

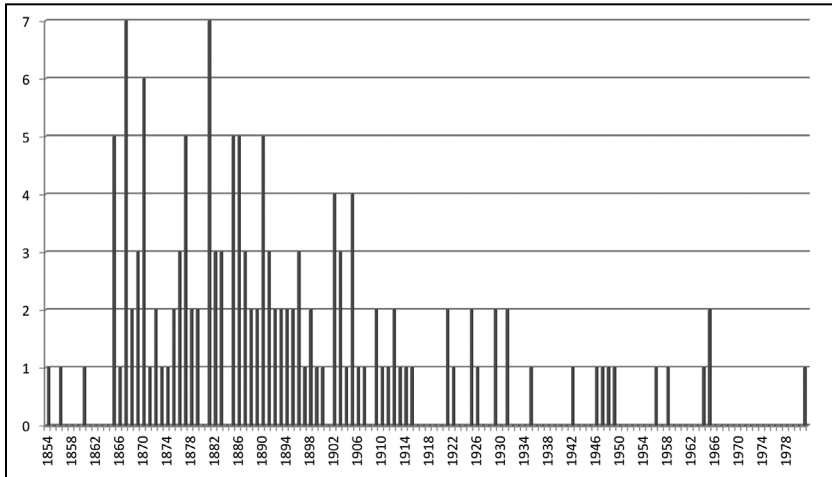
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The Black Higher Education Field

Ashmun Institute, founded in 1854 and now known as Lincoln University of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, holds claim as the first school established with the intent of offering “higher education in the arts and sciences” for youth of African descent.¹ In the course of conducting this research, I identified 154 schools that began with the primary mission to provide higher education to black Americans.²

As Figure 1.1³ indicates, while three black colleges—Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, Wilberforce University of Ohio, and Atlanta University of Georgia—began before the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865), the remaining black colleges opened their doors in its aftermath.

These schools intended to provide the formerly enslaved and the generations following them with the means to participate within a democratic society. Southern Reconstruction provided the groups operating these schools with a window in which to act. Whereas it had been illegal to educate blacks during slavery, and was still a dangerous endeavor in some Southern locales, educating freedmen and women was now an option.⁴ Without a doubt, the emergence of black colleges can be understood as an adaptive response to the post-Emancipation environment. Moreover, the story fits neatly within the standard paradigm of adaptation within the organization studies tradition. Groups in favor of educating blacks—missionary societies, ex-slaves, the Freedmen Bureau—seized the opportunities made available by the political cleavages of Reconstruction. The uncertainty of this moment allowed for innovation with regard to the education of blacks.⁵ Then again, this depiction provides an incomplete picture of the field’s expansion. For though black colleges emerged, they did so against the backdrop of the developing system of state-sanctioned racial segregation.

Figure 1.1 School Foundings per Year

Described as a race-making institution by social theorist Loïc Wacquant, the system of legally sanctioned racial segregation permeated all realms of life within the American South because it “consisted of an ensemble of social and legal codes that prescribed the complete separation of the ‘races’ and sharply circumscribed the life chances of African-Americans.”⁶ Colloquially known as Jim Crow, the system sustained and further developed status distinctions between whites and blacks developed during slavery. The character of black higher education cannot be understood outside of this context.

The proliferation of publicly controlled black colleges illustrates the inescapable effect of Southern racial politics on the growth and development of the black higher education field. As Table 1.1 illustrates, the average state-controlled black college was established in 1887.

Comparatively, the average state-controlled school for white students was established in 1840. Each state that established a black college already had a college in place. In theory, black students could have attended the state-run schools already in existence. In practice, doing so was unacceptable in the Southern states.

As a result, two separate fields—one black, the other white—worked to provide higher education within the South. The organizational consequences of this decision for black colleges were severe. Funding for education in the South traditionally lagged behind all other regions in the nation. Particularly in the Civil War’s aftermath, as a region the South’s financial

Table 1.1. Southern University Founding Dates

<i>State</i>	<i>First Traditionally White College Founded</i>	<i>First Black College Founded</i>
Alabama	1831	1874
Arkansas	1871	1875
Delaware	1833	1891
Florida	1853	1887
Georgia	1785	1890
Kentucky	1865	1896
Louisiana	1860	1914
Maryland	1856	1886
Missouri	1839	1866
Mississippi	1844	1871
Oklahoma	1890	1897
North Carolina	1798	1877
South Carolina	1801	1895
Tennessee	1794	1912
Texas	1881	1885
Virginia	1819	1883
West Virginia	1867	1891
Earliest Founding Date	1785	1866
Most Recent Founding Date	1890	1914
Average Founding Date	1840	1887

resources were crippled. Operating a dual system of education is necessarily more expensive than a single system, as it required two sets of schools, two sets of certification procedures, two sets of administrative offices, two sets of school boards, etc. Despite the region's financially precarious position, the Southern states' cultural preferences dictated an unsustainable organizational solution. In a system privileging whiteness, starving black colleges of critical resources represented the only way forward.

