Last of the Black Titans
The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the 21st Century

Greg Wiggan
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA
with Lakia Scott
Baylor University, USA

This book investigates the historical and contemporary role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In doing so, it provides a background on the pre-colonial entry of Africans into the Americas, as well as African educational traditions, and the struggles for education during the period of enslavement in North America. It discusses the social, historical and contemporary context that pertains to the development of Black education and the formation of HBCUs as a framework for the case study on African American college-bound students' perceptions about attending an HBCU. Last of the Black Titans weaves in students' perspectives regarding HBCUs and concludes with insights and recommendations pertaining to the future of these institutions.

Greg Wiggan is an Associate Professor of Urban Education, Adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology, and Affiliate Faculty Member of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His research addresses urban education and urban sociology in the context of school processes that promote high achievement among African American students and other underserved minority student populations. In doing so, his research also examines the broader connections between the history of urbanization, globalization processes and the internationalization of education in urban schools. His books include: Global Issues in Education: Pedagogy, Policy, Practice, and the Minority Experience; Education in a Strange Land: Globalization, Urbanization, and Urban Schools – The Social and Educational Implications of the Geopolitical Economy; Curriculum Violence: America’s new Civil Rights Issue; Education for the New Frontier: Race, Education and Triumph in Jim Crow America 1867–1945; Following the Northern Star: Caribbean Identities and Education in North American Schools; Unshackled: Education for Freedom, Student Achievement and Personal Emancipation; and In Search of a Canon: European History and the Imperialist State.

Lakia Scott is an Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Baylor University. Her research interests address urban education and student achievement.

Last of the Black Titans
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Series Editor

Shirley R. Steinberg, University of Calgary; Director of Institute of Youth and Community Studies, University of the West of Scotland

Founding Editor


Editorial Board

Rochelle Brock, Indiana University Northwest, USA
Rhonda Hammer, UCLA, USA
Luis Huerta-Charles, New Mexico State University, USA
Christine Quail, McMaster University, Canada
Jackie Seidel, University of Calgary, Canada
Mark Vicars, Victoria University, Queensland, Australia

This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.
Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.
If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce – literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
Last of the Black Titans

The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the 21st Century

Greg Wiggan
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

with Lakia Scott
Baylor University, USA
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Education under Siege, Last of the Black Titans</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Last of the Black Titans: Background on the Entry of</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africans in the Americas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Issues Facing HBCUs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Historical and Social Context of Education for African</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of Schools for African Americans</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Initiatives and HBCU Enrollment</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCU Matriculation and Life Outcomes of Graduates</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: In Their Voice: High School Students’ Perceptions about</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCUs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I: Participants and Schools</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Their Voice: What Is an HBCU?</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Their Voice: What Is a PWI?</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Their Voice: Institutional Differences between HBCUs and PWIs</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Where Are the Black Titans and What Can They Learn from</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCUs: Institutional Factors</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Awareness</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Is Important</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returns on the Degree</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is Important to Prospective Students?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendices 61
Bibliography 67
About the Authors 77
Index 79
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my very first teacher, Mrs. Lyons, the renowned educator in Sav-la-Mar, Westmoreland, Jamaica, and my last teacher, Dr. Asa Hilliard. I owe my deepest gratitude to these two educators who have had a profound impact on my growth and development. I also wish to thank my mother and father (and Baba Hilliard and Brother Robby), who taught me to be firm even when faced by institutional racism and prejudice. And to the ‘Vicker,’ elder ancestor Errol Peynado, and the queen mothers, Mama Scott and Mama “P,” and to the late, Mr. Clinton Scarlett, who was the top librarian in Sav-la-Mar for at least three decades, blessed love. To Queen Makeda and Empress Izana, blessed love. “In loving memory of Dr. John Henrik Clarke.” – Greg Wiggan. “To Dr. Clarke, Dr. Ben, and Dr. Hilliard”

I would like to recognize members of my family. To my husband and best friend, Chadwick Scott, I need to thank you immensely for allowing me to follow this dream. As we welcome Chadley into this world, I need to also thank my parents, Paul and Collette Jones, for their unwavering support and understanding of my academic pursuits. And I would like to especially thank Dr. Wiggan for all of his help and support. – Lakia Scott
INTRODUCTION

