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MaryBeth Gasman

*University of Pennsylvania*, [mgasman@gse.upenn.edu](mailto:mgasman@gse.upenn.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

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Reprinted from *CASE International Journal of Education Advancement*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2001, pages 237-252.  
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## **Abstract**

Johnnetta Cole at Spelman College and Charles S. Johnson at Fisk University offer two powerful examples of the leadership that is needed in fundraising at HBCUs. This paper will examine their innovative strategies and program ideas. It will suggest ways in which current presidents can emulate their practices. Most importantly, it will approach this task from the perspective of black leaders by highlighting their ability to generate innovative ideas and solicit funding to support them.

## **Comments**

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# Charles S. Johnson and Johnnetta Cole: Successful Role Models for Fund-raising at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Date received (in revised form): October 2, 2000

## Marybeth Gasman

Marybeth Gasman is an Assistant Professor of higher education in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. She recently received a Ph.D. in higher education from Indiana University. Her interests include the history of higher education, historically black colleges, philanthropy, and black leadership.

### Abstract

Johnnetta Cole at Spelman College and Charles S. Johnson at Fisk University offer two powerful examples of the leadership that is needed in fund-raising at HBCUs. This paper will examine their innovative strategies and program ideas. It will suggest ways in which current presidents can emulate their practices. Most importantly, it will approach this task from the perspective of black leaders by highlighting their ability to generate innovative ideas and solicit funding to support them.

### Keywords:

*philanthropy, black colleges, fundraising, HBCUs, presidents, African American*

### Introduction

In the past few years, several historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have staged successful multimillion-dollar fund-raising campaigns. In their wake, others have announced similar efforts. HBCUs are making attempts to capitalize on the USA's strong economy and the growing number of generous donors. Because even the wealthiest of black colleges do not have the large endowments or access to wealthy benefactors that predominantly white institutions do, they must find innovative approaches to the task of fund-raising. Perhaps the best publicized of these fund-raising efforts has been that of Johnnetta Cole at Spelman College in Atlanta. Her efforts received widespread attention in the mainstream media including *The New York Times*. Cole, who until recently was president of Spelman, led a campaign which raised \$114 million toward the endowment of the college from 1993-96.<sup>1</sup> Although this amount would not be unusual at many predominantly white institutions, it was a

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### Author's Contact Address:

Dr Marybeth Gasman, Assistant Professor,  
Department of Educational Policy Studies,  
Georgia State University,  
30 Pryor St., Suite 450,  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083, USA.  
Tel: (404) 651 2582  
Fax: (404) 651 1009  
E-mail: epsmbg@langate.gsu.edu

first for a historically black college. What makes President Cole's feat particularly interesting is the way in which she went about raising the money. Whereas predominantly white colleges in the same category as Spelman (Wellesley or Bryn Mawr are two similarly sized women's colleges) receive 80 percent of their endowment monies from alumnae, Spelman acquired only \$3.2 million of its total endowment money from this source.<sup>2</sup> Because of the current economic barriers to the earning potential of black women, Johnnetta Cole was forced to look in many directions for funds.<sup>3</sup>

Cole was not the first HBCU president to meet such a challenge successfully. During his tenure as president of Fisk University in the 1950s, Charles S. Johnson, who was president of the university from 1946–56, was considered the leader to emulate in the area of fund-raising for HBCUs. Johnson raised Fisk University to a level unsurpassed by any private HBCU at the time, when measured by prestige and endowment.<sup>4</sup> Under Johnson's leadership, Fisk became an incubator for African-American intellectuals and leaders; its graduates include historian David Levering Lewis and former Secretary of Energy, Hazel O' Leary. Johnnetta Cole herself was a student during Johnson's tenure at Fisk. Johnson's unique approach to fund-raising, which included carrying program proposals to nearly every meeting he attended, was a key element in his success. He was well connected and, like Johnnetta Cole, tenacious. Cole's and Johnson's accomplishments are particularly important given the troubled financial history of HBCUs.