The establishment of public colleges is but one example of how Jim Crow structured the adaptive possibilities of black higher education. However, the system encouraged more than the expansion of one particular organizational form. It touched every aspect of black college growth and development. To remain viable, institutionalized organizations must gain the public's trust.⁷ This was particularly consequential for black colleges, public and private, operating within the Jim Crow South. Those involved

in the provision of black higher education had to construct a system of colleges and universities that acknowledged and incorporated the legal rules and cultural norms associated with Jim Crow. Though they would have welcomed white students on their campus, black colleges could not do so. Though college leaders preferred racially integrated campus activities, when prominent whites visited black college campuses, segregation was often enforced. Though leaders preferred to develop their curricula fully, black colleges were encouraged to restrict their offerings to majors that would not put their graduates in direct competition with whites.⁸

The Jim Crow period was not the only historical configuration that influenced the growth and development of black colleges. Other configurations also affected the adaptive capacity of the schools. Though they did not begin as organizations that focused on graduate-level training, by the 1970s a number of state-controlled black colleges had the capacity to offer postbaccalaureate courses. Understanding how the curricular emphasis among black public colleges came to include graduate-level programs requires an understanding of broader events occurring within the black higher education field.

Four time periods are of particular interest for this study. The first time period, 1854–1895, marks the field of black higher education's creation and expansion. The expansion of the field occurred as Southern society struggled to reconfigure itself following the Civil War. By the second period, 1896–1944, the field had taken shape with regard to the number and type of schools that would operate within it. Clear enrollment, degree, and financial patterns had crystalized. Unfortunately, it had become clear that blacks located in the Southern states would not be treated as full citizens. In this era, black colleges felt the full weight of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that codified state-sanctioned racial inequality.

Several factors collided to make the third time period, 1945–1975, a momentous one for black colleges. Improvements in primary and secondary education for black students led to an increase in the number of students seeking higher education. Taking advantage of the GI Bill, black servicemen returning from World War II swarmed black college campuses. Though mass protests had yet to occur, black colleges began to feel the effects of what we would later call the civil rights movement in the 1940s. As legal challenges against racially segregated education mounted, Southern state educational authorities expanded the capacity of public black colleges. The 1954 *Brown* ruling further hastened state and private efforts to improve black colleges. Between 1945 and 1975, black colleges underwent unparalleled growth and development.

The renaissance would not last forever. During the final time period, 1976–1999, the place of black colleges within the American landscape faced increasing scrutiny. Black students began to enroll in traditionally white colleges. Several black colleges closed. Several black colleges had a majority white student body. While the usefulness of black colleges had always come under attack, the rationale for attacking the colleges shifted. Whereas critics had once wondered aloud whether “savages” could acquire higher learning, they now questioned the necessity of black colleges given the plethora of choices available to black students.

Field Creation and Expansion, 1854–1895

The majority of black colleges (60 percent) began during the field’s first forty years.⁹ Between 1854 and 1895, ninety-two black colleges emerged amid a general air of optimism. The South was being reconstructed. The political system that oppressed blacks was coming undone. In coalition with white Republicans, black leaders used the Southern state constitutional conventions to lay the foundation for universal education.¹⁰ Promoting higher education represented a natural extension of the idea that every citizen had a right to education within the reconstructed South. With the role of blacks in the postwar South shifting, black colleges emerged to train blacks to participate as full political, social, and economic citizens.¹¹

Private colleges dominated the landscape, accounting for 74 percent of the ninety-two schools established in this first period. A small minority (N = 14) operated as independent schools while the rest had ties to black and white religious societies.¹² The denominational boards of these religious groups provided teachers, financial support, and administrative resources for their affiliated colleges.¹³ Using northeastern colleges as their models, the private schools, particularly those controlled by religious societies, viewed the classical curriculum as the best way to prepare black students for participation within a democratic society.¹⁴ Many private black colleges even utilized the same admission requirements as the classical New England colleges of the time by limiting admittance to the freshmen class to those students that had taken higher arithmetic, algebra, and Greco-Roman history.¹⁵

Of the ninety-two schools that began during this period, 24 percent (N = 22) operated as state-controlled or affiliated institutions. Eight of the state-controlled colleges had the additional designation of land grant schools.¹⁶ Passed by the U.S. Congress in 1862, the Morrill Act provided

each state with a tract of federal land for the purpose of establishing a college focused on the agricultural and mechanical arts. The founding of public colleges during this period provides a window into the coexistence of contrasting sentiments and foreshadowed what was to come. Like the denominational boards, Southern state legislatures took up the cause of black higher education. Yet, the state legislatures, even when controlled by coalitions in favor of black access to education, faced opposition.

When chartered in 1871 by a Republican state legislature, Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College of Mississippi received three-fifths of the state's land grant funds, an annual appropriation of \$50,000 from the state legislature, and a four-year scholarship for one student from each legislative district.¹⁷ Indeed, a promising start for any college. However, just one year earlier, the faculty and chancellor at the University of Mississippi threatened to resign should the school admit black students. Alcorn had the backing of the legislature. Yet, Alcorn might not have existed if forces within Mississippi had shown a willingness to integrate the existing state university.

