is connected to the Civil Rights Act, which legally prohibited racial discrimination in education and other major areas of American life. A college founded today can serve a largely Black student body, but it cannot simply declare itself an HBCU because the designation depends on the institution’s founding history and mission. The federal definition also makes clear that HBCUs are open to students of every race.

The word “historically” is important because it does not mean exclusively. HBCUs were established primarily for Black students, but they have never all maintained the same racial composition, and many now enroll substantial numbers of white, Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous, international, and multiracial students. In 2022, nearly one-fourth of HBCU students were not Black. A school with many Black students is not automatically an HBCU, and a recognized HBCU does not lose its historical identity merely because its current student body becomes more diverse. A Predominantly Black Institution, commonly called a PBI, is a different federal category based largely on present enrollment and the economic characteristics of the students being served. HBCU status comes from history and mission, while PBI status is more directly connected to the institution’s current population.

The number of HBCUs may appear different depending on the list being used. Some federal and private lists include institutions that are inactive, rebuilding, seeking renewed accreditation, or recognized historically even though they are not presently operating as ordinary degree-granting colleges. The National Center for Education Statistics counted 99 degree-granting HBCUs in 2022: 50 public institutions and 49 private nonprofit institutions. Those schools were located across 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the United States Virgin Islands. Most are in the South because that is where the largest population of formerly enslaved Black Americans lived when the major HBCU-building period began. HBCUs also exist in states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Missouri, so they have never belonged to a single Southern pattern.

Their history begins with a fact that should never be softened: American slavery depended partly on controlling knowledge. Enslaved people who could read might understand laws, communicate secretly, study geography, forge travel documents, interpret religious teachings independently, or challenge the lies used to defend enslavement. Several slaveholding states passed laws restricting or criminalizing the education of enslaved people, especially after rebellions frightened white authorities. Black people still learned in secret, taught one another, formed informal schools, and treated literacy as a form of liberation. Education meant more than employment. It offered

the ability to read a contract, protect a family from fraud, understand political rights, teach children, and speak without depending completely on someone else's interpretation of the world.

A few institutions that became HBCUs were founded before the Civil War. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania traces its history to the Institute for Colored Youth, established in 1837, and is generally recognized as the nation's oldest HBCU. Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, founded in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute, became the first degree-granting college created for Black men. Wilberforce University was founded in Ohio in 1856 through a partnership involving Black and white Methodists, then came under the ownership of the African Methodist Episcopal Church during the Civil War. That transition made Wilberforce the first college owned and operated by African Americans. These distinctions sound similar, but they identify different achievements: oldest institution, first degree-granting institution, and first Black-owned and Black-operated college.

The great expansion came after the Civil War. Emancipation ended legal slavery, but it did not provide formerly enslaved people with schools, trained teachers, property, income, or protection from white violence. Black families responded by building education into freedom itself. They held classes in churches, abandoned buildings, private homes, and outdoor spaces, often contributing land, labor, food, and small payments despite possessing very little money. Northern missionary societies, Black churches, philanthropists, and the Freedmen's Bureau also participated, but formerly enslaved communities were not passive recipients waiting to be rescued. They demanded schools, supplied students, protected teachers, and understood that political freedom without educational power could be easily weakened.

The Freedmen's Bureau was a federal agency established in 1865 to assist formerly enslaved people and impoverished Southerners during Reconstruction. Its duties included food relief, labor agreements, medical assistance, legal support, and education. By 1870, it was supporting more than 1,500 schools serving over 100,000 students, although local Black teachers and communities carried much of the daily work. The bureau did not create every institution that became an HBCU, but it helped establish the educational environment in which schools could grow. National Park Service records show how education became one of the bureau's most lasting achievements even as the federal government withdrew support from Reconstruction. When that protection faded, Black communities were left to defend many of these institutions against poverty, political hostility, and racial violence.

Shaw University, founded in Raleigh in 1865, was among the first Black colleges organized after the war. Fisk University opened in Nashville in 1866, Howard University in Washington in 1867, Morehouse's earliest predecessor in 1867, Hampton in 1868, and numerous others followed. Spelman began in 1881 as a school for Black women, while Tuskegee was founded that same year in Alabama. Some were created by Black churches, including African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, and other denominations.

