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THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE NEGRO COLLEGE IN AMERICA

A Term Paper
Presented to
Mr. Ralph Ford
Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Honors Seminar

by
Patricia Lillian Greene

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Thesis Statement: The future role of Negro colleges and universities is being altered as a result of previous factors involved and of newer components developing from the integration of higher educational institutions in America.

- I. The Background
 - A. Education of the Negro Viewed Historically
 - B. Education at the Negro Institution

- II. The Changed Situation
 - A. The Supreme Court Decision and Its Aftermath
 - B. Racial Integration in Negro Colleges and Universities
 1. The Non-Negro Enrollment at Predominantly Negro Institutions
 - C. Dilemma in Desegregation in Higher Education

- III. The Institutions
 - A. Source of Financial Support
 - B. Educational Facilities
 - C. The Faculty and Administration

- IV. The Future of the Negro College

The education of the American Negro began with the modern Africa slave trade. During this period of American Negro slavery little efforts were made to educate the Negro. But there were some Caucasian missionaries who started the Negro on the road to literacy.

A few years before the Civil War began three institutions for the higher education of Negroes started in the Northern part of the nation. During the later part of the 1870's and the early 1880's more institutions of the same general type came into existence with more initiative being furnished by Negroes themselves. Also during this period higher institutions began in the South.

The Twentieth Century saw the emerging involvement of a new factor in the higher education of the Negro in the United States. The Negro institution was not bound by tradition and thus was permitted an opportunity to experiment. The Negro college attempted to organize programs in line with the belief that there were certain areas of knowledge with which each citizen should experience.¹

The four basic types of such general education programs as analyzed by Virgil A. Clift include: (1) those that have concentrated the general education program in the first two years of a four-year program; (2) those that have organized the general education program to parallel the specialized phase of the curriculum; (3) those that provide a common freshman year of general education, with courses in the area running in diminishing proportion through the entire four years, and (4) those with a two

¹Rufus E. Clement, "The Historical Development of Higher Education for Negro America," Journal of Negro Education, 35:299-205, Fall, 1966.

year program of general education which permits exploration in a specialized field during the period of lower division study.²

The late Dean Irving A. Derbigney, of Tuskegee Institute, after a study of programs in several Negro colleges reached this conclusion:

The Negro college has, with limited resources, made much progress in organizing and carrying out programs of general education. The colleges all wish to meet the needs of their students in this important area. A small number of these colleges have made some effort to ascertain these needs specifically. Likewise, most of the colleges included in this study are interested in preparing their students for active participation in the life of the communities in which they will live and of the nation at large.³

The most decisive words in the history of Negro Education in America were spoken on May 17, 1954. These historic words written by a unanimous United States Supreme Court, maintain that:

To separate Negro children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.⁴

These words constituted the future of the Negro in America public education. This not only changed educational thinking and methods of the Negro in the South, but it inspired self-analysis and re-evaluation by educators in the North and West where segregation had existed.

²Virgil A. Clift, Archibald W. Anderson and Gordon H. Huefish, Negro Education in America (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1962), p. 76.

³Irving A. Derbigney, General Education in the Negro College (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 235.

⁴United States Supreme Court, May 17, 1954, 347 U. S. 483, 74 S. Ct. 686, 98 L. Ed. 873.

The Supreme Court, in its decision, took into consideration the development of education and its importance today to American citizens.

Thus the Court said:

In Approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896 when the Plessy v. Ferguson "separate but equal" ruling was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the Nation. Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprive these plaintiffs of equal protection of the law.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today, it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days it is doubtful that any child may be reasonably expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.⁵

The overall picture of desegregation has improved since the Supreme Court school decision. A survey by the Southern Regional Council, revealed at least 1,100 instances of desegregation in the Southern states in the two-year period immediately following the Supreme Court school decision.

. . . The results of the survey suggest that beneath the surface turmoil of Southern resistance, deep running currents are steadily eroding the undemocratic patterns of the past. The causative forces are many moral, economic, political and international - but not the least of them is the insistent stirring of a broader conception of human dignity among Southerners, white and Negro.⁶

⁵Ibid.