Categorizing black colleges as state or privately controlled masks the fluidity that existed in the early development of the field. The Colored Industrial and Agricultural School of Louisiana, now known as Grambling State University, began as a private college in 1905. Not until 1928 did the school become affiliated with the state. Likewise, St. Philips Normal and Industrial College of Texas opened its doors as an affiliate of the Episcopal Church in 1898. When the church could no longer financially support the school, it affiliated with the state in 1942.

Because they are responsive to their environments, institutionalized organizations are heavily influenced by the societal characteristics present at the time of their founding.¹⁸ Moreover, once established these characteristics tend to carry through for generations. For instance, schools at all levels continue to close for the summer months. Primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools still reflect America's agricultural past even though few children spend their summers farming. The educational backgrounds of the formerly enslaved had profound implications for black college growth and development. The majority of blacks emerged from slavery illiterate. As the black higher education field expanded post Emancipation, those operating the black colleges could not ignore this reality. As a result, black colleges opted for an organizational structure that included collegiate, elementary, and high school divisions.

Chartered in 1868, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute focused on the "instruction of youth in the various common-school,

academic and collegiate branches."¹⁹ Of the nine hundred students attending Hampton in 1917, all were enrolled in elementary and secondary courses.²⁰ Not until the 1920s did collegiate-level enrollment at Hampton become significant. Like the privately controlled schools, the public schools also began with small enrollments and gradually evolved into colleges. By 1917 only one public school, Florida Agriculture and Mechanical College, founded in 1887, enrolled students at the collegiate level.²¹

While the majority of black colleges concentrated on both pre- and postsecondary work, a small number of schools concentrated on still higher levels of education. From the outset, those invested in black higher education wanted to ensure access to graduate and professional training. The black community needed trained doctors, lawyers, ministers, and social workers to serve them. Howard University, Atlanta University, Meharry Medical College, and Gammon Theological Seminary were four such institutions founded with a particular focus on graduate and professional training.

As the black higher education field developed it came to include a diverse set of schools. Private, public, undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools each occupied a position within the field. Within each of these broad categories further distinctions applied—religious, independent, land grant.

In the moments following the Civil War, those opening black colleges assumed that blacks would have access to the full range of social, political, and economic opportunities emerging within the South. For a time this was true—blacks accounted for 15 percent of political officeholders in the 1870s South, a higher proportion than in 1990.²² As the 1890s approached, it became clear that these opportunities would not last. The dynamics that would plague black college development had taken root.

Reconstruction had come to an end. The federal government would not intervene on behalf of black education for decades to come. Opponents of black education, now controlling Southern state legislatures, took an interest in black education for nefarious reasons. As a result of the second Morrill Act of 1890, all states that maintained racially segregated systems of education had to establish land grant colleges for blacks if they chose to utilize the land and monies from the Morrill Act to operate land grant colleges for white students.²³ Southern states fulfilled this requirement by annexing existing schools, some of which had operated as private black colleges until this point, and creating new schools.

The field of black higher education would persist. However, state-sanctioned racial inequality shaped the adaptive capacity of the colleges.

By 1896, blacks located in the Southern states were still not treated as full citizens. In that year, the U.S. Supreme Court held that statutes that imply distinctions between “white and colored races” do not destroy the legal equality of the races. They argued that the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship, due process, and equal protection under the law to formerly enslaved blacks, had not guaranteed social equality to this group. A ruling against Homer Plessy’s right to sit in the “White” car of the East Louisiana Railroad had far-reaching consequences. For years to come, black colleges, public and private, forged ahead amid concerns that black higher education threatened the stability of Southern and America society.

Separate but Equal, 1896–1944

With the Supreme Court’s approval, Southern states legalized racial inequality. The role of black education in general, and black colleges specifically, within a racially segregated society became a topic of deliberation. Education should enrich political, social, and economic opportunities—things Southern society denied blacks altogether. Whether and how schools for blacks could exist within such a system became the subject of heated exchanges. The ideological debates over the most advantageous form of black higher education that occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have received much historical attention. Often referenced in relation to Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, these debates reflected the attitudes of a diverse set of parties interested in black higher education—black leaders, Northern industrial philanthropies, Southern education reformers, Southern planters.

In his 1895 speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Booker T. Washington claimed, “No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”²⁴ Washington pushed for the development of a black laboring class and emphasized the role of black colleges in this process. Because they educated black teachers, black colleges had the ability to “train a corps of teachers with a particular social philosophy relevant to the political and economic reconstruction of the South.”²⁵ Washington’s attitudes reflected a widely held sentiment among those in favor of the “Hampton-Tuskegee Idea” which held that black colleges’ pedagogical focus should maintain the inequities of wealth, power, and race.²⁶ Here, educating blacks was a necessary part of the South’s industrial transformation. The “right” type of education would produce more efficient workers and

represented a “sound investment in social stability and economic prosperity.”²⁷ In contrast to the Hampton-Tuskegee Idea stood those who argued that “ex-slaves struggled to develop a social and educational ideology singularly appropriate to their defense of emancipation and one that challenged the social power of the planter regime.”²⁸ The emerging class of black intelligentsia and leaders viewed black colleges as tools to liberate blacks from the inequities inherent to a system such as Jim Crow.