Others grew through missionary organizations, state governments, or combinations of Black community support and northern philanthropy. The founders did not all agree about religion, politics, curriculum, or the proper path of racial advancement, but they shared the knowledge that Black education could not depend on institutions that had spent generations excluding Black people.

Many early HBCUs began as normal schools. A normal school was an institution created to train teachers according to established professional standards; the term came from the idea of teaching educational “norms.” This work was urgent because a single trained teacher could educate hundreds of children across a career, and those children could extend literacy through entire communities. Other HBCUs emphasized agriculture, mechanical trades, nursing, ministry, business, or classical education. Classical education included subjects such as literature, philosophy, history, languages, mathematics, and rhetoric—the art of effective speaking and writing. Some institutions later expanded from teacher-training schools into colleges and then universities, which is why their present names may hide more modest beginnings.

A major debate developed over what Black higher education should accomplish. Booker T. Washington, the influential leader of Tuskegee Institute, emphasized industrial education, skilled trades, agriculture, economic self-reliance, and the gradual building of Black prosperity. W.E.B. Du Bois argued that Black people also needed broad liberal education and advanced professional preparation so they could become scholars, physicians, lawyers, political leaders, artists, and intellectuals. The disagreement is often oversimplified into working with the hands versus working with the mind, but both men understood that Black communities needed trained people and durable institutions. The real conflict concerned political strategy, the pace of change, and whether vocational preparation was being promoted as one valuable path or imposed as the educational ceiling for an entire race. HBCUs eventually developed across the full range, preparing farmers and philosophers, mechanics and musicians, teachers and surgeons.

The land-grant HBCUs grew from another complicated piece of federal policy. A land-grant institution is a college supported through a federal-state system intended to teach agriculture, mechanical arts, science, and other practical fields while conducting research and serving surrounding communities. The first Morrill Act of 1862 helped states create land-grant colleges, but Black students were generally excluded from them in the segregated South. The Second Morrill Act of 1890 required states either to admit Black students to existing land-grant institutions or create separate institutions for them. Southern states usually chose separation, leading to the development or designation of Black land-grant colleges. Today, the 1890 land-grant system includes 19 HBCUs conducting teaching, agricultural research, and cooperative extension, which means taking university knowledge directly into communities through programs for farmers, families, businesses, and young people. The [Department of Agriculture’s explanation](#) shows that these universities remain active in food science, environmental research, rural development, engineering, public health, and modern agriculture.

The Second Morrill Act expanded access, but it also reveals why HBCUs should not be described simply as gifts from generous governments. Many public HBCUs were created because states refused to integrate their white institutions. The new Black colleges frequently received less land, weaker facilities, smaller appropriations, fewer graduate programs, and less political protection than white land-grant universities. “Separate but equal” became the legal language after the Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, but the systems were rarely equal in money, equipment, libraries, laboratories, buildings, or political influence. Black schools were expected to solve enormous educational problems with deliberately limited resources. Their ability to produce graduates under those conditions is evidence of institutional skill, but the skill should never be used to excuse the unequal conditions.

During segregation, HBCUs trained the Black professional class that much of the country refused to train. Black teachers staffed segregated schools throughout the South. Black doctors and nurses served communities where white hospitals denied treatment, restricted privileges, or placed Black patients in inferior wards. Black lawyers challenged discriminatory laws, defended people against racially biased prosecutions, and built the legal arguments that eventually attacked school segregation itself. Black ministers used theological education, church networks, and public speaking skills to organize communities. Black pharmacists, dentists, farmers, business owners, journalists, scientists, and social workers carried professional knowledge into places where the state had failed to provide equal services.

Howard University School of Law became especially important to the legal campaign against segregation. Charles Hamilton Houston, a Howard-trained lawyer and later dean of the law school, helped build a disciplined strategy for challenging unequal education through the courts. He trained and mentored lawyers including Thurgood Marshall, who later argued *Brown v. Board of Education* and became the first Black justice on the United States Supreme Court. Their success was not one brilliant courtroom moment appearing from nowhere. It came from years of research, carefully selected cases, local plaintiffs, factual records, appeals, and lawyers trained to expose the impossibility of making segregated education genuinely equal. An HBCU law school therefore helped construct the legal machinery that changed the constitutional meaning of public education.