Historically black colleges and universities are uniquely rooted in

American history. Prior to the Civil War and because of the oppression of slavery, very few blacks were allowed to be educated. (Exceptions are those black colleges established in the North prior to the Civil War such as Wilberforce College in Ohio and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.) However, at the close of the war, through the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau and missionary organizations (both white and black), small private black colleges appeared rapidly. The white missionaries feared that blacks would become a menace to society unless they were freed from the ignorance which slavery had imposed on them.<sup>5</sup> As church funding dried up, white northern industrialists took control of the funding and curriculum at most black colleges. With the enormous power they held, they imposed a program of industrial education on the institutions. This included classes in cooking, cleaning, horseshoeing, and so forth. Booker T. Washington, the chief African-American supporter of industrial education, urged blacks to "cast down your bucket where you are" and accept the current situation of discrimination. He believed that if blacks committed themselves to economic improvement, eventually civil rights would follow. Economic improvement would come through a steadfast commitment to manual labor and the dignity of hard work. Washington received unprecedented support from white philanthropists. Although not opposed to Washington's "industrial education," sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois wanted more for at least a "talented tenth" of the black population. Du Bois spoke out vehemently against the white philanthropists and their "pawn" Booker T. Washington.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the industrial philanthropists began to

support a liberal arts curriculum for black colleges. However, they maintained a close watch on the recipients of their money.<sup>7</sup>

The existence and monetary support of HBCUs has been a subject of debate since their inception. From the start, these institutions have been providing educational opportunities to African-Americans who, for most of their history, have been denied access to historically white institutions (HWIs). Although the nation's HWIs are making strides toward diversification on their campuses, HBCUs still provide a valuable and much needed choice for African-American college students. Not only do HBCUs provide a nurturing, supportive environment for their students, but they are also dedicated to serving low-income families.<sup>8</sup> According to Kenneth Redd of the USAGroup Foundation:

In 1995-96, about 40 percent of the African-American undergraduates at HBCUs were first-generation college students ... 62 percent came from families with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 ... and 80 percent of the students received financial assistance to help pay their costs of attending college ...<sup>9</sup>

Given the particular problems of funding at HBCUs, the task faced by Johnson and Cole was unique.<sup>10</sup> Not only did they have to raise money, but they had continually to deal with questions of the need and mission of their colleges. Knowing that much of their funding would come from white philanthropic foundations and corporations, they also had to contend with problems of outside control and racial hegemony—real or imagined.

Both Cole and Johnson created a niche, knew their institutions and alumni, and were influential contributors in both the black and white worlds. Neither, however, has been studied in depth as a fund-raiser. This exploration of Charles S. Johnson and Johnnetta Cole's approach to fund-raising will provide a better understanding of the ways in which philanthropies, corporations, and black education can work together. Further, it will suggest concrete solutions for those HBCUs that continue to struggle for financial security.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

Because many black colleges were, in their early years, dependent on white philanthropy, scholars of higher education have looked at the actions and motives of the white philanthropists rather than exploring the agency of black college presidents.<sup>11</sup> This paper, however, approaches the study of black higher education from the perspective of black leaders, demonstrating their ability to generate original ideas and solicit the funding to support them. Much of the previous scholarship on the topic of black college presidents has tended to evaluate their success or failure based on the question of whether or not they were a pawn of white philanthropy. Black college presidents who garner funds from whites are often lumped together with Booker T. Washington—they are labeled as victims of white control. In taking this perspective, scholars lose sight of the specific accomplishments and innovations of these presidents.

This study uses a historical methodology, including but not limited to a review of personal and professional correspondence, official university reports,

speeches, newspaper articles, and miscellaneous written materials found in the Fisk University archives in Nashville, Tennessee. Information pertaining to Johnnetta Cole was gleaned from newspaper articles, speeches, special reports, Spelman College fund-raising materials, and autobiographical pieces. Interviews were conducted with past colleagues and students of the two individuals discussed. Although there is merit in reviewing the strategies and experiences of Charles S. Johnson and Johnnetta Cole individually, this paper will look at their cases together in order to provide a better-rounded example for today's HBCU practitioner. Studying Johnson in conjunction with Cole points out the relevance of history to today's fund-raisers and demonstrates how contemporary fund-raising situations, tactics, and strategies are rooted in the past. Because fund-raising often requires long-term relationships between the donor and recipient, it is important to study the record of individual fund-raisers over time. For this reason, the paper will provide a biographical overview of both Cole and Johnson. This is essential to understanding their style and skills.