This debate offers evidence of the field coalescing. When actors, individual and organizational, begin to interact and engage one another as though they are part of the same enterprise this is an important step in a field’s development. Doing so indicates recognition of common purpose that is essential to field membership.²⁹ While pedagogical preferences among the factions differed, the mere fact that one side chose to engage the other shows that each party knew the other was equally vested in the provision of black higher education. Moreover, it is through these interactions and others that standardized data about the colleges becomes available.

When it took an interest in black higher education, the Rockefeller family’s General Education Board, founded in 1902, began to collect enrollment, course, financial, facility, and faculty data from the black colleges. To determine whether to support a college, the foundation sent field agents to conduct site visits. In his role as a general field agent for the General Education Board between 1915 and 1933, Jackson Davis visited black college campuses to assess their progress. Not only would Davis interview campus officials, he would also attend classes and inspect facilities, all in an effort to determine if a school merited foundation support. Even when the foundation did not visit schools, it would request that schools submit data on the finances, enrollment, classes, and faculty using a standardized template internally referenced as the blank form.³⁰

The federal government’s surveys of black colleges in 1916, 1929, and 1942 further attest to the interconnections that developed within the black higher education field. Thomas Jesse Jones first affiliated with black colleges in his role as an associate chaplain and economics instructor at Hampton Institute in 1902.³¹ In 1913 he became the educational director of the Phelps Stokes Fund, a philanthropy whose interest included black education.³² During his time there, Jones directed the 1916 survey, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*.³³ Notably, the Phelps Stokes Fund sponsored this survey in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Interior.³⁴ The movement of key people in and out of organizations related to black higher

education offers further evidence of the field's coalescence. Each organization had a stake in black higher education and the movement of individuals across these organizations reinforced the interconnections of the field.

College leaders spearheaded efforts to document black colleges as well. Du Bois, working at Atlanta University, catalogued the "intricate social problems" affecting black communities.³⁵ As a result, volumes such as *The College Bred Negro*, published in 1900, tracked the status and development of black colleges and their graduates. The *Journal of Negro Education* published its first issue in 1932. Housed at Howard University, founder and editor-in-chief Charles H. Thompson used the journal to document the status of black education, particularly the state of black colleges.³⁶ Around the same time, Dwight O. W. Holmes, dean of Howard's graduate school, published his study of black colleges, *The Evolution of the Negro College*. Several coalitions among the colleges began during this time period as the connections between them deepened—the Association of Colleges for Negro Youth (1913), the Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges (1924), the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes (1934), and the United Negro College Fund (1944).

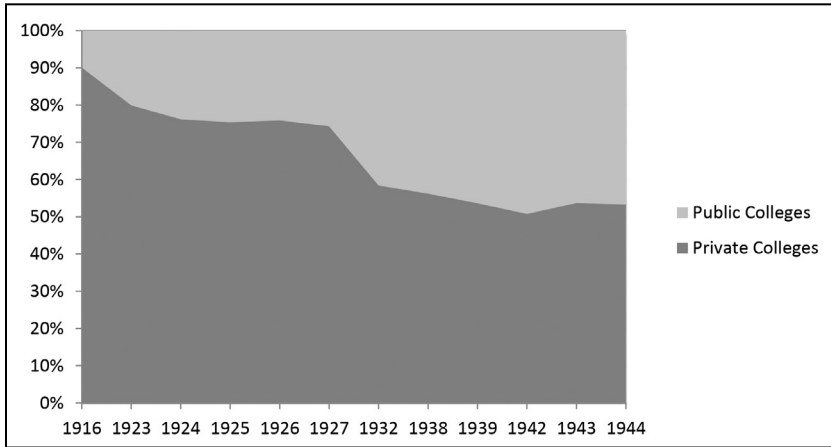
The government, foundation, and publication data that emerged during this period make it possible to understand the relationship between the social milieu (e.g., ideological debates, racial segregation) and black college growth and development. Historical works have established that foundations took sides in the aforementioned pedagogical debates. Northern industrial philanthropies such as the General Education Board preferred to support black colleges that adhered to the Hampton-Tuskegee Idea.³⁷ In the early 1900s, philanthropic groups, including the General Education Board, pressured schools such as Fisk University, Fort Valley High and Industrial School, and St. Paul's Normal and Industrial School to implement elements of vocational training associated with the Hampton-Tuskegee model in lieu of school leader preferences for the liberal arts by intimating that foundation funding would increase.

Data from several sources contextualize the financial ramifications of such events for black colleges. *The Evolution of the Negro College* illustrates that even among poorly resourced schools differences existed.³⁸ Using data from the 1929 *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities*, Holmes tabulated that as a group, black colleges had a total endowment of \$20,713,796.00. While the average black college in 1926–27 had \$85,426.00 in its endowment fund, a wide gulf existed between the most well-endowed schools, Hampton and Tuskegee (\$14,135,768.00

combined), and all the others.³⁹ Foundation preferences for this pedagogical model had more than ideological consequences. A financial pecking order among the colleges took root.