*Education under Siege, Last of the Black Titans*

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have—and continue to play a key role in the education of African Americans. In 1900, approximately 2,600 African Americans had postsecondary credentials, largely due to the efforts of public and private HBCUs (Jackson, 2001). One-hundred-and-ten years later, in the 2010–2011 academic year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013) reported that approximately 33,000 bachelor’s degrees were conferred by HBCUs. In 2010, there were an estimated 4.6 million African Americans who had a college degree (JBHE, 2015). And in 2011, approximately 324,000 students were enrolled in the 100 HBCUs across the U.S. (NCES, 2013). HBCUs account for between 9% and 10% of African American undergraduate student enrollment (NCES, 2013; Thurgood Marshall Fund, 2015), and they continue to represent a great legacy in the history of Black higher education.

Founded in 1837 through a generous donation by Richard Humphreys, who was a Quaker and philanthropist, the Institute for Colored Youth in Pennsylvania (later called Cheyney University), was the first HBCU in America (Cheyney University, 2015). This institution was monumental in the formation of Black higher education. Since that time, many historical and contemporary figures began their trek in post-secondary education at HBCUs. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois [W.E.B. Du Bois], sociologist, historian, Pan-Africanist and Civil Rights activist, was an HBCU alumnus. Du Bois graduated from Fisk University [Nashville, Tennessee] in 1888. He continued his education and received a second Bachelor’s degree in History, graduate degree in Sociology, and Ph.D. in History from Harvard University in 1895 (Harvard University Press, n.d.), the year he became the first African American to receive a doctorate degree from the institution. Much of Du Bois’ work examined the race, class, economics and political struggles of African Americans, issues he first became conscious of while studying at Fisk University. His collection of essays, books, and other writings are seminal works and invaluable contributions to our understanding of race relations.

Similarly, Langston Hughes, renowned poet, playwright and social activist, also graduated from an HBCU. Hughes graduated from Lincoln University [Chester County, Pennsylvania] in 1929. Through his poetry and other writings, he provides colorful portrayals of Black life in America.
INTRODUCTION

during the early-to-mid-20th century (Lincoln University, n.d.). Hughes is recognized as one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, which was a cultural movement that focused on African American artistic expressions and the struggle for equal rights (bio, 2015).

In 1930, future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall graduated from Lincoln University. It is also important to note that Kwame Nkrumah, the Pan-Africanist and former president of Ghana, was also a student at Lincoln University, where he completed a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology in 1935. In pursuit of becoming a civil rights attorney, Thurgood Marshall entered law school at Howard University and graduated magna cum laude and first in his class in 1933 (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2012). Marshall was greatly involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) initiatives aimed at challenging Jim Crow legislation and discrimination against African Americans. He is best known for his involvement in the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared public school segregation to be unconstitutional.

Additionally, Civil Rights Leader and Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. earned a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Morehouse College in 1948 (Morehouse College, n.d.). It is worth noting that King, who was a child prodigy, was an early-admit and only fifteen years old when he began his education at Morehouse. By graduating from Morehouse, King was also continuing a family tradition that began with his grandfather, Dr. Adam Daniel Williams, in 1898. King’s own sons, Martin (III) and Dexter, are also a part of the Morehouse legacy.

Toni Morrison, the highly acclaimed novelist and educator, is also an HBCU graduate. In 1953, Morrison graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Howard University (Washington, D.C.). Morrison has received the Pulitzer Prize, the American Book Award, and the Nobel Prize for her work *Beloved*, which is still used in many U.S. schools today. Additionally, international figure, media proprietor, talk show host, actress, producer, philanthropist, and billionaire Oprah Winfrey, received her start at Tennessee State University as a Communications major, where she completed her degree in 1973.