HBCU campuses also became organizing centers during the modern Civil Rights Movement. Four students from North Carolina A&T State University began the 1960 Greensboro sit-in by refusing to leave a segregated Woolworth lunch counter after being denied service. Their action helped ignite student-led sit-ins across the South. Later that year, Shaw University hosted the gathering from which the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, known as SNCC, emerged. Students from Fisk, Tennessee State, American Baptist Theological Seminary, Tougaloo, Florida A&M, Southern University, Alabama State, and many other institutions organized boycotts, voter-registration campaigns, Freedom Rides, sit-ins, and demonstrations. The campuses supplied meeting rooms, student newspapers, networks, trained speakers,

transportation, moral debate, and communities in which young people could imagine themselves as political actors rather than silent victims.

These schools were not always comfortable with student activism. Some presidents feared that protests would provoke white legislators, donors, trustees, or segregationists who already threatened institutional funding and safety. Students sometimes had to challenge their own administrations as well as the outside society. That tension reveals the difficult position of HBCU leadership during segregation: protect the institution long enough for it to survive, or risk its survival by openly confronting the system that made it necessary. Students often decided that education without action was incomplete. The Smithsonian's history of HBCUs and social movements shows that these campuses did more than produce famous leaders; they provided the relationships and organizational spaces through which movements could operate.

The desegregation of previously white colleges did not remove the purpose of HBCUs. Legal access to an institution is not the same as equal treatment inside it. Black students entering predominantly white institutions, commonly called PWIs, often encountered isolation, open hostility, few Black professors, narrow curricula, and expectations that they represent their entire race. HBCUs offered an academic environment where Black students could see Black people functioning as presidents, professors, scientists, deans, trustees, physicians, conductors, engineers, and scholars. That visibility changes what authority looks like. It allows a Black student to be judged as an individual learner rather than treated as a racial exception who must continually prove that Black people belong in higher education.

An HBCU education is not identical at every school. Public HBCUs receive part of their support from state governments and usually charge lower tuition to residents of that state. Private HBCUs depend more heavily on tuition, donations, endowment income, grants, and religious or institutional support, and they ordinarily charge the same basic tuition regardless of the student's home state. Some HBCUs are two-year community or technical colleges offering associate degrees, certificates, and workforce training. Others are four-year liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, or research institutions offering bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Morehouse is a college for men, while Spelman and Bennett are colleges for women. Howard is a large private research university in Washington, while Florida A&M, North Carolina A&T, Southern, Tennessee State, and others are public universities connected to state systems.

Religious identity creates another layer of difference. Xavier University of Louisiana is historically Black and Catholic. Oakwood University is connected to the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. Numerous institutions have Baptist, Methodist, or African Methodist Episcopal roots, while others now operate as public secular universities. A religious affiliation may influence chapel requirements, campus conduct, curriculum, or the institution's understanding of service, but the degree of influence varies. Rural campuses also feel different from urban campuses surrounded by government agencies,

hospitals, corporations, and public transportation. The letters HBCU describe a shared historical category, not a single campus personality.

The academic structure generally resembles that of other American colleges. Students complete general education courses, which build broad ability in writing, mathematics, science, humanities, and social analysis, before or alongside concentrated study in a major. A major is the student's primary academic field, while a minor is a smaller secondary concentration. Credits measure completed academic work, and a student must earn a required number of credits while maintaining an acceptable grade-point average to graduate. Departments employ faculty members, colleges or schools organize related departments, and a provost usually oversees the academic side of the university. The HBCU difference is therefore not that the degree operates under a separate educational system; it is that the institution carries a specific historical mission, culture, and relationship to Black advancement.

Accreditation must be understood clearly because school pride cannot replace it. Institutional accreditation evaluates the college as a whole, including finances, governance, faculty qualifications, academic programs, student support, and educational outcomes. Programmatic accreditation evaluates a specific professional program such as nursing, engineering, social work, education, law, medicine, pharmacy, or business. A university may hold valid institutional accreditation while one specialized program lacks the approval required for professional licensing. Prospective students should verify both levels when entering a regulated career. Loss of accreditation can threaten federal financial-aid eligibility, credit transfer, graduate-school admission, and professional licensing, so accreditation status deserves more attention than rankings, football records, or social-media popularity.