Though public and private colleges existed, as Figure 1.2 documents, at their peak, private black colleges enrolled 90 percent of the students within the field. Given their dominance, private college endowment figures offer a general proxy for the well-being of the entire field. Endowment, and the income from it, are important determinants of a college's ability to grow and develop. It is no surprise then, that the federal government recognized only three black colleges as "true" colleges in 1916. The 1916 survey, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, revealed that thirty-three schools offered work at the collegiate level. However, because the majority of the work undertaken at these schools occurred in primary and secondary education, the survey classified only three as true colleges—Howard University, Meharry Medical College, and Fisk University. The report referred to Howard's endowment as "negligible" and Fisk's endowment as "insufficient."⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the poor state of their endowments, in each case the schools had secured external support, which no doubt contributed to their ability to devote the necessary resources to developing their collegiate curriculum. Howard University received an annual appropriation from the federal government; Meharry Medical College received financial support from the Carnegie and Rockefeller family foundations; Fisk University had found success raising funds through the performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The poor financial situation of most schools made it impossible to adequately develop both pre- and postsecondary work. Holmes estimated that "6 per cent of the total income of [schools doing some college work] \$3,999,071, or \$239,404, for the support of 2,641 college students for a year, or a per capita expenditure of less than one hundred dollars, was a sum entirely inadequate even in 1916."⁴¹

Ironically, despite their large endowments, given their propensity to focus on vocational training, the government recognized neither Hampton nor Tuskegee as colleges. Foundation preferences aside, this model did not meet the standards by which colleges were judged. Even at this point it is possible to see the problems that result from partial adaptation. The private colleges that aspired to be colleges could not actually achieve this goal because they lacked the financial resources to do so. The Hampton-Tuskegee schools had more financial resources than others, but the money was conditioned upon eschewing the curricular choices

Figure 1.2 Percent of Enrollment by College Type, 1916–1944

that would enable the schools to be recognized as colleges. Thus, neither type of school—the liberal or vocationally focused—was able to achieve its full potential. Foundation policies rooted in theories of black inferiority and inequality curtailed adaptation all around.

High enrollments in the primary and secondary or academy divisions of the black colleges further highlight the implications of the social milieu for growth and development. The colleges were affected far beyond the ideological debates of their merits within a segregated society. The schools continued to bear the burden of educating all black children, not just those interested in pursuing a college degree. The growth and development of their collegiate divisions depended upon the states' willingness to provide black students with an educational alternative. Yet, in 1916, of the roughly twenty thousand blacks enrolled in high schools, approximately 5,300 were enrolled in public high schools. The remaining students attended private high schools or the secondary departments of the land grant and state normal colleges for blacks.⁴²

Here again, this results in partial adaptations for black colleges. Black colleges continued to enroll students at the primary and secondary levels while also trying to establish themselves as “true colleges.” Black colleges could not easily do away with their lower divisions. For many blacks, the colleges were the only options for elementary and high school training. State policies prevented the black colleges from abandoning lower-level courses, although, as blacks migrated to urban centers in the 1920s, Southern states began to revise their policies toward publicly supported black primary and secondary education. Unschooling children in the rural

South were easily absorbed into the farm labor system. Unschooling children in urban areas walked the streets. Schools became the solution. By 1926, all major Southern cities had at least one publicly supported black high school.⁴³ By the mid-1930s, black high school enrollment topped 150,000. By 1940, almost one-quarter of the black youth age fifteen to nineteen had enrolled in a publicly supported black high school within the South.⁴⁴

Even though the financial situation of the colleges had changed very little between 1916 and 1928, the *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities* revealed a tremendous amount of development at the collegiate level. While the majority of the schools included in this survey still offered primary and secondary education, the number of schools offering collegiate-level work increased to seventy-seven. As black students began to rely on state-sponsored primary and secondary education, black colleges could concentrate more of their resources at the collegiate level. According to data from the *Journal of Negro Education*, on average 13 percent of the students enrolled at black colleges were at the primary and secondary levels in the 1938–39 academic year.⁴⁵ The implications of the differential speed at which the schools became “colleges” is further explored in chapter 2. By the 1940s, when the United Negro College Fund emerged, these partial adaptations toward the collegiate model became ever so important.

Despite the movement of black students toward state-controlled primary and secondary education, black colleges continued to play a critical role in the overall scheme of racially segregated education. The black colleges provided the bulk of the teaching force for the elementary and high schools that black children attended in Southern communities. Despite the organizational diversity among black colleges—public, private, religious, land grant—the schools operated primarily as teacher training institutions. Admission to some colleges, such as Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, was partly based on the student’s intention to become a teacher.⁴⁶ In *The College Bred Negro*, W. E. B. Du Bois reported that by 1900, 53.4 percent of the graduates from black colleges reported their occupation as teachers.