Other notable African Americans who have graduated from HBCUs include Herman Cain [Morehouse, 1967], Jerry Rice [Mississippi Valley State University 1984], and Shelton “Spike” Lee [Morehouse College, 1979]. And more contemporarily, several prominent African Americans completed their education at HBCUs. Tom Joyner, radio host and founder of
REACH Media, Inc., graduated from Tuskegee University with a Sociology degree in 1978. Similarly, Yolanda Adams, award-winning Gospel singer, radio show host, and actress graduated from Texas Southern University in 1983 with a degree in Radio/Television Communications. Pam Oliver, NBA and NFL sportscaster, graduated from Florida A&M University in 1983 with a Bachelor’s degree in Broadcast Journalism. Jacque Reid, popular television and radio personality, earned a Bachelor’s degree in Print Journalism from Clark Atlanta University in 1989. And Stephen Anthony Smith, sports journalist and ESPN personality, received a degree in Mass Communications from Winston-Salem State University in 1991 (Winston-Salem State University, n.d.).

Anika Noni Rose, Tony Award-winning singer and actress, graduated from Florida A&M University with a Bachelor’s degree in Theatre in 1994 (FAMU, n.d.). Similarly, Taraji P. Henson, actress, singer, and Academy Award nominee began her college career at North Carolina A&T State University, but soon after transferred to Howard University where she completed a degree in Fine Arts in 1995. Henson has shared stories of her son being racially profiled by police at University of Southern California (McGloster, 2015). As a result, she decided to enroll him at Howard University. In addition, Keshia Knight Pulliam, a young actress most popularly known for her role as “Rudy Huxtable” on “The Cosby Show,” graduated from Spelman College with a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology in 2001. In 2010, Pulliam founded Kamp Kizzy, a nonprofit organization for young girls. Additionally, in 2010, child prodigy Stephen R. Stafford II joined the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by enrolling at Morehouse College at the age of 13, where he is a triple major in biology, mathematics and computer science. Stafford began taking courses at Morehouse when he was 11 years old.

In spite of HBCUs’ long and decorated history of educating African Americans, their future remains uncertain. More recently, schools like St. Augustine’s University and South Carolina State University have been struggling to stay open amidst accreditation and financial challenges. At Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina, the enrollment has decreased by 27%. Additionally, Shaw University has more than 20 million dollars in debt (Chambers, 2015) and Barber-Scotia College lost its accreditation in 2004. Over the last 80 years, several HBCUs have closed, these closings include: Daniel Payne College [1889–1977], Friendship College [1891–1981], Guadalupe College [1884-1936], Kittrell College [1886–1975], Leland College [1870–1960], Mississippi Industrial College [1905–1982]), Western University (Kansas) [1865–1943], Prentiss Institute
INTRODUCTION

[1907–1989], Bishop College [1881–1988], Natchez Junior College [1884–1989], Mary Holmes College [1892–2004], and South Carolina State University [on probationary status and proposed to temporarily close until 2017]. Schools like Morris Brown College, Howard, Clarke Atlanta, Fisk, Cheyney, Tennessee State, and Wilberforce Universities, among others, continue to face accreditation and or financial struggles.

These institutions are faced with contemporary challenges that include: declining Black student enrollment, financial instability, accreditation sanctions, and increasing speculations concerning the value of an HBCU degree in the 21st century. Additionally, in consideration of the fact that the mission of HBCUs are changing in order to accommodate greater racial diversity, the need to sustain federal and state funding has had an impact on the enrollment of these institutions. Enrollment trends over the 20th—and now 21st century, are indicative of how integration has both positively and negatively impacted HBCUs. Notwithstanding the social, political and economic changes in the American landscape, HBCUs continue to play an important role in African American higher education attainment (NCES, 2012), and they are some of the leading producers of Black science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates (Upton & Tanenbaum, 2014). In this sense, these institutions are the titans or giants of Black higher education. However, because of the gradual decline in Black enrollment at these institutions, there is a need to more deeply examine the relevance of these schools in the 21st century.

It is in this light that this book explores the historical and contemporary role of HBCUs in the education of African Americans. While this is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment on the topic, the book examines how HBCUs have served—and continue to serve as a force in Black higher education. The book presents a case study of African American high school students’ perceptions about attending an HBCU. Since these are the prospective students who are most likely to attend a Black institution of higher education, we explore the following research question: What are the perceptions of African American college-bound students on attending a Historically Black College or University?

