



United Negro College Fund, Inc.
Building for Equal Opportunity
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S.
ALLEN**

**SOME
CRITICAL
REASONS
FOR
CONTRIBUTING
TO
THE
CONTINUING
SUPPORT
OF
THE
PRIVATE,
PREDOMINANTLY
BLACK
COLLEGE
IN
THE
DECADE
OF
THE
SEVENTIES**



Van S. Allen's association with the member institutions of The United Negro College Fund began as an undergraduate at Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi, from which he received his A.B. degree in 1950. He holds Masters degrees from the University of Michigan and the University of North Carolina, and a certificate in alcoholic studies from Yale University. He was awarded his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina in 1969. Dr. Allen has also taught in two member institutions of UNCF — Tougaloo; and Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. He is currently Associate Project Director of the Institute of Higher Educational Opportunity of the Southern Regional Educational Board in Atlanta, Georgia.

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Text of an address by Dr. Van S. Allen to a meeting of the national staff of the United Negro College Fund, Washington, D.C., January 1970.

I speak of the private, predominantly black colleges and their importance to our nation today.

You will recall that it was only a few years ago that leading white and black educators, politicians, church leaders, and even some philanthropic foundations that had, in varying measures, supported these colleges, were convinced that integration would open the doors of the white and predominantly white colleges and universities of this Nation and thus would end the need for the then black and predominantly black colleges. Many of these attitudes persist even today, in spite of what hard-earned experience garnered since the 1954 public school desegregation decision has suggested to us.

Those whites who disagreed with the latter position were viewed by certain segments of the black community as subtle supporters of segregation. Their liberal white friends viewed them in much the same manner.

Blacks who saw the need for continuation of the black college were caught up in much the same set of circumstances as their white counterparts, as they frequently were viewed by white liberals as separatists, and segregationists, interested only in the security of their own position within the segregated system.

Blacks, whom our young college students would call "whitimized" today, looked upon those blacks who thought that black colleges should continue as being separatists, segregationists, etc.

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There are a couple of ironies in these positions that are very clear to us today, but were very opaque five years ago.

I speak now of the attitude of superiority on the part of many of our white friends and contributors who were unable to see that the black colleges were doing a job in education that no other colleges or universities in our Nation were doing, and the fact that about twenty of those colleges had been doing this job for nearly one hundred years.

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I speak of the attitude that viewed as inferior institutions and dedicated faculties who, through the years, have taken the raw black youths of the cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta, from the tobacco fields of North Carolina, the red clay hills of Georgia, to name a few areas, and starting where they were academically, saw them through an academic experience that led them finally to the heights of academic achievements in the finest universities in this Nation.

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I speak of the blindness that would not allow many of our benefactors to see that the private black and predominantly black colleges, as a rule, had no history of discrimination.

Few of them ever had limiting clauses in their charters regarding race. Hence, discrimination in education is, for the most part, a phenomenon of our predominantly white culture, not the black culture.

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I speak of the attitude that assumed that the white culture had the answers for all of the needs and problems of black people, and hence, the sooner everything having a purely black identity could be removed, the better.

Tragically enough, there are blacks who, having been subjected to the same educational experiences as their white counterparts, hold much the same attitudes.

Common attitudes of this latter group have been that the black college is an inferior institution and its students and faculties are inferior. This same black today is usually very pleased to take a position with the predominantly white university. And this is no great mystery when one considers the fact that there is an innate tendency for each culture to take care of its own by producing people who will support its concepts and values. Until most recently our white and predominantly white institutions taught, consciously and conscientiously, every comer to "think white."

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It is small wonder that black students today accuse many of their black teachers of being "whitimized," of being insensitive to the needs of black students. And how true this is when I recall those college teachers who insisted on us black students internalizing all of the patterns of the white culture while debasing everything that was of our own culture. Many of us ended up ashamed of our parents, to the extent of rejecting

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them, all because we were, under the guidance of well-meaning people, "whitimized." We were trained to be white black men or *evolués* as black French-speaking Africans would say.

Our experiences in attempts at integration have made us realize that where blacks and whites are concerned in America, we have developed two cultures — one white and one black, and both have influenced the characteristics of each other.

Both of these cultures have their individual value systems, folkways and mores.

Both systems have developed their own ego-supportive forces which are essential to the development of identity and the survival of the individual.

Few of our white supporters appreciate how close the black man came to being destroyed by an educational system that denied his existence and magnified whiteness. I recall clearly and traumatically how, on the campus of one of our Big Ten universities in 1950, I was rudely awakened to the fact that blacks viewed associating together as being a very unpopular practice. There I found American black students deliberately staying away from each other on the campus, in the dining halls, and in the dormitories. At the same time, I observed that African, Japanese, Chinese, Jewish and Indian students sought each others' company and frequently got together as a group to talk.

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The black student, on the other hand, was so obsessed with the idea of fitting the white image that he was seeking every means of losing his identity and otherwise disappearing into the white world.