### **Preparing for the Role of Fund-raiser**

According to historian and former Fisk board member John Hope Franklin (in an interview by the author, June 5, 1999), Charles Johnson came to the presidency of Fisk with well-developed relationships with most of the prominent philanthropists of his generation. Remembered primarily as a University of Chicago-trained sociologist and an "architect" of the Harlem Renaissance,<sup>12</sup> Charles S. Johnson made great

contributions to black higher education. Adept at working with philanthropists, Johnson was not only able to collaborate with individual organizations but could also initiate cooperative efforts among various philanthropic institutions. Because the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial had funded his position as chair of the social science department at Fisk and was instrumental in his selection for the post, Johnson had a strong relationship with the Rockefeller philanthropies. He knew Edwin Embree, president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, from his days with the Chicago Race Relations Commission, and had nurtured the relationship over many years. Embree and the Rosenwald Fund were the chief supporters of Johnson's sociological research. Johnson's ability to work with white philanthropy was the main reason he was selected for the presidency. Fisk desperately needed to increase its endowment and although Johnson was not the first choice of many black leaders, they knew that he could bring in the much needed funding. Although Embree, too, would have preferred that Johnson remain in his role of researcher, he supported him in his presidency. Johnson was highly regarded for his sociological research and the white philanthropists with whom he associated wanted him to remain in this role.

Not only did Embree serve as a university trustee, but within one week after the inauguration, he made a \$15,000 contribution to the Fisk president's office—to be used at the discretion of Johnson.<sup>13</sup> Despite Johnson's close ties to philanthropic organizations, he was able to maintain control of the Fisk campus and its curriculum. After many years of struggle, Fisk had established itself as a liberal arts institution and Johnson, as will

be demonstrated, was able to maintain this focus and build upon it.<sup>14</sup>

While Johnnetta Cole received grants to support faculty research in anthropology, she did not have the long-standing personal relationships that Johnson had developed with individual philanthropists.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Johnson, Cole did not have the experience of building an entire academic department with the assistance of philanthropy. Her lack of expertise in this area made her doubt whether she would be selected for the Spelman presidency. According to Cole,

...at one point I almost guaranteed that I would not become Spelman's seventh president. During the course of a meeting with the faculty, one professor asked, "Dr. Cole, what has been your experience as a fund-raiser? What can we expect from you?" Drawing on nothing but sheer honesty I replied, "Well, I have certainly raised funds as a faculty member, but I have to say that in the sense in which you mean fund-raising, I have never raised a dime. But," I added, "I think I am capable of raising millions."<sup>16</sup>

Despite her lack of philanthropic connections, Cole was persistent in her pursuit of funds and had the type of personality appropriate for educational fund-raising. Perhaps she gained these interpersonal skills in her past positions within academe. A graduate of Northwestern's doctoral program in anthropology, Cole began her academic career at Washington State University in 1964 as an assistant professor and director of black studies. From 1970 to 1983, she served as the associate provost for undergraduate education at the University of Massachusetts. In 1983, she moved on

to Hunter College in New York City to serve as the director of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. In each of these positions, Cole was known as someone who was assertive in her desires to make change and able to build coalitions across gender and race.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Challenge of Alumni Giving**

One of the greatest challenges for both Cole and Johnson in their quest for funds was the support of alumni. Johnson, for example, found that most foundations were unwilling to give money toward an endowment when alumni support was lacking. Similarly, while most foundations and corporations were impressed with Spelman's ability to secure a \$20 million gift from Camille and Bill Cosby, they still asked, "How much are the alumni giving?" According to Charles Stephens, a staff member in external relations at Clark Atlanta University (an HBCU), "Alumni are the proof in the pudding. If we're going to get support from the larger community, we've got to demonstrate that the people who have benefited from us directly do care."<sup>18</sup> This is particularly important to HBCUs because of the continual questioning of their existence.<sup>19</sup> The support and accomplishments of alumni help to solidify the foundation of these institutions.

In their efforts to raise funds from alumni, both Johnson and Cole were helped by the fact that their presidencies broke new ground. Cole, for example, was the first black female president of the all-female college. Spelman College was founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Seminary. Its first classes took place in the basement of the Friendship Baptist Church. Spelman's mission for its first students, all freed slaves, was to "teach

them to read the Bible and write well enough to send letters to their families in the North."<sup>20</sup> Today, however, Spelman is considered a highly selective college and is ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the best liberal arts colleges in the country—black or white.<sup>21</sup> Johnnetta Cole's selection as president pleased alumnae who were asking, "When will a black woman lead Spelman?" Upon her selection, 77 Spelman alumnae contributed a total of \$1.7 million with gifts of over \$10,000 each. This feat set a new standard in the world of African-American philanthropy.<sup>22</sup>