The educational power often associated with HBCUs comes from the relationship between high expectations and cultural recognition. A student may encounter a professor who understands the academic gaps created by an underfunded school system but does not interpret those gaps as lack of intelligence. That professor can provide support while still demanding excellent work. This is different from lowering standards. Effective support identifies what the student does not yet know, teaches it, and then requires the student to perform. Many HBCUs have long accepted students with uneven preparation and attempted to develop them rather than using admission selectivity as the main evidence of institutional quality.

Mentoring becomes especially important in that environment. A mentor does more than offer friendly encouragement; a mentor explains professional expectations, recommends opportunities, corrects weaknesses, introduces networks, and helps a student see the path between a classroom and a career. At a smaller HBCU, a student may have greater access to faculty members who know the student's name, family situation, strengths, and habits. That closeness can create accountability because absence becomes noticeable and unfinished work cannot hide easily. It can also create research and leadership opportunities that might be reserved for graduate students at a much larger

university. None of this happens automatically, but a student who builds serious faculty relationships can receive an education extending far beyond the course catalog.

The cultural experience begins with an unusual form of diversity. A majority-Black campus does not contain one kind of Black person. Students arrive from Southern towns, Northern cities, Caribbean nations, African countries, affluent suburbs, military families, rural communities, immigrant households, private schools, public schools, and homeschooling environments. They bring different complexions, religions, accents, politics, musical tastes, family structures, and understandings of Black identity. A student who previously thought of Blackness as one experience may discover arguments over class, colorism, nationality, gender, religion, respectability, and regional culture. HBCUs can therefore deepen a student's understanding of Blackness rather than surrounding the student with sameness.

That environment can reduce what psychologists call stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when awareness of a negative belief about one's group creates extra pressure during performance. A Black student in an advanced science course may spend mental energy wondering whether one mistake will confirm someone's assumptions about Black intelligence. On an HBCU campus, the same student may still face academic pressure, but Black ability is already visible across the institution. Failure on one examination remains a personal academic problem rather than evidence about the race. Removing that additional burden does not guarantee success, but it can create more room for learning, experimentation, and recovery.

Homecoming is one of the most visible expressions of HBCU culture, yet calling it a party misses its institutional function. Alumni return to reconnect with classmates, visit departments, recruit employees, mentor students, contribute money, support vendors, attend worship services, and remember the environment that helped form them. The football game may anchor the schedule, but homecoming also acts as a public reunion between the school and generations of graduates. Current students see living evidence that the institution extends beyond four years. Alumni see the campus as an inheritance that must be protected, criticized, funded, and handed forward. Music, clothing, food, step shows, tailgates, convocations, and class reunions turn institutional memory into something people can physically enter.

Marching bands carry a similar depth. The HBCU band tradition combines musical education, military precision, choreography, athletic conditioning, theatrical performance, and community pride. Musicians must control breath, memorize complex arrangements, maintain formations, respond to a conductor or drum major, and continue performing while moving with force. Dance lines, drumlines, brass sections, and high-stepping styles produce a spectacle, but the spectacle rests on repeated practice and technical discipline. Band scholarships also create educational access for students who may never appear on a football roster. A strong band becomes a recruiting tool, an ambassador, a guardian of school songs, and one of the institution's most recognizable public voices.

Black Greek-letter organizations form another major tradition. The National Pan-Hellenic Council contains nine historically Black fraternities and sororities commonly called the Divine Nine. Several were founded at Howard University, while others began at institutions outside the HBCU world; they are not exclusive to HBCUs. Their deeper purpose involves scholarship, service, professional networking, political action, and lifelong membership, although popular culture often reduces them to colors, hand signs, stepping, and campus visibility. Stepping is a coordinated performance using the body as percussion through stomps, claps, chants, and movement. Hazing is not a legitimate requirement of membership; it is dangerous, prohibited, and capable of destroying lives and organizations. A serious member inherits duties, not merely symbols.