Many of our supporters have not understood this need for identity on the part of black people. They have not understood that effective integration cannot take place in this Nation until every ethnic group knows and appreciates itself and is equally appreciated by every other cultural group.

This will occur only when we teach each ethnic group to appreciate its own and the culture of others . . . as equals. To debase or project as inferior any culture is to render the integrative formula null and void.

What I have attempted to say is: we must help those who would support us to understand that we live in a pluralistic society, a society that recognizes the Mormons' right to a Brigham Young, the Catholics' right to a Notre Dame, the Jews' right to a Brandeis, and the Baptists' right to a Wake Forest.

This same society has experienced great pain and gnashing of teeth as it has been challenged to extend to the black culture the same right to be. Yet this is a racist and otherwise discriminatory attitude which presently is threatening the very foundations of our Nation. It is an attitude that still supports the idea that only white is good.

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served this Nation well, even with limited resources. To verify this point we have but to take a look at the black intelligentsia produced by our white and now predominantly white colleges and universities in this country since the Emancipation Proclamation, as compared with black intelligentsia produced by our private black and predominantly black colleges. The figures suggest that, except for the black colleges, the development of black intelligentsia in this country would have been even more tragically limited.

A head count of black leadership today will again support the potency of this group of colleges. The Martin Kings, Angie Brooks, Ralph Abernathys, Charles Evers, Thurgood Marshalls, to name just a few, all have come by way of one of these institutions. And there are thousands of others who are not as well known but are making their contribution.

The whole civil rights thrust received its impetus from the leadership of graduates of these colleges. And, while some are trying to make up their minds about the rightness or appropriateness of this role for black college graduates, I would hasten to say no other force has done so much to take the hypocrisy out of America than has this movement. And further, I challenge anyone to point to one development growing out of the struggle of blacks for civil rights in this Nation that has in any way weakened us. On the

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contrary, this Nation has been substantially strengthened. No longer can any nation charge America with legally supporting second-class citizenship. I contend further, that if our white and predominantly white universities had been developing a similar sensitivity in their graduates, the whole change process would have been far less painful than has been the case.

We need these colleges to continue to produce such citizens for the good of this Nation.

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If our donors can be persuaded to accept the pluralistic concept of the American society, if they can see the need of the black and predominantly black college to be, one might proceed to point out areas of academic experience that these colleges are uniquely prepared to address themselves to, not just for black students, but all students who want a well-rounded educational experience; all students who wish to prepare themselves for working in the *real world*.

One might start by again pointing to the democratic tradition that these colleges have as compared to their white counterparts.

This tradition has resulted in the development of black intelligentsia who have been able to function across racial lines . . .

This tradition has resulted in the development of black intelligentsia who have been able to function across racial lines because they were taught to understand both the black and white cultures. They were taught this type understanding in the classroom and by the example that was more or less consistently set by integrated faculties within these institutions.

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Today these institutions are the only ones with the accumulated know-how for showing the way in education for living in an integrated society.

We might also point out, as further evidence of the effective work of these colleges, the fact that our black teachers who have been graduated from these colleges, and are now finding themselves assigned to the predominantly white school to teach, are compiling a much better record of successes than are their white counterparts who are frequently having their first real contact with blacks in their lives.

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One of the major differentials operating to create this pattern is the fact that blacks have had to learn how to deal with rejection at the hands of whites. Their very survival, for so long, depended on their being able to decipher the white mind. On the contrary, nothing in our society suggested that whites were obligated to learn about blacks. In fact, their own culture was designed to generally discourage such concerns on the parts of whites through the use of such labels as "nigger lovers," "traitors," and outright ostracism of the individual. The end result of this pattern is a population of white teachers with low tolerances for rejection, and hence the high dropout rate we are seeing among those assigned to black schools.

Our black colleges are in the best position to offer leadership in the preparation of white teachers

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for working in our integrated schools. The Harvards and Yales, the Michigans, Columbias and Ohio States — none of these can do this job, primarily because money cannot buy *the black experience*. The best their money can do is make possible the creation of an artificial environment for such purposes, which raises the question of why must we spend money creating a resource that we already have in our midst? Why not give these colleges the opportunity of playing the role that they are prepared to play, and which is so critical to our Nation today.

These colleges, over the years, have attracted a rare breed of whites. Whites who were principled to the extent that they were willing to make their lives examples of what this democracy is all about by casting their lot with the black college.

Many of these whites have paid severe economic and social prices for their principles. At the same time, they have accumulated an experience and expertise that this Nation needs today more than ever before. These white faculty people are in a position to serve as an important part of the bridge that can help other whites to a more understanding and effective attitude regarding themselves and blacks.

Is there any reason why we should permit this resource to lie fallow?

