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The ICSS and the Development of Black Collegiate Honors Education in the U.S.

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Precursor to the NCHC, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) was active from 1957 to 1965 under the leadership of Joseph Cohen at the University of Colorado. As NCHC culminates fifty years of supporting collegiate honors education, its historical context needs to include the contributions to honors from a unique group of institutions, the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). While scholars of collegiate honors education understand Frank Aydelotte, Swarthmore's seventh president, to have started "a trend in honors among American colleges and universities" (Rinn 70), the honors literature does not provide evidence of Aydelotte's engagement with Black higher education in the U.S. In fact, Aydelotte's 1925 report "Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities," identifying institutions operating honors programs, does not list any HBCUs. Further, in their book describing the "adventure" of developing honors education at Swarthmore and across the country, the Swarthmore faculty also made no mention of collaborating with colleagues at HBCUs (Swarthmore College Faculty). During this time, Aydelotte and the Swarthmore faculty

were attracting national attention and starting to get major grants from, for instance, the General Education Board (Aydelotte, “Breaking” 34–35), just as later Joseph Cohen and the ICSS attracted funding from the Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundation, indicating that honors was increasing in national importance (Andrews 18). We are left to question, though, whether HBCUs were providing the same kind of special opportunities for their students in the mid-twentieth century and what particular challenges these unique institutions faced providing honors education within the racialized climate of the United States in the 1960s.

My present study, an historical analysis exploring the development of honors education at Morgan State University (see Dula), reveals that some of the private, liberal arts HBCUs in the 1920s were likely offering opportunities to their high-ability students that could have been operating in the spirit of honors even if they had not launched a program with that name. Moreover, the findings in my study, based on archival documents, reveal that Cohen, with the ICSS, did, in fact, actively support the development of collegiate honors education at Black colleges. While the focus on high-achieving students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) was a campaign that began between the two world wars and continued in the 1950s Cold War era with the ICSS, the question is whether earlier, in the 1920s, Aydelotte and his faculty ever reached out to HBCUs as they promoted honors education or whether they simply dismissed these institutions as not possessing the raw material: talented students.

Perhaps the notion of Blacks with superior academic talent seemed preposterous to Aydelotte and his faculty in the 1930s, but—at a time of scientific racism and the Eugenics movement—Black scholars were responding powerfully to that assumption. Consider, for example, the writings of Charles H. Thompson, who was a professor and dean at Howard University and founder of *The Journal of Negro Education*. Louis Ray wrote that one of Thompson’s goals for Howard was “to focus on educating gifted students of color” (190). In 1935, as editor of the *Journal*, Thompson provided the editorial comment “Investing in Negro Brains,” in which he insisted “that the range of intelligence among Negroes runs just as high as it does among other racial groups”; then, going on to note poor educational opportunities and facilities, Thompson wrote that it was no wonder that a student might not achieve full potential “in view of the depressing effect of poor environment and poor school facilities upon the I.Q.” (153–55). Thompson did not call for the development of honors programs or special honors facilities, but he did go on to inquire about the identification and harnessing of Black academic talent, writing:

[W]hat efforts are being made to discover them and to develop their talents for the benefit of the race and the nation? These questions assume considerable importance when it is considered that the Negro as a race and the nation as a whole are handicapped because our natural resources of superior human ability remain buried, undeveloped, and unused. . . . [I]t is evident that something much more systematic must be done about it. . . . [A]re we making the best of our higher educational facilities[?] . . . [S]ome rather comprehensive machinery has to be devised by which we may discover the members of this “very superior” Negro group. . . . [M]any of these bright young people are lost, either because of lack of encouragement or lack of funds to go on with their training—and their superior brains are of little avail without training. (153–55)

Some HBCUs were pushing Thompson’s agenda despite the segregated environment that made the training of “superior Negroes” into the kind of work requiring a most adamant combination of educator and civil rights advocate.