The *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities* further confirms the emphasis on teacher training at black colleges. Between 1922 and 1927, education ranked highest among the academic specialties.⁴⁷ Other popular majors included agriculture, home economics, and theology. A report issued by the U.S. Department of Interior indicates that the focus on education continued into the 1940s. The Department of Interior’s 1942

report, *National Survey of the Higher Education of Negroes*, found that 84 percent of the students surveyed from a subset of black colleges stated they felt most prepared to enter the teaching profession and of these students, 75 percent planned to enter the teaching profession in the following year.

This too offers a chance to reflect on the social milieu's ability to divert the adaptive potential of black colleges. The heavy emphasis on teacher training was not a random outcome. During this time period, black colleges were encouraged to train their students in fields that would not put their graduates in direct competition with whites. This, coupled with the meager resources available to most black colleges, resulted in a limited curricular focus. Teachers were needed throughout the black community, and black teachers would never be assigned to white schools. Though understandable, the heavy focus on teacher training meant that other disciplines did not flourish at black colleges.

The prevailing attitude toward black colleges during this historical moment was that if black colleges had to exist, then these schools should help blacks adjust to their position within a racially segregated society. Consequently, black colleges were used as vessels to provide the black community with its own leadership class.⁴⁸ Concerns that black colleges would educate black students out of their "rightful place" within Southern society remained throughout this period. These attitudes not only structured the curricular choices of black colleges, but also shaped the resource mobilization process. Endowment figures from this period indicate that foundations selectively supported black colleges, favoring those schools that did not appear to challenge the status quo of Southern race relations. The contours of the debate changed—by the 1930s, educational reform had made the ideological debate over vocational versus applied curriculum all but moot. Yet, the South's commitment to racial segregation remained; thus, the reality of black colleges did not change.

Civil Rights, 1945–1975

The years following World War II brought significant changes to the American landscape. After sacrificing to secure democracy abroad, efforts on the part of black Americans to secure rights within their own country intensified. As had been the case post Emancipation, education remained high on the list of priorities among black citizens and activists. Though large-scale protests had yet to occur, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had initiated a series of

lawsuits that would have wide-ranging repercussions for the growth and development of black colleges.

Beginning in the mid-1930s, the NAACP sought to ensure that blacks had access to professional and graduate schools. According to data from the 1942 *National Survey of Higher Education of Negroes*, Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia maintained no graduate programs for blacks in the arts and sciences.

Several dynamics within the black higher education field combined to make the NAACP's claims on the state to provide graduate and professional education more plausible. As Figure 1.3 indicates, following World War II, enrollment at black colleges rebounded eventually surpassing its pre-war maximum of 38,000.

Due in large part to returning veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill of Rights, by 1948 black colleges enrolled more than seventy thousand students. This time period also marked an important shift among public and private black colleges. As Figure 1.4 illustrates, by 1949, the public colleges enrolled more than 50 percent of the students attending black colleges, confirming a trend that began in the late 1930s. First, surging enrollment at black colleges meant that in the long run more blacks would obtain the prerequisite qualifications to attend professional and graduate school. Second, the higher education of blacks was truly a public endeavor—the state had begun to play an active role in the college education of blacks. These factors increased the efficacy of the NAACP's argument that the state had a responsibility to provide graduate and professional education to blacks.⁴⁹

The NAACP's emphasis on graduate and professional training met with some early success. As a result of a lawsuit initiated by the NAACP, the University of Maryland enrolled its first black law student in 1936.⁵⁰ However, when challenged, most states opted to erect separate graduate and professional schools or programs for black students. Two days after the Supreme Court ruled in January 1948 that the state of Oklahoma must provide Ada Lois Sipuel with access to legal education, the University of Oklahoma's regents opened a black law school and within a week had hired three faculty to teach there.⁵¹ Such tactics resulted in the elaboration of graduate programs at black colleges, particularly at the publicly controlled ones. Between 1951 and 1971, the number of graduate programs at public black colleges increased from ten to nineteen.⁵²