Then, what about those black administrators who have adminis-



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tered these mixed faculty groups? What about the skills that have grown out of their experiences? Would not these skills be helpful to the white administrator who now finds himself confronting a mixed faculty and student body? White administrators could learn much from these black administrators. And again I emphasize the fact that none of our major educational institutions can claim such a resource.

The potential resource that these institutions have for training both black and white teachers is unlimited. Through cooperative teacher training programs between predominantly black and predominantly white colleges, whites can be introduced to the black culture. They can be helped to understand what they must do in order to reach the black student in the classroom. And by the same token the black student in the sharing experience can learn ever more about the white world, its dreams and aspirations. The end result being a deeper and more meaningful appreciation for cultural differences, which is absolutely essential to successful teaching.

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Our donors must be made to understand that a cultural heritage is best transmitted by the group itself, primarily because of the group's indigenous understanding of its many components. In view of this position one has to question the prerogative of white institutions and predominately white institutions that would deign to

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offer black studies in the same sense and depth as black institutions.

Our donors should be encouraged to see that black studies is a "thing" of black people, black culture and thinking black.

It should be pointed out that just as we blacks have been willing to be educated in predominantly white institutions over the years, we also covet the right to be educated in the black or predominantly black college. Above all, we want the right to a relevant education, an education that, in addition to introducing us to the ways and means of the larger society, also deals with the problems that a minority group such as ours must overcome in order to succeed. For example, political science as it is generally taught is applicable to the white experience in American society. It does not deal with the socio-psychological principles that a Charles Evers has to pursue in order to be elected Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi.

Our donors also need to know that our white counterpart institutions are beginning to be much more appreciative of the job that black institutions have done with black youth over the years.

Many of these formerly white institutions are now having unfortunate experiences with their black students, experiences they would not have had if they had been willing to believe that black people might have had something to offer white people.

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Tragically, these institutions are handicapped by the conceptualized myth of inferiority regarding the black institution and are destined to continue to be frustrated when their black students ask for special dormitories, dining areas, meeting rooms, etc., that they can call their own.

The black college can do much to help bridge this chasm if they are supported, and if they are asked. No other institutions in our Nation are prepared to do this job.

Because of the common needs of our now predominantly black and white colleges, we are afforded an unusual opportunity to reap the benefits of integrated education without either the black or white institutions in close proximity to each other having to lose their identities. Through cooperative arrangements, students (black and white) of both colleges taking courses on both campuses would eliminate the necessity of the white college siphoning away black faculty members, would integrate both student bodies, and would provide additional choices in employment opportunities for blacks and whites. Joint appointments of faculty members would be a means of handling this latter problem. Such a relationship will be tangible evidence of the acceptance of the black institution as an equal partner in meeting the educational needs of all American youth.

Our donors should be reminded that black colleges are still educating better than half of all black

... black colleges are still educating better than half of all black students getting a college education in America today.

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students getting a college education in America today. Hence, there is no real question of their importance to our Nation.

You might suggest, finally, to our donors, to quote Rev. Farley W. Wheelwright, who in one of his recent sermons at the Unitary Society of Cleveland, Ohio, said:

"Time was when white liberals were certain that they had the keys to viable race relations. 'Just make black people as nice as we are and everything will be dandy . . .'"

He continues:

"But our keys have failed to unlock doors of equal opportunity to masses of black men, women, and children. We had no master key, just lots of little keys to little doorways. While we opened cracks for selected blacks to enter the white world of education, professions, homes and politics, we systematically kept locked the doors of *black heritage, universal education, and equal opportunity*. White liberal sympathy to black oppression has ever been magnanimous. [However] white dollars — white power — have remained solidly entrenched in white banks, white real estate, white institutionalism."¹

To quote Wheelwright further:

"The key to brotherhood, white style, failed to open brotherhood doors for yet another basic reason, a reason many white people, myself perhaps included, [he says] have failed fully to

¹ *National Observer* (Monday, November 10, 1969), p. 12.

² *Ibid.*

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... we have our own world and we are fighting for the right to live in it with dignity and honor and integrity, the due of every man.

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understand. That is that the masses of black people did not and do not now want to enter the white world, become a part of our standards . . .”

And I would add, like every other ethnic group, we have our own world and we are fighting for the right to live in it with dignity and honor and integrity, the due of every man.

The black colleges have the keys to the doors of education and equal employment opportunity for both blacks and whites who anticipate successful participation in the present and future American society.

This is power, the kind of power that America has to recognize and respect. The kind of power that America needs today more than ever before. These colleges are a resource that even America, with its unlimited resources, cannot purchase.

I charge you that we blacks must not lose this power that is the product of so many dedicated souls who have gone before. For, to lose this power would imperil our own heritage, and hence, the true heritage of this nation.

America can ill afford to lose this resource.

We at the Southern Regional Education Board believe in the future of the private black and predominantly black college. We believe in a pluralistic society that would see each cultural group as an equal.

³ Ibid.

United Negro College Fund, Inc.

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