

Chapter 3

Debunking The Myth of Dependency: HBCUs and The Challenges of Western Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines a bi-polar ideological constructs of Western and Non-western modes of education within the Historically Black Colleges and Universities educational system. Western curricula have ‘colonized’ Black world educational systems for centuries making it hard to inculcate African ontological and epistemological ideologies in most universities. As a result, the birth of HBCUs was a welcome relief as African Americans and Blacks from Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and Europe found a ‘home’ to be ‘historically aware’ of their lineage and ancestry. This chapter makes a case through critical literature to argue that sustaining and empowering these Black Colleges and Universities through Western and Non-western educational traditions constitute the barometer for success. This would ensure their long lasting role in higher education in the United States and the world.

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INTRODUCTION

“The mis-education of the negro” is the title of the book by Carter G. Woodson published in 1933. In it, the black person is conditioned to imbibe Western and shun Black/African American education (Woodson, 2011). The aim of Historically Black Colleges and Universities is to reverse that trend because according to Bennett and Xie (2003) “curricula at HBCU include a greater integration of Black history and culture than those of majority White institutions” (p. 569). To Woodson, Blacks should learn Western as well as Black/African American education. According to him, what happened in the post-slavery era was the tendency at majority White institutions for both Whites and Black students to embrace Western education because it was the safety valve for integrating oneself into the world community.

The ‘superiority’ of Western ways of life/civilization has been the outcry of many scholars not only in the United States but also in the entire black world (Achebe, 1994; Williams, 1994; Nyamnjoh, 2012; Asante, 2014; Rabaka, 2011). Blacks in continents like Africa, North America, Latin America and Europe have endured the pain of what Molefi Asante has aptly called “hegemonic Eurocentric education” (Asante, 2014, Chapter 3, para. 13). This is nothing short of complete dependency on foreign value system; and so HBCUs should be the academic center for liberating the black person from forceful dependency on Euro-American traditions. There is a sense of psycho-social liberation, satisfaction and confidence when Blacks in the mother continent of Africa, Caribbean, and other parts of the world attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States (Langmia and Durham, 2007). As a case in point, two former African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (Morgan, 1995; Wright, 2004). So, It was that feeling of liberating the mind and soul of the Black person that drew them to register at an HBCU. Today they have remained emblematic figures in Africa.

I intend to highlight what I think has been the achievement of HBCUs and what I believe can be done to move the needle a little further to achieve satisfactory educational uniqueness from a socio-psychological perspective of an HBCU alumni.

UNTAINTED BINOCULAR VIEW

Having worked at two HBCUs, I have come across cultures and value systems that are diverse enough, reflecting some of the overall mission of HBCUs. For instance, in the mission statement of the two universities that I attended, the issue of educat-

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