Figure 1.3 Total Black College Enrollment, 1945–1975

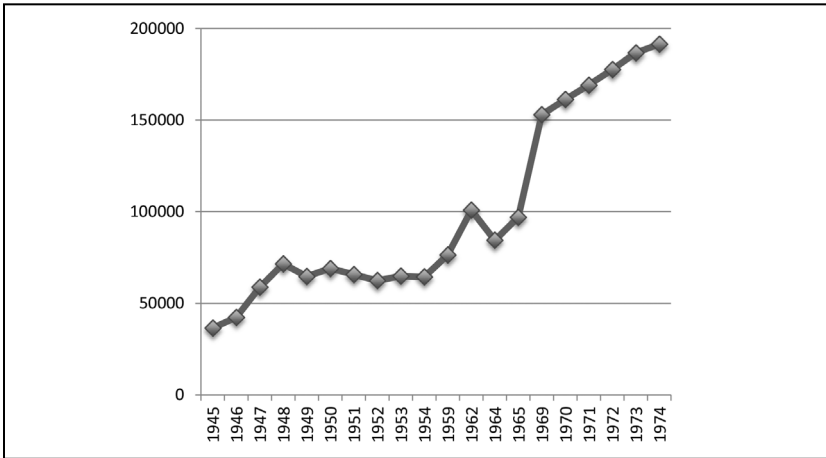
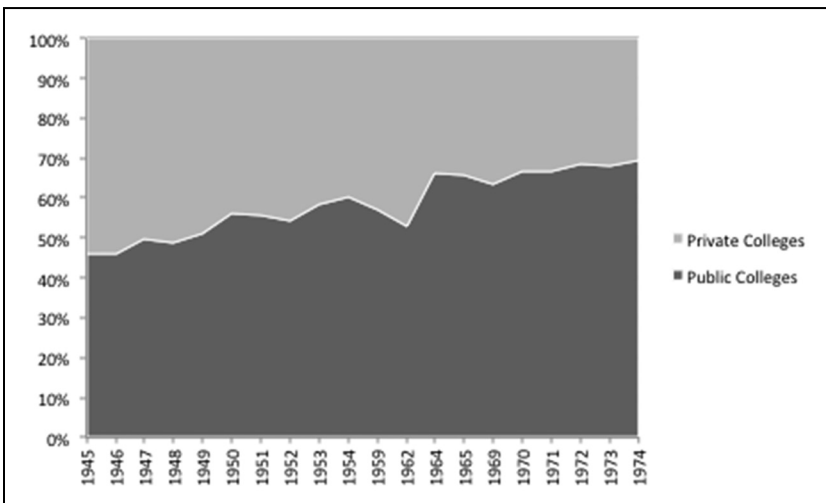


Figure 1.4 Percent of Enrollment by College Type, 1945–1975



States did not confine their efforts to expand the curricular capabilities of black colleges to the graduate level. Fearing that the 1954 *Brown v. Board* ruling would provide increasing numbers of black children with the opportunity to gain adequate preparation for a college education, ensuring that the majority of black students would continue to attend black colleges became a priority.⁵³ This new goal conflicted with the reality that black colleges had been intentionally starved of critical resources,

making them unattractive to better-prepared black students, particularly those now theoretically able to attend traditionally white colleges in the South.⁵⁴

In response to this dilemma, Southern states sought to equalize the instructional capacities of schools designated for black students by bringing them up to par with those schools historically designated for white students. Historian James D. Anderson's case study of Mississippi provides a useful illustration of the region-wide pattern. A 1945 study of Mississippi higher education revealed that the state had deprived Alcorn, the black land grant institution, of the opportunity to become a "viable higher education institution."⁵⁵ Dilapidated buildings, an inadequate salary structure, and insufficient land for the purposes of an agricultural college ranked high among the concerns noted in the report. Despite this knowledge, the situation at Alcorn and the other black public colleges located within Mississippi did not change until the *Brown v. Board* ruling approached. In anticipation of the *Brown* decision, the state of Mississippi increased Alcorn's operating budget by \$50,000, allocated \$275,000 for additional buildings, and made a special appropriation of \$77,000 in the 1950–51 academic year.⁵⁶ Mississippi's Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning planned to develop black public colleges as undergraduate institutions, concentrate graduate work at Jackson College, and when necessary channel black students to three traditionally white colleges—Ole Miss, Southern Mississippi, and Mississippi State University. Six months after the *Brown* ruling, a committee studying Mississippi higher education recommended: "The three institutions presently operated for Negro students should be maintained and developed further as part of the State program to meet the anticipated increases in college enrollment during the next decade."⁵⁷ This pattern of events led Anderson to conclude: "After more than eight decades of severely repressing the development of higher educational opportunities for blacks in Mississippi, the State Board was now making haste to enlarge undergraduate opportunities for black students at Jackson, Alcorn, and Mississippi Vocational, primarily as a strategy to preserve the state's tradition of racially segregated higher education."⁵⁸

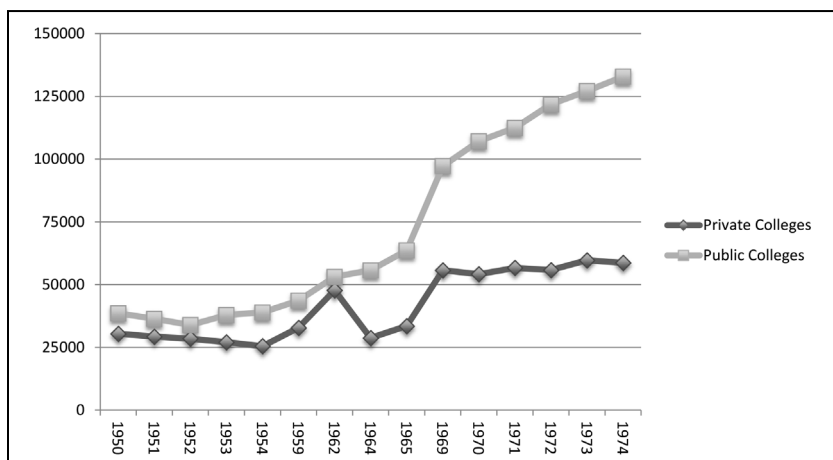
Though developing the black colleges can be seen as positive, it is still important to understand these changes as partial. The states elaborated the black colleges as a means of diverting black enrollment away from traditionally white colleges. These were not carefully thought out plans that conceived of black and white colleges as part of a unified system. As a result, the states duplicated programs across black and white colleges

more often than not. Years later, when courts and legislatures began to conceive of black and white colleges as part of a unified system, program duplication became problematic. Black colleges no longer appeared unique. In a system still favoring traditionally white colleges, black colleges appeared redundant.