In the context of this book, the following terms are operationalized.

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY (HBCU)

HBCUs are degree-granting institutions that were established in the 1800s and prior to 1964, with the principal mission of providing educational access
and opportunities for African Americans. While HBCUs have traditionally and contemporarily served mainly African Americans, enrollment is open to all students regardless of their race or ethnicity. These schools are categorized as: public 2- and 4-year colleges/universities, private 4-year colleges/universities, and land-grant institutions. There are approximately 100 HBCUs [public and private] across the nation that confer associates, bachelors, and advanced-level degrees.

PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION (PWI)

A predominantly White institution (PWI) is a postsecondary college or university with White students accounting for 50% or more of the student body. These institutions are considered historically White and are most commonly rooted with patterns and traditions of Western Europe.

AFRICAN AMERICANS/BLACKS

An African American is someone who is of African descent which can include being born in the U.S., but having African ancestral lineage. Additionally, this term is also inclusive of immigrant born Blacks, that is, people who are of African descent and now reside in – or outside of continental Africa. In this book, the term African Americans is used interchangeably with Blacks. Due to the historical and contemporary nature of the book’s topic, we do not differentiate between the two terms.

In chapter 1, we provide a background on the pre-colonial entry of Africans into the Americas, as well as African educational traditions, and the struggles for education during the period of enslavement in North America. In the second chapter, we discuss the social, historical and contemporary context that pertains to the development of Black education and the formation of HBCUs as a framework for our study. In the third chapter, we introduce our study on African American college-bound students’ perceptions about attending an HBCU. And in the final chapter, we discuss our findings and provide recommendations regarding the future of HBCUs.
CHAPTER 1

LAST OF THE BLACK TITANS

Background on the entry of Africans in the Americas

The entry of Africans into the Americas dates back to 800 B.C.E., before the arrival of Europeans. During this time, Africans who were later called Olmecs sailed to the Americas. Artifacts from their civilization have been discovered by modern researchers. The Olmecs had a presence throughout the Americas and particularly in Mexico (See Ivan Van Sertima’s They Came Before Columbus and Robin Walker’s When We Ruled; The Ancient and Medieval History of Black Civilizations). While in the Americas, they developed a relationship with other native groups such as the Aztecs, Mayans, Caribs, Tainos, Chibchas, Tupis, Guaranis, Incas, Araucanians, and the Arawaks, among others. Back in Africa, African societies varied from communal hunter-gather societies to advanced civilizations (Diop, 1974). Africans also had educational traditions on the continent of Africa. In fact, the early development of institutions of higher education is attributed to—and directly linked to continental Africa and historical Egypt (also known as Kemet, meaning the land of the Blacks). Obenga (1992) asserts that, “a crucial understanding of the transmission of knowledge can be understood by the direct line that the Greek educational lineage inherited from Kemet” (p. 21). He further postulates that, “this is why we are interested in African philosophy of the Pharaonic period: to connect the contemporary with that of the ancient and to demonstrate the pre-existence of African philosophy before its appearance anywhere else on this earth” (p. 28). On this issue the ancient Greek Plutarch, in his book Parallel Lives, notes: “The ‘wisdom of the Egyptians’ always seems to have a fascination for the Greeks, and at this period Alexandria, with its famous library and its memories of the Ptolemies, of Kallimachus and of Theokritus, was an important [center] of Greek intellectual activity” (Plutarch, 75 C.E./2012, p. 17). Similarly, Greek Historian Herodotus in his Histories explain:

For the people of Colchis are evidently Egyptian, and this I perceived for myself before I heard it from others. So when I had come to consider the matter I asked them both; and the Colchians had remembrance of the
Egyptians more than the Egyptians of the Colchians; but the Egyptians said they believed that the Colchians were a portion of the army of Sesostris. That this was so I conjectured myself not only because they are dark-skinned and have curly hair, but also still more because the Colchians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians alone of all the races of men have [practiced] circumcision from the first. (Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014, Second book of the histories, section 104)

Herodotus continues:

But as to those matters which concern men, the priests agreed with one another in saying that the Egyptians were the first of all men on earth to find out the course of the year, having divided the seasons into twelve parts to make up the hole; and this they said they found out from the stars: and they reckon to this extent more wisely than the Hellenes… (Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014, Second book of the histories, section 4)

To the extent and acknowledgment of Plutarch, Herodotus and others regarding the intellectual tradition and contributions of Black Africans, it should be recognized that access to—and further development of knowledge for African Americans in a contemporary sense is rather an inherited right from their ancestral beginnings, because people of African descent have been creators and transmitters of knowledge since its inception. In fact, two of the oldest universities in the world, the University of Waset and the University of Sankore were located in continental Africa (African Kingdoms, n.d.). In 1280, the University at Timbuktu in West Africa (also called University of Sankore) was created under Mansa Musa’s reign, who was the King of Mali (Davidson, 1964). Mansa Musa was one of the wealthiest kings of the Medieval World. Saad (1983) explains that the ancient city of Timbuktu and its institutions of higher learning were created by Africans who converted to Islam. These Africans maintained a tradition of scholarly excellence. Saad (1983) notes:

Although it was not uncommon to engage in several fields of study at the same time, candidates to scholarship usually began their higher education in grammar, then in tafsir. In Qur’anic literacy school (mak-tabs), these two fields at an elementary level were treated as one and the same; the instructor (mu’allim) introduced his students to Arabic grammar while teaching and dictating the text of the Qur’an itself. At more advanced levels, the two fields were likewise studied simultaneously, though sometimes under different masters. The
main distinction lay in the fact that the students were introduced to grammatical commentaries as such, while in *tafsir*, works of a wide range of authorities were used as textbooks. (p. 74)

Saad’s (1983) findings are also supported by the narrative of al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi (also known as Leo Africanus). In 1518, Spanish soldiers captured al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi, a Muslim scholar of Moorish descent (an African descendant living in Granada, Spain). Once the Spanish learned of al-Wassan al Fasi’s brilliance as a scholar, they presented him to Pope Leo X as a gift. Pope Leo X had al-Wassan al-Fasi baptized into Roman Catholicism and changed his name to Leo Africanus. This was perhaps a strategic move by Africanus to save his own life. Pope Leo commissioned Africanus to write a book that described and explained the contours of North Africa. Africanus’ book was entitled, *Description of Africa*, or also called, *The History and Description of Africa: And of the Notable Things Therein Contained* (BBC: Leo Africanus, 2011).

In the *Description of Africa*, Africanus makes the following observation:

> Passing therefore westward from the Island of Siene, you enter into the province of Nubia, bordering on the west upon Gaoga, eastward upon the river Nilus, towards the North, upon Egypt, and southward upon the desert of Goran. The inhabitants thereof called by Strabo live at this present (as Francisco Aluarez reporteth) a most miserable and wretched kind of life; for having lost the sincerities and light of the gospel, they do embrace infinite corruption of the Jewish and Mahometan religions\(^1\…

Meroe called at this time by the names of Guengare, Amara, and Nobe, being the greatest and fairest isle which Nilus maketh, and resembled by Herodotus to the shape of a target, containeth in breadth a thousand, and in length three thousand stadios or furlongs. (Africanus, Pory, & Brown, 1600, pp. 28–29)

Africanus’ knowledge would prove to be most valuable to European nations and explorers who were interested in carving up and colonizing the continent of Africa (Wiggan, 2015). The narrative of Leo Africanus points to the fact that Africans were literate before the arrival of Europeans. However, they had literacy in their own social and cultural context, which was not always valued in the Eurocentric western world, particularly on the plantations of the Americas.
Clarke (1977) provides insight on the intentional and neglected intellectual history of African scholarship. When elaborating on the University of Sankore, Clarke (1977) explains:

Before the destruction of the Empire of Songhay by the Moroccans and European mercenary soldiers at the end of the sixteenth century, the Africans in the Western Sudan (inner East Africa) had been bringing into being great empires and cultures for over a thousand years, the most notable empires being Ghana and Mali. The Songhay Empire and the University of Sankore, at Timbuctoo, was in existence over a hundred years after the slave trade had already been started along the west coast of Africa. During this period in West African history—from the early part of the fourteenth century to the time of the Moorish invasion in 1591—the city of Timbuctoo and the University of Sankore in the Songhay Empire were the intellectual centers of Africa. Black scholars were enjoying a renaissance that was known and respected throughout most of Africa and in parts of Europe. (Clarke, 1977, p. 142)