Cole's accomplishments are particularly impressive given that Spelman lagged behind most liberal arts institutions in the area of fund-raising staff and supportive technology.<sup>23</sup> They had "no consistent annual giving program, no ongoing stewardship program, no planned giving or major gifts program, and an out-of-date computer system."<sup>24</sup> Cole had to establish avenues for regular communication with alumnae. Instead of organizing their alumnae campaign in a traditional manner such as identifying donors based on past giving habits, categorizing them, and approaching them all using the same strategy, Spelman developed individual strategies for its various constituencies: "Each constituent group had a financial goal and a distinct strategy."<sup>25</sup> For example, in order to cultivate alumnae donors for the future, Cole encouraged students to become involved in the campaign. One student who led a campaign was 1996 graduate Johnita Mizelle, who noted, "It was the feeling of empowering other sisters to give of themselves for future Spelman sisters that was most important to me." Not only did the women at Spelman learn about fund-

raising, they gave \$78,000 to the institution.<sup>26</sup> A key to Cole's success with alumnae was her positive approach. While some fund-raising campaigns ask donors to give money to make up for the institution's deficiencies—decaying buildings, inadequate staffing, poor library facilities—Cole's approach was to focus on Spelman's strengths, particularly its science programs. For example, Cole was quick to point out that 40 percent of Spelman's students are science majors. Given the fact that African-Americans are poorly represented in the sciences, this was a very strong selling point.<sup>27</sup>

As with Johnnetta Cole, when Johnson was selected for the presidency, it was used as an occasion to renew a long-standing endowment campaign. Johnson was the first black president of Fisk. Founded in 1866 under the auspices of the American Missionary Association, Fisk was originally located in an old Nashville army barracks. Its mission was to provide free education to the former slaves.<sup>28</sup> Fisk went from teaching basic reading and writing classes to being one of the premier black institutions in the country, producing graduates such as W.E.B. Du Bois and John Hope Franklin. At the time that Johnson became president, alumni had been calling for black leadership of their institution. To capitalize on the new energy at Fisk and to gain the support of blacks, Marts and Lundy, a prominent national fund-raising firm that had been hired to assist Johnson, encouraged several of the black Fisk trustees to match dollar for dollar each contribution made by alumni. According to Marts and Lundy,

... this would put the negroes out in the front of the procession carrying the flag—instead of dragging along in the



rear in a place of inferiority. It would put the flag in the hands of the new negro president and strengthen him in his leadership. And it would encourage the proper philosophy of cooperation between the whites and negroes, that of white encouragement to the negroes to work out their own destiny—in the best Fisk tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Ernest Alexander, one of the alumni trustees, used Johnson's prestige to aid in this effort. For example, in a letter to alumni, Alexander wrote:

Those of us, and particularly you as parents, who know Fisk and its President-Elect, Dr. Charles S. Johnson (Fisk's first Negro president) have the promise that any such investment which may be made in the education of our boys and girls will bring rich returns to our American democracy and culture.<sup>30</sup>

Recruiting alumni support at HBCUs proves to be a very difficult task. The problem lies in the financial situation of blacks. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, even today the median black family income is 62 percent of the median white family income; and the median net worth of black families is one-tenth that of white families. Until these financial gaps are narrowed, HBCUs will have a difficult time soliciting funds from their alumni.<sup>29</sup>

Because the alumni did not have enough resources to give large amounts of money to Fisk, President Johnson looked to the faculty, staff, and students as well. Together, this group pledged to raise \$15,000. The Nashville black community was also asked to support the

campaign. Under the auspices of architect Calvin McKissack, the black community pledged to raise \$25,000 as "evidence of its support of Dr. Johnson and Fisk University." Although many doubted its ability to raise this amount, the black community successfully fulfilled its pledge.<sup>30</sup>

### Attracting White Donors

According to an article in the *Chronicle on Higher Education*, what matters most to trustees and committees when searching for a new president is "the ability to think strategically about the entire college, its financial needs and its future."<sup>31</sup>

However, at HBCUs, presidents must also be able to bridge the cultural gap that exists between them and the majority culture—the majority culture that could potentially support the institution financially. Most college fund-raisers want the donor to feel like part of the "college family," but this becomes a difficult task when the traditions and culture of the family are unlike that of the potential donor. Charles S. Johnson and Johnnetta Cole were able to bridge this gap successfully.