By the 1950s and 1960s, however, during the timespan of the ICSS, several HBCUs were deeply engaged in the discourse of honors education for their collegians. According to his papers, Cohen made several ICSS visits to HBCUs to assist with the development and strengthening of honors programs (ICSS, Fd. 9, Box 22). Cohen worked closely with HBCUs such as Fisk University, Howard University, Southern University, Morehouse College, and others. Among ICSS’s regional conferences, one was dedicated to the needs of high-achieving Black collegians.

HONORS EDUCATION AND THE COLD WAR ERA

The ICSS and the national spread of collegiate honors education was successful in part because the efforts were unfolding during a time when the country was attuned to the Cold War and the 1957 launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik (Andrews 21–22). Sputnik served the honors movement well in the 1950s and 1960s as the nation grew increasingly interested in talent development. The United States was immersed in a domestic battle at all levels in the 1950’s. For one, it was witnessing the ardent upsurge of a community’s refusal to be quieted or to settle for the second-class citizenship allocated to them, a refusal that was expressed in their anger and mobilization against the flagrant violence pervading their existence and an unequivocal demand for equal rights in every form from bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, to

their demands for the right to vote and their appeals for educational access in Topeka, Kansas (Sitkoff). The stratagem of the Civil Rights movement eventually gave way to the executive signing of the first Civil Rights Act in September of 1957 (Pub. L. 85-315, 71) by President Eisenhower.

In 1957, when academically able and talented Black children in Little Rock, Arkansas, were fighting for equal access in America's classrooms, the Soviet Union was launching an international sneak attack in technology and the sciences. The domestic unrest that Eisenhower was facing in the homeland was a national challenge, but President Eisenhower was equally unprepared for Sputnik. Russia's successful October 4, 1957 satellite launch caused the United States embarrassment, moving the country to invest resources in every level of U.S. education, including colleges and universities. Almost a year to the date of Russian's 1957 coup, the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) allowed for funding provisions to education in science and technology. The United States was panicked that American scientists, technology, and schooling had fallen second to that of the Soviet Union (Hartman). However, even before 1957, there was sentiment that higher education and education in general were eroding: "The Cold War setting created higher expectations among Americans concerning the quality of education in their schools, well before the first Russian sputnik was launched" (Chaszar 46). Joining Aydelotte's chorus were others such as Thomas Bonner, an historian and university president, who also publicly asserted concerns that American education was not at a level to maintain and secure the country's safety and quality of life. He wrote in 1958 that the nation's lawmakers and educators had been sufficiently warned:

[F]or several years independent observers have been warning us about what the Soviets were doing in education, especially in science education, but they were crying in the wilderness until October 4, 1957. . . . [I]t is upon education that the fate of our way of life depends. It means that the outcome of the third world war may be decided in the classroom. (Bonner 178)

Bonner went on to argue that the problem was not that the United States did not have the intellectual talent to compete with Russia but that it was indifferent to intellectual achievement and scholarship. He found that scholars and professors in Germany were given rock star status while in America all prestige went to those who excelled in athletics and entertainment. Bonner wrote that, when he was a guest professor in Germany, "nothing impressed

me more than the contrast in status and acceptance of the scholar and the intellectual” (180). In addition to the “skewed” American perspective, he explained, everyone was educated at the same level: “we have decided that democracy means the same amount of basic education for all regardless of ability” (179). Instead, Bonner advocated providing trade education for the less capable so as not to “adjust to meet the needs of those not capable” (179). Bonner foresaw a time in education when

our colleges [and] universities [and the nation] . . . will be unashamedly and proudly concerned with the gifted. We will cease grouping them with the handicapped and defective as abnormal or problem children and recognize them as the greatest and most important challenge we have in the classroom. If we continue to make [the gifted] . . . ashamed of their abilities, as we never have with athletes and showmen . . . we are doomed as a free people. (178)

Bonner’s plan for a true intellectual and societal democracy reflected the U.S. government’s and educational leaders’ new goals for U.S. society. U.S. Naval Admiral Hyman Rickover, for example, used his status to influence federal-level engagement in education, testifying before Congress in 1958 that Russia’s lead with the Sputnik launch rested squarely on the inferiority of American schooling compared to that of Russia’s educational system (O’Gorman 771).