To this extent, the notion of Greeks being the creators of philosophy and intellectual thought as postulated in Western academies, should be dispelled. Clarke (1977) and many others [i.e., Asa Hilliard, John G. Jackson, Molefi Asante, Marimba Ani, etc.] have attempted to correct these forms of miseducation through their scholarship in fields such as Africana Studies, Anthropology, History, Kemetology (Egyptology) and Sociology in order to realign philosophical, methodological, historical, and intellectual thought towards continental Africa—where education and civilization began. In fact, a 2013 study conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign sought to determine what percent of U.S. colleges and universities offer African American studies programs. The findings revealed that currently 76% of U.S. colleges and universities provide some form of Black Studies (Alkalimat et al., 2013). However, only 20% of these institutions had formal units or programs, while 56% reported that they offered Black Studies through a course or a series of courses (Alkalimat et al., 2013). While many schools did not have official Black Studies Departments, they reported that they offered this curriculum through departmental units or elective courses (Alkalimat et al., 2013). This is a tribute to the legacy of William Leo Hansberry, who established the first Black Studies/Africana Studies program in the U.S. at Howard University in 1922. However, the struggle to correct the curriculum and to infuse multicultural and diversity perspectives...
LAST OF THE BLACK TITANS

in public K-12 education and PWIs is ongoing, as education is one of the last great battlefields for freedom and democracy.

Notwithstanding these educational developments in continental Africa and Black education in the U.S., as noted, the historical period of Africans’ involuntary entry and enslavement in North America began in 1619 with the arrival of African slaves (also called indentured servants) taken from the island of Barbados to James Town, Virginia. This marked the beginning of one of the greatest atrocities in human history, and whose impact, consequences and outcomes are still lingering in the 21st century (See John Henrik Clarke’s *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust*).

After the events of 1619, Africans would later be taken directly from the continent of Africa to North America in chattel slavery, where they were bought, sold, traded, and bred like cattle for profits. As early as 1644, a group of Boston businessmen financed three slave ships to sail directly to Africa. As the profits and competition for slaves increased, conflicts between Protestant and Catholic countries became intense. Since North America was established as a Protestant country under British colonialism, it developed its own local and global economy based principally on slavery, sharecropping, and trading spices. Internationally, the enslavement of Africans played a crucial role in the development of global capitalism (see Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*). The struggle for freedom would continue throughout the Civil War [1861–1865] and into the Reconstruction period [1865–1877].

Prior to the Reconstruction period, the time that followed the American Civil War, most African Americans (termed as “Negroes”) were in positions of servitude and they were not permitted to receive a formal education. It was illegal for a slave to learn how to read and write for this would threaten the White establishment and the institution of slavery (Woodson, 1915). For example, in 1740, South Carolina officially passed the Negro Act, which was formal legislation that made it illegal to teach African Americans to read English. As noted above, the Africans were literate in their native languages, practices, and culture. However, by 1835, most southern and many northern states had officially passed anti-literacy laws. For example, as early as 1641, Massachusetts was among the first colonies to legalize slavery, and as a rule, slaves were not permitted to learn to read.

Similarly, in 1667 in the state of Virginia, a law was passed that indicated that Christian baptism did not change a Black person’s status as a slave. In other words, even if the enslaved Africans converted to Christianity, they were to remain as slaves (PBS, 2004). Slaveholders were interested in
Christianizing slaves and keeping them illiterate; this included giving them Protestant names, changing their cultural ethos to Europeanize them, and teaching them to be obedient and to wait until the ‘afterlife’ to receive their reward for being good servants.