Because of Johnson's national stature, it was hoped that his inauguration would bring support from the white community. White members of the board of trustees were asked to use their ties in their own community to raise support for the university—support that had not been seen since the mid-1920s. In this effort, the fund-raisers appealed to the white citizen's concerns regarding blacks—economics, loyalty to the South, and morality. Some of the reasons given to persuade whites to give to Fisk were progressive and pragmatic in their tone. For example, reason number one of Marts and Lundy's

document, "Twelve Reasons Why Nashville Should Support Fisk," asks white citizens to consider the economic contributions of blacks to the local community:

1. The University itself and the student body spend approximately \$500,000 in Nashville each year. This means that amount is brought in from the outside every year . . .<sup>32</sup>

However, many of the other reasons fed into the attitudes of racist Southern whites. Reason six, for example, conveys the idea that blacks should be indoctrinated in the segregated way of life by educating them in the South:

6. The Negro people must have ministers, doctors, teachers, and social workers. These professional leaders must be trained either in the South in a place like Fisk, or they must go to a northern University. Would we not prefer to train our own, here in our midst, where they can continue sympathetic to southern life?<sup>32</sup>

And reason twelve taps into the racial stereotype that blacks that are uneducated or educated in the North are immoral, lawless, and rebellious:

12. The sound religious program at Fisk makes for a sober, sane, constructive, and moral citizenship. Fisk students do not get into trouble. They are law-abiding and they make citizens who cooperate with the best element—white or black—in the communities where they live.<sup>33</sup>

It may be difficult today to understand Johnson's willingness to include language that appeased Southern whites. However, in light of Fisk's past history of strained town-gown relations, it was perhaps the only way he could garner funds from the local white citizens. In an effort to be pragmatic, this fund-raising campaign may have belittled the people whom it was trying to benefit. Perhaps this is one reason why the appeal to local whites bore Marts and Lundy's signature rather than Johnson's.

Despite the perils involved, the fact that Charles Johnson and Johnnetta Cole were both interested in reaching out to white donors is one of the most important elements of their success. President Johnson positioned himself strategically by accepting invitations to be on several philanthropic boards. He was director of race relations for both the American Missionary Association and the Julius Rosenwald Fund. On behalf of the John Hay Whitney Foundation, Johnson directed the Opportunity Scholars Program—a program that aimed to develop black scholars and leaders. Johnson made every effort to establish relationships with the leaders of both white and black organizations. Since several leaders in the black community, including W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier, did not condone his high-profile interactions with white philanthropists, he was more successful in his relationships with whites. Frazier and Du Bois, both sociologists, received very little philanthropic funding throughout their careers, primarily because they spoke out so vehemently about philanthropic support and the strings attached to it. They saw Johnson as someone who capitalized on white philanthropy—using it to create a

sociological “empire” at Fisk. Johnson was able to shape Fisk into a center for scholarship because of his interactions with many of the major foundations. Likewise, President Cole, who is an advocate of “the power of people engaging across communities to solve problems,” serves, or has served on the boards of five major corporations including Home Depot, Merck, and Coca-Cola.<sup>34</sup> Her connections to these companies were instrumental in her successful fund-raising.

### Understanding the Donor

The mere willingness to work “across communities,” however, did not propel Johnson and Cole to the forefront of educational fund-raising. These two presidents made concerted efforts to understand the point of view and needs of the donors. A representative of Burger King who gave Spelman \$100,000 said of Johnnetta Cole:

She knew exactly how to pitch me. She invited me to breakfast at her home and she had a tax attorney there who specializes in handling gift taxes. She knew I'd be interested in any tax advantage which could help me make the gift.<sup>35</sup>

According to Cole, what appeals to most corporate donors is

reciprocity—the idea that we each have something the other needs. They know they will need a diverse work force in the future. They know they need to help us educate these black women.<sup>36</sup>

Just as industrial philanthropists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century wanted a skilled black labor force for their

companies, today's corporations want to employ skilled, educated people. Aware of the changing racial and ethnic demographics in future years which are projected by the U.S. Census Bureau, corporate leaders are eager to make sure that the pool of workers is prepared to meet the demands placed upon them. Both Johnnetta Cole and Charles Johnson used the quality of the workforce as a leveraging tool when soliciting corporations and foundations.