While the quality of education at all levels became a popular concern to the American public, higher education became the main target for criticism as colleges, and research universities in particular, were where scientists were trained (Douglass). Research universities were also partners with the government, receiving hefty amounts of federal funds and facility resources in efforts to advance technology and produce a new generation of scientists. In 1945, according to John Douglass, “the federal government was already funding 83 percent of all research in the natural sciences,” most of which was funneled to universities in dollars and in the form of federal laboratories on university campuses; these included large sums of money appropriated to the National Science Foundation (NSF), which was created in 1950; the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which was passed in 1958; and funding to other federal agencies such as the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Atomic Energy Commission (Douglass 2). Douglass went on to explain that while October 1957 was not at all the beginning of federal involvement in higher education research, Sputnik jolted “American lawmakers and the public in their joint resolve to invest in and reposition higher education” (4).

This repositioning and emphasis on technology rather than the liberal arts dismayed honors educators who were hoping after the war to refocus higher education on liberal studies. Chaszar notes, however, that the climate of scrutiny on science research and the research university actually focused attention on academic rigor and academically talented students, and it “encouraged the resurgence of honors programs” (44). Chaszar references the response at the collegiate level, but the effects of the satellite launch also trickled down to the K–12 classroom. According to educator Abraham Tannenbaum,

There was no serious action in America’s schools [for the gifted] until Sputnik was launched in 1957. . . . When the educational community finally took action on behalf of the gifted, it did so with alacrity. . . . [In] the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was an upsurge in research activity dealing with the characteristics and education of gifted children. (9–11)

The White community’s wake-up response to the quality of U.S. education was differently motivated yet peculiarly similar to Black America’s long critique of U.S. education that had begun a tenacious fight for equality as well as quality in schooling. Black higher education was also seeking to develop talent, but HBCUs were not initial recipients of funding from the 1958 National Defense Education Act. Black institutions were systematically denied consideration in training scientists and maintaining federal laboratories on their campuses.

In addition to institutional partnerships with the government, colleges and universities were responding to the campaign of talent development with the resurgence of interest in collegiate honors education. The Cold War era made conditions ripe to pick up after where Frank Aydelotte’s initial honors campaign and World Wars I and II had left off.

COHEN, ICSS, AND BLACK HONORS DEVELOPMENT

The University of Colorado’s honors program was among a few to survive through and after the Second World War. Cohen wrote that “[i]t was a striking fact how many of the programs listed by Aydelotte in 1925 were practically nonexistent when I made my own first survey in 1952” (Cohen, Foreword x–xi). Cohen’s ability to secure Rockefeller Foundation monies to support both Colorado’s honors program and the expansion of the honors movement broadly made all the difference in his ability to mobilize the effort

across the nation. The grant also stipulated that the Colorado honors director would visit colleges and host a June conference in 1957, a meeting that represented “twenty-seven large institutions, both public and private” (Cohen, “The First” 25).

With the June 1957 conference behind them and with backing from the Carnegie Corporation, the ICSS held a second meeting later that year, in October, to define action steps from the June proceedings. Among those items, the ICSS was developed at the October 1957 meeting to “act as a clearinghouse for information on honors activities across the nation” (Cohen, “The First” 27). Other initiatives were a newsletter, *The Superior Student*, campus visits, and a plan for more conferences with regional scope (South in 1958 and Northeast in 1959).

By Cohen’s own accounting, the establishment of the ICSS in 1957 made for a “systematic, coordinated effort . . . to extend honors programs to the large private and state universities” (Cohen, “Development” 9). The University of Colorado provided the infrastructure and leadership for its headquarters. According to Chaszar, the ICSS’s main mission was to reach administrators and faculty, especially, in order to facilitate a broad discussion of honors education, to share resources and support for building and sustaining honors programs, and to serve as a clearinghouse for information. The group intended to implement this mission through campus visits; the established newsletter, *The Superior Student*; outreach to educational associations and agencies; and national and regional conferences. Chaszar cited the April 1958 newsletter as declaring “to stimulate nationwide discussion of the fundamental honors questions” (78).