⁶David Loth and Harold Fleming, Integration, North and South (New York: Fund for the Republic, 1956), pp. 49-50.

Negro colleges and universities are experiencing great change in this decade as they attempt to take their place in the academic community. The traditional function of the Negro public college has been to prepare teachers. One of the most serious problems facing the Negro college is whether to continue exclusively as teacher-training institutions or to expand programs to include the broader field of liberal arts. Due to the many deficiencies of the Negro public college, this second course would be difficult to follow.⁷

In 1965 the North Carolina State Board of Higher Education had this to say about Negro colleges:

. . . The time has come for drastic improvements in the curricula, in libraries and laboratories, in breadth and competence of faculty and perhaps most of all in the quality of students. This will require curriculum experimentation, to meet the students at their achievement levels, giving supplementary instruction where needed in basic skills. Since such a program will be expensive efforts to find money and sound ways of using it are continuing on many fronts.⁸

An understanding of the present functions and future prospects of the predominantly Negro college depends on knowledge of the percentages of present students who are not Negroes. The aggregate figures revealed that between 2.5 and 3.5 percent of students enrolled in predominantly Negro institutions in 1963-64 were non-Negro. Although a small minority of these students were Oriental, the majority were Caucasians. Seventy-five out of 123 institutions reported no non-Negro students. In two

⁷Philip D. Vairo, "The Dilemma in Negro Higher Education," Journal of Higher Education, 38:448-450, November, 1967.

⁸Biennial Report 1964-65, (Raleigh North Carolina: State Board of Higher Education, 1965), p. 15.

institutions the proportion of non-Negroes exceeds one-half and are no longer predominantly Negro institutions. Twelve institutions reported that more than 5 per cent of students were non-Negro. Thirty-four have less than 5 per cent non-Negro students. These institutions are located in the Northeastern or border states, at Bluefield and West Virginia State Colleges and at Lincoln University at Pennsylvania.⁹

Negroes in the smaller segregated colleges are left behind in the mainstream of progress except those who are revitalizing their programs. They provide a culture in which there is more of a feeling of an extended family. Unless these colleges are assisted they will remain as imitations of higher education. These colleges are also handicapped by the loss of outstanding students to predominantly white institutions.

The white student in the segregated college is affected by desegregation as the Negro. He is in a comparable dilemma, but not such a severe one. When part of a majority he was conforming to fashionable prejudice. Now as a part of a quiescent and vanishing minority, he is dubious about being left behind in a segregated isolated minority, group himself. The white Southerner is concerned lest he may be losing caste by remaining in a segregated Caucasian institution. A decade ago he would have lost caste by taking the opposite course of action. Long a devoted conformist, he is uncomfortable about being a deviant, yet he has a freedom of choice.¹⁰

⁹Earl J. McGrath, The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities In Transition, (Columbia University: Bureau of Publications, 1965), O. 14.

¹⁰Sam Wiggins, "Dilemmas in Desegregation in Higher Education," Journal of Negro Education, 35:431-436, Fall, 1966.

Finance is the most crucial weakness of the Negro college. If this could be counteracted many present shortcomings could be eliminated. The expenditure per student for educational and general purpose was averaged in 1959 as \$888 compared with the national average of \$1,334. In the previous ten years the educational and general expenditures increased 76 per cent, but expenditures had risen 108 per cent in the same decade.

The sources of institutional income are significant. They reveal the present balance of support between public agencies and private philanthropy. The Negro college receives finances from the state government, student tuition and fees, private gifts, Federal Government, endowment earnings and from local government. The financial condition of the Negro institution will require large additional funds to cover current expenses and endowment if they are to improve their present programs and provide a higher education of suitable quality for the student.¹¹

The facilities of the Negro college present a more favorable picture than does the financial support and other features of institutional life. The physical facilities of the Negro college come closer to meeting their needs than other areas. In some respects, in accommodating their present enrollments for example, their buildings and other facilities are more nearly adequate than in many other institutions. It is true, that some areas of Negro colleges could benefit from modernized facilities, but in many their existing plant and equipment offer considerable opportunity for expanded use without large expenditures for additional structures.¹²

¹¹McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 136-138.