Charles Johnson, like Cole, was skilled at learning the likes and dislikes of philanthropists. He knew what motivated them and what would make the difference between getting and not getting a donation.<sup>37</sup> For example, knowing the Rockefeller Foundation leaders were absolutely meticulous about their record keeping and administration of grants—undoubtedly a holdover from the reign of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.—Johnson would compile the most detailed reports possible. He would write letters almost every other day to the foundation and call often. He knew that the Rockefeller Foundation would look more favorably upon an institution when it was providing copious documentation of its efforts. Perhaps Johnson's most successful use of his skills of persuasion was his relationship with John Hay Whitney. While serving on the United States Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) in the early 1950s, Johnson met philanthropist and socialite John Hay Whitney. Born into one of America's wealthiest families, Whitney was a colorful figure in the worlds of business, media, and politics. He was the chief editor and publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune* that, despite the \$40

million he poured into to it, failed. Whitney's name and persona carried great political clout. He used his influence in the Republican Party to help elect Dwight Eisenhower, who returned the favor by appointing him ambassador to Great Britain. Recognizing Johnson as a person with innovative ideas and strong ambition, Whitney soon took a liking to him and solicited his opinion on a variety of issues. Johnson saw in Whitney a person who had vast material wealth but lacked personal fulfillment. When Whitney complained, "He had wasted too many years, put too much money into things that had no deeper purpose," Johnson quickly volunteered to assist the philanthropist in his quest to do something meaningful. Johnson saw a need to nurture black talent, not only at Fisk but also throughout the country—at both black and white institutions. Through the financial help of Whitney, he was able to realize his vision. With the creation of both the John Hay Whitney Foundation, and more specifically, the Opportunity Fellows Program, Johnson helped Whitney to align himself with interracial education and human relations.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to their persuasion skills, both Johnson and Cole used very personal approaches and sometimes even odd peculiarities to influence donors. Johnnetta Cole, who frequently wears a scarf of kente cloth, a multicolored West African weaving, gives these scarves to corporate and foundation donors as a sign of racial harmony. For example, after a meeting with executives of the Chase Manhattan Bank in 1994, Cole gave each of the white, middle-aged men a stole made of kente cloth. She considered it a positive way to solidify their relationship

and make them feel included in the Spelman community. Cole has also been known to present the stoles to the college's alumnae, noting that the stoles are the "stripe of royalty" and that the alumnae are the "royalty" of Spelman. Cole's very personal, down-to-earth approach has served her well.<sup>39</sup>

Although persuasive, Johnson did not have Cole's warmth. He has been described as being aloof and possessing a very dry sense of humor. However, he was adept at controlling the dynamics of a meeting. He used personal peculiarities to his advantage when meeting with donors. One such peculiarity was a stuttering problem:

He was [often] overheard talking to someone about money and he could deliver a solicitation without stuttering one time for several minutes. It was a mannerism that he developed. Sometimes he would use the stuttering to cause silent moments in the conversation when asking for donations. When the potential donor looked like she was most vulnerable, he would pop the question and stop stuttering. (Joe Taylor in interview by author, April 29, 1999.)

### **Maintaining Independence in Philanthropic Relationships**

According to Billie Sue Schultz, fund-raising consultant for the Kresge Foundation and head of the advancement division at Spelman during Cole's presidency, "Black colleges have been practicing reactive fund-raising: Filling out applications for whatever programs foundations and the federal government announced. But sometimes these programs [don't] have a thing to do with the

priorities of the colleges.”<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the experiences of Charles S. Johnson and Johnnetta Cole is their ability to maintain independence in their decision making. Because they approached foundations and corporations with ideas, they were able to set the priorities for their institutions. Universities must consider the potential encroachments on their means of governance, principles of academic freedom, and institutional integrity before accepting contributions from philanthropic organizations and corporations.<sup>41</sup> As noted earlier, this is especially important at HBCUs that have a past marred by incidents of philanthropists imposing their ideas on desperate colleges. With a few exceptions, HBCUs are, even today, at the mercy of the foundations and corporations because of their financial status. Whereas most HWIs have enough funds to cover operating costs and substantial endowments, HBCUs must be frugal about their spending. Even Howard University in Washington, DC, which has the largest endowment of any HBCU—\$291,468,000—lags far behind 131 predominantly white institutions in terms of endowment. It even falls behind Phillips Academy, a private preparatory high school, which has a \$535 million endowment.<sup>42</sup> HBCU leaders must be diligent about taking the lead in the area of fund-raising so as not to be exploited.