The ICSS made great strides in advancing collegiate honors. Cohen highlighted eight important conferences of note, some thematic in nature, between the years 1958–64. They targeted particular populations such as the conference on Honors and the Preparation of Teachers at the University of Wisconsin in April 1962 and the conference on Talented Women and the American College—titled “Needed Research on Able Women in Honors Programs, Colleges and Society”—at Columbia University in May 1964 (Cohen, “The First” 48–49). Cohen also made campus visits in order to investigate how institutions and faculty could best develop and manage honors programs suitable for their campuses, and he made other visits to prepare for upcoming regional conferences.

Despite the segregated structure of higher education in the late 1950s, Cohen’s honors campaign crossed racial lines. According to Chaszar, Cohen

visited fourteen Southern universities in the spring of 1958. A few of the Southern institutions visited were HBCUs: Howard and Southern and later that summer Fisk and Morehouse (87). After his Southern visits, Cohen reported in the October 1958 newsletter,

Fisk University is exploring new academic approaches with 25 of its best freshmen. It is also testing out an early admissions experiment in cooperation with six other colleges and universities including Oberlin and Wooster. . . . Morehouse is gathering important data by means of a controlled experiment involving an accelerated program. 24–30 Ford scholars are participating. (“Some Notes,” 11–12)

Appearing in the May/June 1959 *Superior Student* newsletter was an article entitled, “Educating the Gifted Negro Student: A problem of Encouragement and Development,” written by President Felton G. Clark and Dean E. C. Harrison of Southern University about the obstacles in both identifying and encouraging Black student talent (2–4). The authors referenced the Cold War “international power struggle . . . and the numerous publications criticizing the nation’s schools for their neglect of the gifted” as reasons and urgency to identify and encourage Black student talent, and they pointed out that although the nation was preoccupied with talent development, there was “a noticeable lack of interest in this regard among Negro students” (2–4). The authors’ criticism was critical in ensuring that Black institutions and students were included in the talent development campaign, especially with regard to financial support. It would have been detrimental to allow the segregationist climate to disregard Black talent as able to contribute to the Cold War efforts, especially after proving its patriotic valor in the Second World War as with the Tuskegee Airmen, a group of Black WWII military pilots, for example.

One concern that Clark and Harrison highlighted was the measures in place to identify able students and provide an environment that would nurture their talents. Finding standardized testing to be an inadequate indicator, they wrote, “the devices which are being used to identify the talented among the dominant group are less effective in measuring the intellectual potential of Negro youth” (3). Instead, they supported efforts that called upon more integrated strategies for identifying talent such as those of the Southern Project of the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students that “experimented with methods and techniques of searching for talent among Negro high school seniors. During the existence of the project from 1953–1955, 1,732 students in 45 cities were identified as superior

through such procedures as counseling, instructor ratings and scholastic aptitude testing” (3).

Clark and Harrison acknowledged the lower socio-economic background of some of the identified students and encouraged directing their talent potential by affording them “a challenging and stimulating educational climate [so] they are motivated to strive for high achievement” (4). In this regard, they expressed their criticism of Black institutions:

Unfortunately, too few of the colleges existing primarily for Negro youth provide the climate that is conducive to the development of able or gifted students . . . the fact that existing among Negro youth is a significant number of potentially gifted students. . . . Hence, those who are involved in the process of planning educational programs of Negro youth must become more aware of the need for seeking out those with potential and for extending to them stimulating educational opportunities . . . [and] continue to pursue rather vigorously research and experimentation that will lead to promising “how-to-do-it programs.” (4)

One of the “how-to-do-it programs” was collegiate honors.

On the first page of the May/June 1959 newsletter that preceded the article by Clark and Harrison was an announcement, “The Gifted Negro Student: A Challenge to American Education,” detailing an upcoming conference on the gifted Negro student sponsored by Southern University, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), and Southern regional educational associations. *The Superior Student* editors noted that the conference would address a national concern: “the loss to the nation of a considerable source of undiscovered and hence unrealized Negro intellectual potential serves as one of the foremost challenges to American educational leaders today.” That “educational leaders” was not qualified by the term “Negro” emphasizes the national imperative for the education of this group of students from K–12 to the college level.