The professional activities emphasized in the faculties at the predominantly Negro colleges indicate the degree to which they are in the mainstream of higher education in the United States. The faculty members in Negro institutions devote three-fourths of their time to teaching. Administration and other duties account for 18.2 per cent, 3.4 per cent in research activities and 7.5 per cent in other areas. The figures prove that the Negro colleges are unable to provide their faculties with the opportunity or the resources essential for a continuing program of research.¹³

The percentage of faculty members holding the Ph.D. degree has been used to measure faculty quality. The United States Office of Education has estimated approximately 50 per cent of the faculty members at the nation's colleges and universities hold the doctor's degree while at the Negro colleges the percentage is 30. In medicine and law the proportion of doctorates among the Negro college faculty members surpass that in the nation at large.

The presidents of many Negro colleges are fully prepared by education and earlier experiences to give inspiring and informed leadership to the academic enterprise over which they preside. They have earned the highest degrees, they have been successful teachers and able researchers, they keep abreast of developments in society as they occur throughout the United States, and they have the imagination and dedication to keep their institutions in the forefront of progress.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., pp. 108-109.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 122-124.

Negro colleges are in a critical stage of their development because of the changing relations between the Negro and the general community. This is seen in the growing hope on the part of the Negro and in the expectation on the part of the general community, that Negroes will contribute more significantly than in the past to the advancement of the nation's economy. It is becoming increasingly apparent that these new expectations present Negro colleges with the challenge of reorienting their programs so that service to the general community will replace parochialism and isolation.

Historically, Negro colleges came into existence to serve a racial group. Like other social institutions, they reflect the aspirations, sentiments, values, and needs of the social group that they serve. If Negro colleges are to gain advancement and expansion they must solve perplexing problems that involve the major elements of an education institution.

The instructional program of the Negro college must rid itself of parochialism and reflect the needs, aspirations, values and sentiments of the general culture. There should be constant re-examination of the curriculum in the interest of updating course offerings and providing stimulating and intellectually exciting learning experiences which challenge students to reach the upper limit of their capacities. The educational standards must be raised at the Negro college.¹⁵

The role of Negro colleges should not be that of solely providing compensatory education. It is important that the colleges be strengthened

¹⁵E. C. Harrison, "The Negro College in A Changing Economy," Journal of Higher Education, 36:261-263, May, 1965.

to serve more Negro youth while made more attractive to white students so that institutional differences will not appear to reflect racial differences, but student variations in ability, intellectual interests and career goals. The extent to which Negro colleges will leave the periphery of higher education and achieve a balance which lends itself to educational ventures that function well in a multiracial society will depend upon the extent that these colleges, and the appreciation of their roles and contributions, are unmarred by the predominance of their racial composition.¹⁶

Institutions now designated "Negro colleges" will become colleges without designation but they will not go out of existence. Their enrollments will grow. If their future is precarious it will not be because of desegregation, but mainly because of financial difficulties.

Centers of Negro education will be the main source of interracial intercultural and international education in the South, with faculty and student body composed of teachers and students from all over the world, representing every culture, race, religion and nation.

Colleges with a long tradition of providing higher education for Negroes can play two unique and necessary roles: they can administer to the spiritual, social, economic, and cultural needs of the majority of Negro students and they can at the same time, provide a truly integrated education that rises above the barriers of race, culture, nationality and faith.

¹⁶Vivian W. Henderson, "The Role of the Predominantly Negro Institutions," Journal of Negro Education, 36:266-273, Summer, 1967.

¹⁷Ednjamin E. Mays, "The Future of Negro Colleges," Saturday Review, November 18, 1961, OO. 53-54.

In the words of Secretary Wirtz:

Tomorrow belongs to those who face the fact of change honestly, squarely, eagerly who go forward to meet it who see change as an essential quality of growth, who see growth as the meaning of life, and who believe that the future is a good idea.

It is essential that instead of evading these problems, the Negro colleges face them honestly, constructively, and imaginatively.¹⁸

¹⁸David Riesna and Christopher Jencks, "The Viability of the American College," The American College, by Nevitt Sanford (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1962), p. 8.

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