Nevertheless, enrollment figures indicate that these strategies met with success. Enrollment at black colleges increased sharply in the years after the *Brown* decision. Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicates the rate of high school graduation for blacks between twenty and twenty-four years old in the Southern states increased from 18 percent in 1950 to 57 percent in 1970.⁵⁹ Black college enrollment benefited from this trend. Yet, public colleges benefited most. As Figure 1.5 illustrates, private black college enrollment more than doubled during this period; however, enrollment at these schools steadied at around 55,000 students toward the 1970s. Comparatively, enrollment at public colleges more than tripled in this same time span, totaling more than 132,000 by the mid-1970s.

The federal government also directed more attention to black colleges in this period. Part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, drafted by the U.S. Congress, the 1965 Higher Education Act intended to strengthen institutions of higher education and sought to raise the quality of financially struggling colleges. The act also contained an admission that the state and federal governments had participated in discriminatory allocation practices against black colleges. To remedy this, Congress developed a set of programs aimed at strengthening those schools that have

Figure 1.5 Black College Enrollment, 1950s–1970s



and had as their primary mission the education of black Americans prior to the year 1964. Congress referred to the schools that fit this criterion as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, thus bestowing an official title upon a group of schools that had existed for more than a century. The date 1964 had little to do with the history of these colleges. Congress chose a date that ensured the inclusion of the largest number of black colleges in existence prior to the act's implementation. Under Title III of the Higher Education Act, those colleges falling under the Historically Black College and University umbrella term (public and private) qualified for special funds that would allow these schools to improve their instructional capacity.

Despite expanding enrollment, curricular options, and budgets, some things remained constant within the black higher education field. Students continued to receive the majority of their degrees in education. Though the figure had declined since the early 1900s, education continued to account for 35 percent of the degrees awarded from black colleges in 1972. The pattern of degrees would not shift until the final time period. While degrees offer tangible evidence of continuity, the treatment of black public colleges in this period provides intangible evidence of the same.

Southern states continued to base their interest in black colleges on these schools' ability to help the state fulfill political objectives. The desire to maintain a dual system of education continued long after the *Brown* ruling. State-controlled black colleges enabled Southern governments to protect the traditionally white status of their flagship universities. As early as 1950, Mississippi officials conceded that some blacks would have to obtain education at state-run traditionally white universities. Yet, a 1975 lawsuit filed against the state claimed a dual system of higher education continued to persist. Once ignored, black colleges had become a linchpin in stemming the tide of black bodies on traditionally white college campuses.

Questioning Black Colleges, 1976–1999

In the immediate aftermath of the *Brown v. Board* ruling, prevailing wisdom held that black colleges would meet their demise. Upon learning of the Court's decision, John D. Rockefeller Jr., a longtime supporter of black colleges and chairman of the General Education Board, could see no further need for the schools.⁶⁰ The NAACP felt the continued existence of black colleges presented a barrier to black enrollment at traditionally white colleges. Walter White, the NAACP's executive director from 1931

to 1955, took things a step farther, declaring black colleges as inferior to their white counterparts.⁶¹ As the previous section illustrates, these predictions rang false. Indeed, the immediate impact of *Brown* on black colleges resulted in a renaissance of sorts. State educational authorities and legislators who had long ignored the needs of black colleges suddenly took an active interest in promoting the well-being of these schools. Enrollments increased. Budgets expanded. Curricular choices multiplied.

Not until the 1970s did the long-anticipated signs of trouble emerge. During this period, traditionally white colleges began to actively recruit black students that performed well academically and those that excelled athletically.⁶² Black colleges could not compete with the scholarships, curricular choices, or facilities of their traditionally white counterparts.⁶³ In the Southern states, black students' enrollment at traditionally white colleges increased from 4.3 percent in 1970 to 9.5 percent in 1976.⁶⁴

As expected, the migration of black students toward traditionally white colleges was consequential for the growth and development of black colleges. Figure 1.6 illustrates that enrollment at black colleges decreased between the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Enrollment was not the only area of concern. School closures and mergers suggested the field had begun to contract in more ways than one. Daniel Payne (private, four-year) closed in 1977; The Virginia College (private, two-year) closed in 1980; Mississippi Industrial College (private, four-year) closed in 1982; Friendship College (private, two-year) closed in 1981; Natchez Junior College (private, two-year) closed in 1983; Clark College (private, four-year) and Atlanta University (private, graduate school) merged in 1988. These mergers and closures suggest that the environment could no longer sustain the number of black colleges that

Figure 1.6 Total Black College Enrollment, mid-1970s to mid-1980s