Among the other conferences of note between 1958 and 1964, Cohen highlighted the February 1960 conference, hosted by Southern University and A. & M. College in Baton Rouge, for predominantly Negro institutions and focused on the gifted Negro student. Cohen wrote, “I am particularly proud of our first, the Southern conference, which led at once to a conference of predominantly Negro colleges and therefore opened up the whole issue of the culturally deprived and disadvantaged anywhere” (Cohen, Foreword xiii).

Chaszar explains that the Southern University president, Felton G. Clark, reached out for conference support to the Carnegie Corporation, which directed him back to the ICSS. ICSS assisted in cosponsoring the conference. At this conference, societal issues were addressed that plagued Black educational experiences, such as inferior facilities and resources, not to mention the racial climate that might impede the recognition and/or growth of Black talent (Chaszar 88–89).

Earlier, in a 1958 article titled “The Development and Present Status of Publicly-Supported Higher Education for Negroes,” Clark had rejected the vocational and agricultural training encouraged by Southern state-funded institutions and espoused by Booker T. Washington’s “advocacy of industrial education which was hailed by white Northerners and Southerners” (Clark 225). Noting a total of “34 state-supported institutions for Negroes” in 1956–57, he charged Black institutions “to become American institutions . . . providing an educational climate that stresses competition with standards of excellence” (232). Clark did not mention Sputnik directly but did write that

it was soon realized that America was not utilizing effectively its human resources; the results being a shortage of specialized talent such as engineers, scientists, physicians. . . . Related to the problem was the Negro to whom had been applied the “separate but equal doctrine,” with the consequence being the denial of appropriate opportunities for maximum development of the Negro’s potential. (231)

In other words, Black colleges should have been no different than majority White institutions with regard to academic standards and educating Black students in the tradition of the liberal arts rather than industrial training, and doing otherwise would be a waste of “Negro” talent. As if speaking to an audience broader than HBCU leadership, Clark appeared to see an opportunity in the Cold War space race to argue for higher levels of Black education. With the recent passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the NDEA (National Defense Education Act), Clark was perhaps appealing to both the interests of the nation and its urgent need to develop all talent as well as to the interests of HBCU presidents.

Legal scholar Derrick Bell’s concept of Interest-Convergence—the accommodation of two opposing sides with mutual interests but with competing motivations—was likely Clark’s goal. In the context of desegregation litigation, Bell viewed the Interest-Convergence Dilemma principle operating

in favor of the Black community only when this dismantling met the interests of the White community: “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (“*Brown v The Board of Education* and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” 523). Further building upon Bell’s theory of interest-convergence, critical legal scholar Mary L. Dudziak historically traced desegregation cases, contextualizing the timing of decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* with federal interests regarding foreign policy and global relationships, concluding that hypocrisy more than good will led to a nation’s espousing democracy and dismantling *Plessy v. Ferguson* while maintaining segregation. Dudziak argued that these legal events need to be understood in the racialized Cold War context in which they occurred in order to truly benefit from their historical and contemporary meanings.

Clark’s focus on the need for Black talent was an opportune example of interest-convergence within the historical context of the late 1950s, when the nation needed all hands on deck and when an international audience was observing the nation’s practice of democracy in relation to its Black citizens. In 1960, Clark coordinated leaders from a total of thirty-three Black institutions to “explore the most urgent educational problems of superior students from culturally deprived backgrounds . . . good minds unevenly developed [due to lack of educational resources]” and to explore “*remedial* (emphasis theirs) work for Honors students” (Clark and Harrison 2). True to the traditions of HBCUs, the conference “Report” in the same issue of *The Superior Student* newsletter indicated the contribution that these leaders gave to the larger collegiate honors educators’ community,

It was a contribution of this conference that the broader socio-cultural aspects of Honors programs necessarily received closer scrutiny and came into the foreground. . . . [T]he conference made evident the large role which favorable cultural environment and high levels of expectancy in the . . . school and the community play in academic achievement. (2)

The ethic of care that distinguishes HBCU institutions and the supportive experiences they afford their students (see Brown et al.; Fleming) was powerfully present even in their meeting deliberations.