Thus, the pursuit of education became evermore important for African Americans after slavery because it served as a promise for freedom and racial uplift (Wiggan, Scott, Watson, & Reynolds, 2014). With the help of empathetic northern Whites and through the work of the American Colonization Society, a controversial White organization that sought to train and relocate free Blacks to Liberia to help run an American colony in Africa, a small, but select group of African Americans received a college degree before the Civil War (see Carter G. Woodson’s *The Education of the Negro prior to 1861*). Through these and other deliberate, but dangerous attempts at providing an education to African Americans, there was a small group of educated Blacks before the Civil War. For example, in 1849 Charles Lewis Reason became the first Black faculty member on a White college campus in America. He was a professor of mathematics at New York Central College in McGrawville, New York (Wiggan, 2011). Additionally, the distinguished scholar Martin Henry Freeman graduated from Middlebury College in 1849 and he remained in Vermont and later became a professor at Avery College (formerly Allegheny Institute). Among other Black professors were William G. Allen and George B. Vashon who both served at Avery College in the 1860s. And later, in 1876, Edward Alexander Bouchet graduated from Yale University with a Ph.D. in physics, making him the first African American to receive a doctorate from an American university (Wiggan, 2010).

After the Reconstruction period [1865–1877] and landmark legislation (such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954) pushing for the development of education for all Americans, the introduction of new educational opportunities greatly influenced Black students’ decision to attend HBCUs. With the aftermath of the Civil War, HBCUs represented one of the few opportunities for African Americans to receive access to higher education (Jackson, 2001; Lovett, 2011). In the *College Bred Negro American*, W. E. B. Du Bois explained the impact of Black college graduates at the turn of the 20th century. Du Bois argued that HBCUs played a vital role in the production of Black college graduates and Black leaders. For Du Bois’ monumental intellectual contributions to Black social progress, Historian John Henrik Clarke has rightly referred to him as a Black titan (see John Henrik Clarke et al.’s *Black titan: W.E.B. Du Bois*). Similarly, with respect to the impact of historically black colleges and universities, at the institutional
level one might argue that HBCUs were *titans* or *giants of Black education* and Black social progress. In this book, *Black titans* is used to underscore the significant role that HBCUs have—and continue to play in the education of African Americans.

While having rich institutional legacies, during the early-to-mid 20th century, with increased resistance against segregation and gradual advances in the integration of PWIs, African Americans’ enrollment at HBCUs began to decline. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there was a continual decline in African American student enrollment in HBCUs that started in the early part of the 20th century (NCES, 1995, 2004). From the second-half of the 20th century to 2015, there have been several prevailing factors that have threatened the future of HBCUs: (a) looming financial issues (Cantey, Bland, Mack, & Joy-Davis, 2012; Minor, 2008; Stuart, 2012), (b) accreditation concerns (Fester, Gasman, & Nguyen, 2012), and (c) negative media attention (Gasman, 2006, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Jencks & Riesman, 1967). Although HBCUs have played a major role (both historically and contemporarily) in the education of African Americans (Albritton, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Cantey et al., 2012; Franklin & Savage, 2004; Freeman, 1999; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Perna, 2001; Thompson, 2008; Wiggan, 2011; Woodson, 1915), one is left to wonder about the continuing significance of these *Black titans* in the 21st century. If HBCUs are looking to African Americans as their primary constituency for their enrollment, then it should be imperative that these institutions obtain feedback on how this demographic views these schools when considering which college or university to attend. Today, HBCUs enroll between 9% and 10% of all African Americans attending a college or university, and they award approximately 20% of all Black students’ undergraduate degrees (Thurgood Marshall Fund, 2015; UNCF, 2014).

A growing body of literature explains HBCUs’ historical and continuing contributions to the African American community (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 1998; Franklin & Savage, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Wiggan, 2011). Many researchers attribute HBCUs with providing students with cultural value, social empowerment, and the development of racial and cultural identities (Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Franklin & Savage, 2004; Lovett, 2011). These institutional characteristics are consistently identified as being part of an HBCU experience. It should then be recognized that Black students who attend HBCUs participate in what shall be termed as a *Black college experience*, an issue that is addressed later in this book [Chapter 3].
(2006) discusses the Black college experience as one that is characteristic of institutional family, cultural immersion, and universal inclusion. That is, in the Black college setting, students feel more connected to the faculty, staff, and their peers through social activities and organizations, all of which help to solidify common cultural values and social bonds. This book seeks to explore African American college-bound teens’ perceptions about selecting and attending an HBCU. It addresses the need to investigate how student perceptions are related to HBCU enrollment in the 21st century.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FACING HBCUS

