



Origination of "The HBCU Concept"

Before the Civil War, higher education for black students was virtually non-existent. The few, such as Fredrick Douglass, who did receive schooling, often studied in informal and sometimes hostile settings, or were forced to teach themselves entirely. Southern whites strongly opposed the education of black students, and formal education for blacks was only slightly more common in the North. Some schools for elementary and secondary training existed, such as the Institute for Colored Youth, a school started in the early 1830s by a group of Philadelphia Quakers. It was renamed Cheyney University many years later after becoming an institution of higher learning. College educations were also available to a limited number of students at schools like Oberlin College in Ohio and Berea College in Kentucky. Only two historically black private colleges, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Wilberforce University in Ohio, existed prior to the Civil War.

In the years following the Civil War, with the 13th amendment's abolition of slavery and reconstruction in the South, things were beginning to change. In 1862, Senator Justin Morrill spearheaded a movement to improve the state of public higher education throughout the United States, putting an emphasis on the need for institutions to train Americans in the applied sciences, agriculture, and engineering. The Morrill Land-Grant Act gave federal lands to the states for the purpose of opening colleges and universities to educate farmers, scientists, and teachers. Although many such institutions were created, few were open or inviting to blacks, particularly in the South. Only Alcorn State University in Mississippi was created explicitly as a black land-grant college. It would be 28 years before Senator Morrill rectified this problem. The solution came with the second Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1890, which specified that states using federal land-grant funds must either make their schools open to both blacks and whites or allocate money for segregated black colleges to serve as an alternative to white schools. A total of 16 exclusively black institutions received 1890 land-grant funds.

Most of these public schools were founded by state legislatures between 1870 and 1910. Prior to this, it was the initiative of many blacks themselves, along with the support of the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Freedmen's Bureau that was responsible for setting up private colleges and universities for the education of blacks. African-American churches ran their own elementary and secondary educations for southern blacks, preparing them for vocations or advanced studies. This created a demand for higher education, particularly for the institutes to train teachers for work in black schools. Between 1861 and 1870, the AMA founded seven black colleges and 13 normal (teaching) schools. Many of these institutions, along with the private HBCUs founded later by the AMA, the Freedmen's Bureau, and black churches, became the backbone of black higher education, producing African-American leaders for generations to come.

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