The impending intellectual loss HBCUs would suffer from failing to nurture gifted Negro students was heartfelt. In “Final Session: Next Steps,” Albert N. Whiting, Dean of the College at Morgan State College—now Morgan

State University—pleaded “for the establishment of Honors programs in Negro colleges” along the lines recommended by the ICSS (15–16).

HBCUs had significant engagement with the ICSS and the honors movement. Howard University English professor and honors program director John Lovell, Jr., and Fisk University history professor and honors program director M. J. Lunine were both in attendance at a “general” ICSS conference in Denver in April of 1965 (ICSS, Fd. 3, Box 22). During Cohen’s campus visits to support the development of new programs and continued growth of existing honors programs from 1956 to 1963, he was invited to visit and meet with deans and faculty of Howard University (April 14, 1958; March 1, 1961; December 6, 1961), Southern University (April 22, 1958; November 3, 1959), Fisk University (June 17, 1958; September 11–12, 1962), Morehouse and Spelman Colleges (June 21, 1958), and Virginia State and Hampton Institute (September 28, 1960) (ICSS, Fd. 9, Box 22). In correspondence of June 16, 1959, George Redd, Dean at Fisk University, forwarded Fisk’s honors program plans to Cohen and the ICSS. He wrote, “I have delayed writing to you since the most helpful Louisville Conference because I wanted to give you a complete report. . . . I shall look forward to the increased participation in the services of the Inter-University Committee” (ICSS, Fd. 9, Box 22). Redd had attended the first Southern Invitational Conference at the University of Louisville in November of 1958. The conference “for institutions predominantly Negro,” was the Southern University Invitational Conference at Southern University and A.&M. College in February of 1960 (ICSS, Fd. 9, Box 22).

Redd enclosed a report titled “Recommendations of the Sub-Committee of the Educational Policy Committee on an Honors Program for Fisk University, June 1959,” which described in full detail the purpose and procedure to developing the honors program. The sub-committee’s report proposed that “it is desirable, as far as practical, to create a climate in which superior students will compete more effectively with each other rather than be retarded by the ‘run of the mill’ student” (ISCC, Fd. 9, Box 2:1). The plan indicates not only the university’s commitment but its forward thinking as they envisioned that by fall 1962 their honors students and program would “have its own food service; an academic advisor rather than a personnel advisor; its own library . . . and become a source of intellectual information for the campus” (ICSS, Fd. 9, Box 2). Although a formal honors program had not been established previously at Fisk, courses with this intent had existed for years. A survey of “Fisk University’s General Honors Program” was attached to the report with the following comments:

[S]pecial offerings for superior students are nothing new at Fisk. For more than twenty years, Departmental Honors courses have been given in various major fields; and during the past two years, special Honors sections have been established. . . . [W]hat is new . . . is the systematic effort to provide the top 5 to 10% of the student body with a four-year program. (ISCC, Fd. 9, Box 2:1)

In the 1963–64 ICSS membership brochure, HBCU supporting institutional members included (as printed): Bennett College (North Carolina), Central State College (Ohio), Clark College (Georgia), Grambling College (Louisiana), Langston University (Oklahoma), Lincoln University (Pennsylvania), Savannah State College, Texas Southern University, Tuskegee Institute (Alabama), Virginia State College, and Xavier University (Louisiana). This list represents only dues-paying members, and it is likely that many more HBCUs already had established honors programs or had faculty committees actively engaged in discussions to develop them. For example, Howard University and Hampton, both with honors programs at the time, do not appear on the list.