HBCUs are credited with producing 50% of the Black school teachers and administrators (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2015). These success rates can be attributed to the nurturing and supporting environment at these institutions. However, perceptions surrounding the contemporary role of these institutions continue to challenge their stability. In this sense, HBCUs were perceived as important when African Americans were unable to gain access to higher education at other institutions. However, more recently, many question if HBCUs are still relevant since African American students generally have options as it relates to accessing higher education. In addition to decreased enrollment, school finances (Cantey et al., 2012; Minor, 2008; Stuart, 2012), negative media attention (Gasman & Bowman, 2011), and accreditation concerns (Fester et al., 2012) are some of the issues that HBCUs must mediate.

Minor (2008) discusses the issues related to HBCUs in regards to financial challenges, anti-affirmative action policies, and competition from PWIs and community colleges. Minor (2008) explains that much of the confusion about the role of HBCUs rested on where they were historically and what they are becoming in the contemporary era. Historically, HBCUs principally served African Americans. However, today, with pressure from governors and state legislatures to close or diversify these schools, affirmative action is now used at public HBCUs for White students, to help bring diversity to these institutions (meaning more non-Black students) (Paddock, 2013). This is affirmative action for White students. HBCUs like Delaware State University and Winston-Salem State University have increased their enrollment of White students, many of whom are attending on scholarships and or affirmative action related tuition waivers. While the historical use of affirmative action is shifting to encourage White students to attend HBCUs, some opponents of these initiatives see HBCUs—or any institution that is premised and operated to serve a racial minority student population, as
unnecessary and unjustifiable in the 21st century. Still, HBCUs represent an important pathway that helps provide African Americans with access to postsecondary education. Minor (2008) argues that three elements are needed to understand the contemporary role of HBCUs: (a) assessment of enrollment trends over the last few decades; (b) legal sanctions that have impacted HBCU infrastructures; and (c) the relationship that racial context has as a variable in education attainment. He asserts that despite Civil Rights triumphs, many states have still found ways to segregate higher education opportunities.

For example, Mississippi has restricted access by race to state colleges by promoting disparities in admission policies, academic programs, and funding (Minor, 2008). Specifically, “other race” degree policies, or funding tied to increasing non-Black student enrollment at HBCUs, have negatively impacted student enrollment (Minor, 2008). Given such racially restrictive school funding measures, Minor (2008) contends that the survival of HBCUs will depend on how successful these institutions are in convincing the public that their mission is still important.

National Center for Education Statistics data from 2004 and 2012 (NCES, 2013) indicate that nationally, college enrollment for African Americans has increased, specifically at PWIs. Among public HBCUs, African Americans are still the largest student population. However, as NCES (2013) data reveals, the number of African American students entering and attending HBCUs is gradually declining (see Table 1). Cantey, Bland, Mack, and Joy-Davis (2012) concur and acknowledge that decreasing enrollment must be countered with new initiatives in technology, the recruitment and retention of high quality faculty, and by modeling Black success through increasing the presence of African American faculty who hold PhDs. Matthews and Hawkins (2006) note that HBCU administrators and leaders should showcase how these institutions are adjusting and thriving, in spite of their challenges. They note:

> Despite their problems—fractured budgets, ailing and aging infrastructures, and revolving door leadership—they continue to do more with less while managing to outpace majority institutions in training and producing the majority of the nation’s Black teachers, preachers, social workers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, engineers, and scholars. (Matthews & Hawkins, 2006, p. 37)

Although HBCUs have a legacy of nurturing Black student success, the future of these institutions is at risk. In the next chapter, we discuss the social
CHAPTER 1

context that pertains to the development of Black education and the formation of Black institutions of higher learning as a framework for our investigation on 21st century high school students’ perceptions about attending an HBCU.

NOTE

1 It is important to note that at the time of Africanus’ writing, the letter “J” was not created as yet.