Athletics also carries history beyond entertainment. Segregation once prevented many Black athletes from entering major white college programs, allowing HBCUs to develop extraordinary football, basketball, track, baseball, and coaching traditions. Conferences such as the Southwestern Athletic Conference, Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association, and Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference became important athletic and cultural networks. HBCU classics are games played at prominent or neutral locations that often include band competitions, alumni gatherings, recruiting events, and celebrations of regional Black culture. Athletic programs can strengthen enrollment and school identity, but they also require careful financial management. A successful team does not excuse weak academics, and a struggling team does not determine the value of a university.

The modern numbers show both reach and limitation. In 2022, HBCUs enrolled about 289,000 students, including approximately 219,000 Black students. Black students at HBCUs represented about 9 percent of all Black students enrolled in American degree-granting institutions. During the 2021–22 academic year, HBCUs awarded approximately 48,800 degrees: associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral. About 74 percent of those degrees went to Black students, and Black women received a substantial majority of the HBCU degrees awarded to Black graduates. The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) also reports that women made up 64 percent of HBCU enrollment in 2022, revealing a serious gender imbalance that affects campus life, relationships, leadership development, and the Black professional pipeline.

The influence of HBCUs is larger than enrollment alone suggests, especially in science and professional preparation. National Science Foundation data have shown that HBCUs are disproportionately important as the undergraduate starting point for Black students who later earn doctorates in science and engineering. A student may complete a bachelor's degree at an HBCU, then earn a doctorate at a large research university, making the HBCU the institution that built the original scientific confidence and preparation. Howard achieved the Carnegie Research 1 designation in 2025, meaning it crossed defined thresholds for research spending and doctoral production. Several other HBCUs hold Research 2 status or are increasing their research capacity. These classifications measure the volume of research activity, not the total worth of an

institution, but they affect funding, faculty recruitment, laboratories, graduate education, and national visibility.

Research requires money, and this is where the historical disadvantage becomes visible again. Universities finance research through federal agencies, state governments, corporations, foundations, and institutional funds. Large research universities often possess extensive grant offices, laboratories, equipment, doctoral programs, and established relationships that make them competitive for additional funding. HBCUs have frequently been expected to build the same capacity after generations of unequal investment. A 2025 Government Accountability Office report found that HBCUs received 1.5 percent of federal research funding provided to colleges and universities in fiscal year 2022, an increase from less than 1 percent in 2018 through 2020. The increase matters, but the percentage remains small relative to the national responsibility placed on these institutions to diversify research and professional fields.

A university's finances come from several sources. Tuition and fees are payments connected to enrollment. State appropriations are funds a legislature provides to public institutions. Grants support specified programs or research and usually come with rules governing their use. Donations may be restricted to scholarships, buildings, athletics, or a named program. An endowment is a pool of donated money invested for long-term support; the institution generally spends only a controlled portion of the earnings so the principal can continue producing income. Schools with small endowments must depend more heavily on tuition and annual funding, leaving them more vulnerable when enrollment falls or emergencies arise.

Public HBCUs have also faced documented state underfunding. Land-grant states were expected to support their 1890 HBCUs fairly alongside predominantly white land-grant institutions, but the required matching and appropriated funds were often unequal. In 2023, the United States secretaries of Education and Agriculture notified 16 governors of a combined funding disparity exceeding \$12 billion between land-grant HBCUs and their non-HBCU counterparts over the period examined. The Department of Agriculture's announcement did not describe a minor accounting mistake. It documented the cumulative result of states repeatedly giving one public institution more capacity to hire faculty, maintain buildings, build laboratories, conduct research, and attract students than another institution serving the same state.

Private HBCUs face a different financial pressure. Many serve students from families with less inherited wealth and less ability to pay full tuition. The institutions may want to keep prices accessible while lacking the enormous endowments available to wealthy private universities. Financial aid can close part of the gap, but grants and scholarships do not always cover housing, meals, books, transportation, and personal expenses. Federal loans must be repaid, and Parent PLUS loans can place serious debt on families. In 2019–20, 90 percent of HBCU undergraduates received some form of financial aid, while 65 percent took out student loans. A low advertised tuition therefore does not

automatically mean a low final cost, just as a high advertised tuition does not always mean an expensive net price after grants.