The Basic College is perhaps the best example of Charles S. Johnson’s ability to set his own priorities in the use of philanthropic dollars. Unsure of the possibility of integrated black education in the South, Johnson created the Basic College, to give promising black students the opportunity to learn in a nurturing,

stimulating environment. An early entry program, the Basic College recruited high school juniors and seniors and placed them in cohesive learning groups that benefited from the presence of artistic, literary, and political figures that Johnson invited to the Fisk campus. They studied together, ate together, and lived together in small cohorts that provided support within the academic setting. By going to the Ford and Whitney Foundations with the Basic College idea, Johnson was able to create the learning environment that he had envisioned. These foundations collaborated with Johnson and he implemented his program with few modifications.

Cole tried to find donors who were sympathetic to the mission of Spelman. She accepted funds from those who supported her ideas and her methods of change and advancement. In Cole’s mind, Spelman was producing tomorrow’s female leaders and it was just as reputable as Wellesley, Williams, Amherst, and Oberlin<sup>43</sup> in terms of faculty and students. One of Cole’s initiatives was to raise support for a \$22 million science complex. Although 40 percent of Spelman’s students were science majors, the large amounts of money necessary to support the latest science facilities were missing.<sup>43</sup> She approached funders with this in mind—emphasizing the prestige of the institution and its proven ability to educate young women.

Although imperative to the success of their respective institutions, both Johnnetta Cole’s and Charles Johnson’s fund-raising efforts took a toll on their relationships on campus. President Cole was away from the campus for large periods of time—making an average of two solicitation visits per week. Because of her

personality, Cole seemed better able to handle the time away and was good at regrouping with faculty and staff upon her return. However, Charles Johnson had a more difficult time and felt the need to apologize to the faculty:

It is necessary for someone to go out into the country and pick it up [the money]. It is a long and tedious business, because you can't walk into an office and asked for \$10,000 cold ... That is my interpretation and my apology to you for what must have been my great loss.<sup>44</sup>

According to Mary Thompson, the former director of the Fisk International Center, the faculty opinion of Johnson was one of great respect coupled with frustration. Leslie Collins, a professor of English, described Johnson as someone who "enjoyed building fences around himself and [who] was not easily accessible." There is no doubt that Johnson's frequent absence from the campus exacted a cost from his relationships with faculty members.<sup>45</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As today's black colleges and universities continue to struggle to garner funding for operating costs and endowments, it is important to look at the successes of their predecessors. Both Johnnetta Cole and Charles S. Johnson offer powerful examples of the type of leadership that is needed on HBCU campuses. Johnson, for instance, would study prospective donors—learning their inner motivations, obsessions, and personal quirks. He would then use this information to craft an approach that made donors feel as if they were accomplishing their goals. While this

kind of management of donor interactions is important for any fund-raiser, it is imperative at an HBCU where there is a history of outside manipulation. By controlling his interactions with the philanthropists, he ensured that he would not be controlled by them. Cole, on the other hand, dealt with the problem of cultural gaps and lack of familiarity with the HBCU environment. She used gestures of inclusion to attract interest from those who might not otherwise understand the importance of historically black colleges.

Both Johnson and Cole were cognizant of the important role that alumni play at HBCUs. Alumni giving is essential as a financial resource, but most importantly as a testimony to the effectiveness and uniqueness of an HBCU education. For many HBCUs, soliciting alumni "formally" is a new undertaking. For years, HBCUs have only solicited alumni when specific needs arose. Cole provides an example of how to cultivate ongoing support and educate alumnae donors not only after they graduate but also while they are students.<sup>46</sup> Once they understand the structure of the giving process, black college alumni begin to give and support their alma maters. Emmett D. Carson, president of the Minnesota Foundation and former fellow at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, has suggested that HBCUs introduce "general information about the role of philanthropy in our society into undergraduate liberal arts programs." This seems almost a given considering that since "we encourage people to participate in the democratic process another important aspect of being a good citizen [in addition to voting] is active participation in some form of philanthropy."<sup>47</sup>

Johnnetta Cole demonstrates that it is necessary for leaders of HBCUs to use nontraditional approaches to fund-raising. What might work for predominantly white institutions may not be appropriate at an HBCU. She recognized that focusing on the college's deficiencies—a frequent strategy at HBCUs—would not work when the institution's mere existence was being questioned. Corporations and foundations want to be associated with successful, proven endeavors. Cole rightfully positioned Spelman in a positive light when conveying its story to potential donors. Further, both leaders used the occasion of their selection as a way to bolster support for the institution. Both were firsts at their respective colleges and both emphasized this in their solicitations.