Pertaining to ICSS leadership, Black historian John Hope Franklin was a member of the executive committee for the national organization. He gave the opening address at the February 1960 conference entitled “To Educate All the Jeffersonians,” which was published in the April 1960 *Superior Student* newsletter, an issue dedicated to the Southern Conference on the Gifted Negro Student. Franklin’s remarks had a powerful magnitude that resonates even today as leaders debate about and advocate for Black education:

[T]he many who sought universal education, or the few who wanted to encourage the superior student, actually had in mind *white* universal education or the encouragement of the superior student *provided* he was white. Perhaps nothing has blighted the drive for universal education in the United States more than the simultaneously held contradictory notion that universal education should be confined to white people. Perhaps nothing has made a caricature of the current drive to identify and encourage the academically talented more than the concurrently prevailing practice of segregated education and cultural degradation that makes such identification and encouragement extremely difficult. . . . It was the view, supported in law, that Negroes should have equality in ignorance, and that no black person should have an education, whether he be moron or genius. . . . [L]aws

were enacted making it a crime for them to learn *or* be taught . . . [to] ensure proper subordination. (5)

Franklin, who later became the nation's preeminent scholar in American and Black History, continued in his remarks to outline the history of Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and segregation in education.

In the conference session discussions, the special newsletter also mentioned that Fisk, Hampton, and other HBCUs were working with local high schools not only to recruit but to begin earlier the nurturing of talented students. In describing efforts of the Hampton Institute to identify talent, William Robinson reported,

[M]ost identification of bright students [by Hampton] was too little and too late. To try to correct this, three local high schools without any programs for their superior students were enlisted in a special effort . . . [to provide] freshman courses in the high school. (*The Superior Student*, "High School" 11)

The conference itself and the active discussion of highly talented Black students illustrate Black colleges' involvement in the late 1950s and early 1960s (some much earlier as with Fisk University) in a significant and evolving trend in higher education, mostly out of a desire to meet the needs of the Black academically talented student population.

Cohen and his colleagues would continue to travel until 1963 in their efforts within the ICSS to transform teaching and learning on campuses across the nation. Cohen wrote, "As director up to 1963, I took on a good share of these [campus] visits. During this period I made roughly 300 visits and participated in 100 conferences" (Cohen, "The First" 32). Cohen's southern-state campus tour was apparently advantageous to his coordinating efforts and the engagement of Black colleges. Because the HBCUs that were involved in ICSS during these early years—Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University), Bennett College, Fisk University, Hampton University, Howard University, and Morehouse College, to name a few—were primarily private and boasted collegiate coursework in the liberal arts, the adoption of honors programs was an agile fit.

State-supported Black institutions, though, were also meeting the needs of their high-achieving students, including Morgan State University (then Morgan State College), Florida A&M University (then Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes), Grambling State University (then Grambling College, Louisiana), and South Carolina State University (then

Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina). Among others, these public institutions were deeply engaged with the ICSS and involved in discussions on developing the academically talented youth on their campuses.

This historical analysis has revealed the contributions of a collection of institutions to the development of honors in higher education and bridged the research gap in the role of HBCUs in that development. The omission of HBCUs in historical studies of honors is evident, for instance, in the recent study “College and University Honors Programs in the Southern United States,” the authors fail to make any mention of Black institutions despite the research being conducted in the region of the nation where most HBCUs are located (Owens and Travis). This colorblind oversight indicates that HBCUs are categorically absent from mainstream research considerations by most higher education scholars unless the topic is specifically on Black education. Even if Black institutions had been among the participants in Owen and Travis’s study, their role is unclear to the reader.

The particular histories of HBCUs require that research findings be nested in the distinct characteristics of Black institutions even if they appear on the surface to be conducting similar work as their White counterparts. Any past contributions or current practices and initiatives being carried out at an HBCU, in contrast to a White institution, have typically occurred and continue to occur within a more onerous context given the unique historical and contemporary challenges of these institutions. This context necessitates at least a brief acknowledgement when scholars attempt to understand current trends in higher education, especially within the American South. Understanding the historical strategies of HBCUs in meeting the needs of high-achieving Black collegians will show how institutions of higher education need to respond to and identify these students and will better equip both scholars and educators to achieve the best practices and outcomes in honors education for Black collegians.

Going forward, the NCHC can serve a critical role in the next fifty years in sponsoring research on honors education and the contributions of HBCUs to the field of collegiate honors education. Further, the organization can forge exciting collaborations with its member institutions, in the tradition of Joseph Cohen and the ICSS, that might directly support HBCUs in their efforts to provide innovative educational opportunities for its most academically able collegians.

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