“Net price” is the amount a student is expected to pay after grants and scholarships are subtracted from the full cost of attendance. Grants and scholarships generally do not require repayment, while loans do. Students must also determine whether a scholarship automatically renews and what grade-point average, enrollment level, major, or service requirement must be maintained. A first-year award that disappears during the second year can turn an affordable school into an unaffordable one. Borrowing may be reasonable when the degree leads to strong opportunities and the debt remains manageable, but school pride should never prevent a family from calculating the actual obligation. Education can transform a life without making every possible price wise.

The challenges inside HBCUs must be discussed honestly because respect does not require pretending. Some institutions struggle with aging dormitories, delayed maintenance, limited housing, financial-aid errors, outdated technology, staff turnover, weak advising, slow administrative processes, or accreditation pressure. Deferred maintenance means repairs have been postponed, allowing roofs, plumbing, electrical systems, laboratories, and residence halls to deteriorate while the cost of fixing them grows. Smaller institutions may offer strong teaching but fewer course sections, meaning one canceled class can delay progress toward graduation. Students may also encounter traditions that resist necessary change or a family atmosphere that becomes too willing to excuse poor service. Historical underfunding explains many problems, but explanation does not eliminate the institution’s responsibility to manage competently.

Graduation rates require the same honesty and context. The standard federal graduation rate often measures whether first-time, full-time students complete a degree at the same institution within a specified period. It may not fully reflect transfer students, part-time students, adults, students who stop out temporarily, or those who complete elsewhere. HBCUs often educate large numbers of first-generation and lower-income students who face employment demands, family responsibilities, transportation problems, housing insecurity, and financial interruptions. Those realities help explain lower completion rates at some schools, but they do not make completion unimportant. A student should examine retention, graduation, transfer, debt, licensure passage, and employment outcomes while asking what support the institution provides when problems arise.

The idea that every HBCU automatically feels like family is another myth. A campus can offer cultural belonging while still containing cliques, class differences, colorism, sexism, political conflict, and ordinary human selfishness. Black leadership does not guarantee effective leadership, and a Black majority does not remove every form of prejudice. What an HBCU offers is the possibility of addressing those problems inside a setting where Black humanity is structurally central rather than marginal. Students still have to choose friends wisely, seek mentors, use office hours, protect their finances, study consistently, and hold the institution accountable. Culture can support a student, but culture cannot complete assignments or make decisions on the student’s behalf.

Choosing an HBCU should therefore begin with the academic program rather than the logo. The institution and the specific program should have the necessary accreditation. The student should examine course requirements, faculty experience, research opportunities, internships, class availability, career placement, housing, campus safety, transportation, disability services, counseling, health care, and the responsiveness of financial-aid staff. Visiting the campus during an ordinary class week can reveal more than attending homecoming because the daily environment shows how students actually live and learn. Conversations with current students should include difficult questions about advising, dormitories, food, registration, scholarships, and whether promised opportunities are accessible. Love for HBCUs is strongest when it expects them to serve students well.

The degree itself is not lesser because the institution is historically Black. An accredited bachelor's degree from an HBCU is a bachelor's degree, and employers or graduate schools should evaluate the graduate's preparation, experience, performance, and skills. Prejudice can still affect how institutions are perceived, but prejudice does not determine academic legitimacy. HBCU graduates have entered every major profession because the schools were never designed as educational imitations. They were built to provide learning where exclusion had created a national emergency. Their history is Black, but the knowledge taught in their classrooms belongs to the full range of human inquiry.

An HBCU is therefore more than a campus where Black students happen to gather. It is an institution created from the Black determination to turn emancipation into education, education into professional ability, and professional ability into community power. Its classrooms carry the history of people who learned when learning was dangerous, built schools when money was scarce, and pursued degrees when other universities treated their presence as unacceptable. Its value can be seen in teachers, physicians, farmers, engineers, artists, lawyers, scientists, entrepreneurs, military officers, public servants, and organizers whose work reached far beyond the campus gates. Its continuing responsibility is not to survive on history alone, but to convert that history into excellent teaching, honest administration, significant research, protected students, and useful opportunity. When an HBCU fulfills that responsibility, it does more than preserve a Black educational tradition; it proves what that tradition was built to accomplish.