Most importantly, Johnson and Cole show that it is necessary to bring ideas to funders and that it is crucial to search actively for innovative funding sources. An organized, deliberate approach to fund-raising enables an institution to maintain integrity in its efforts to garner funds. This approach must be delivered by leaders who are dynamic, outreaching, and comfortable in their social interactions—leaders who are willing to bring their institution's goals to a wider audience. Again, this point is particularly important at HBCUs given their troubled history of outside control. The fund-raising strategies and perseverance of Cole and Johnson can and should be mirrored by current HBCU presidents.

Legal scholar Derrick Bell has pointed out that the only significant advancement for African-Americans has taken place when there has also been an opportunity for whites to benefit. Understanding historical realities, Johnson and Cole have

taken a pragmatic approach, gaining the support of both the white and black communities. For Johnson, this was a difficult balance to strike—he had to spend a great amount of time socializing with white philanthropists instead of his family and the Fisk faculty. Occasionally his relationships with white philanthropists led to distrust by faculty members and black intellectuals. However, in the end, he was able to establish a premier educational institution through the use of philanthropy. This strategy is key to the future of black colleges. Particularly in a time when affirmative action is in decline, the continued existence of, and monetary support for, historically black colleges are important for both African-Americans and the country as a whole. Not only do HBCUs respond to the unique needs of today's black students, but they also cultivate new leaders in American society and abroad. The support for historically black colleges is a positive statement by the public and private sectors that reinforces their commitment to the education of all citizens, including African-Americans.<sup>48</sup> HBCU presidents and their staffs must convey this message to potential donors.

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### Practitioners' Perspectives

In her paper, Marybeth Gasman masterfully parallels the core success characteristics of two prominent African-American CEOs: Presidents Johnnetta Cole at Spelman College and Charles S. Johnson at Fisk University. Gasman's seminal work illustrates the effectiveness of Cole and Johnson in their philanthropic efforts, clearly outlining the intricacies of effective fund-raising and leadership.

Nearly fifty years separated Cole's and Johnson's endeavors at garnering support for their institutions—institutions that historically struggled to match the successes of their white counterparts—yet their styles are surprisingly similar and equally effective. During their tenures, each set a precedence of excellence and offered needed templates and prescriptions for CEOs of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) interested in effectively advancing their institutions.

Gasman's work articulates the success factors shaping the superior contributions made by Cole and Johnson. The work is intriguing, for it effectively illustrates the inherited challenges each of these leaders faced during their presidencies.

Undoubtedly, Gasman's insights parallel many of the needed characteristics for one to be successful in any organization serious about fund-raising. However, she artfully tailors those characteristics to the realities present within HBCUs—both during Johnson's tenure in the 1950s and most recently while Johnnetta Cole was at Spelman's helm. Ultimately, Gasman's work reinforces the most important elements needed to advance an institution or cause effectively.

Certainly, Cole and Johnson were masters in their craft of educational fund-raising, possessing well-honed skills and talents in support of their leadership goals. Gasman's work reinforces the benefits associated with HBCU CEOs understanding and practicing educational fund-raising basics. Obviously, the successes of Johnnetta Cole and Charles S. Johnson would not have come to fruition if their personalities did not include initiative, integrity, and positive mental attitude—the main staples of effective fund-raising. As illustrated, Cole and Johnson knew the art of effective stewardship, and whenever possible aligned their efforts to meet the needs of the donors with whom they were working. Without Cole's and Johnson's thoughtful and deliberate professional fund-raising strategies, it is doubtful their efforts would have been as successful as they were.

A macro approach to Gasman's work quickly gives relevance to the contributions made by these African-American CEOs. Through Cole's and Johnson's successes, it is clear that self-confidence, vision, intuition, and persistence, coupled with an unyielding pursuit of excellence, brought their institutions' dreams to fruition. Undoubtedly the leadership of Presidents Johnnetta Cole and Charles S. Johnson earned them their historical place in educational fund-raising.

**Ralph Amos**  
*Assistant Vice President*  
*Ohio University Alumni Association*