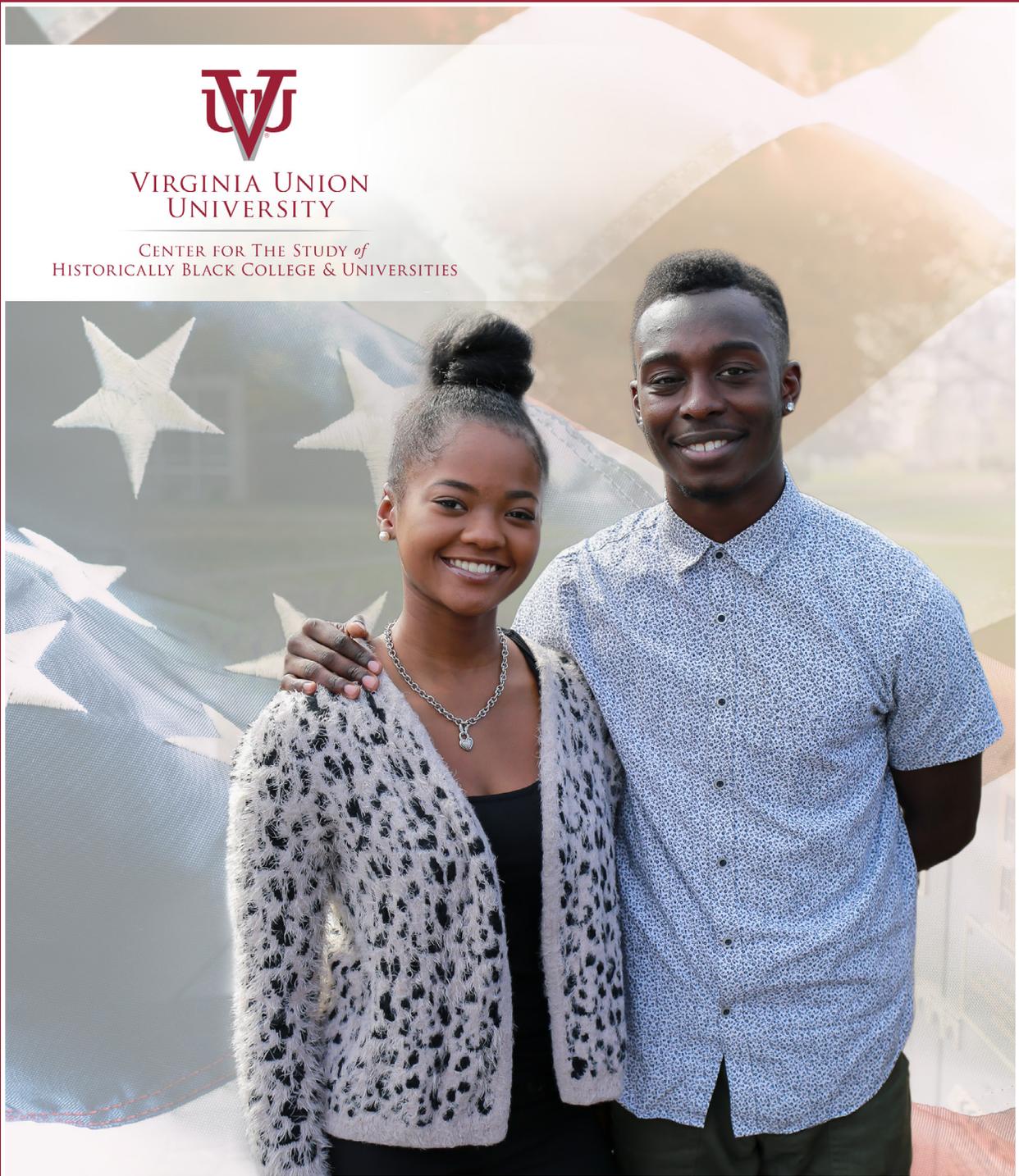




VIRGINIA UNION  
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CENTER FOR THE STUDY *of*  
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE & UNIVERSITIES



A PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO AMERICA'S  
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:  
KEY PRIORITIES OF THE BIDEN-HARRIS EDUCATION AGENDA

The Center for the Study of HBCUs  
Virginia Union University

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A Pledge of Allegiance to America's  
Historically Black Colleges and Universities:  
Key Priorities of the Biden-Harris Education Agenda

By Terrell L. Strayhorn, PhD

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this inaugural report is to identify, examine, and analyze proposed plans within the Biden-Harris administration's education agenda affecting our nation's 101 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The 20-plus page report synthesizes the new administration's priorities in support of HBCUs and provides a mechanism for tracking accountability of such proposals to the HBCU community as the agenda moves from aspiration to actuality.

Organized into 7 major sections, the report provides a laconic review of the illustrious histories and remarkable contributions of HBCUs to society. Their track record is strong and undeniable—just 101 HBCUs collectively enroll nearly 300,000 undergraduate and graduate students, over 10% of all African Americans enrolled in higher education. Though representing only 3% of postsecondary institutions in the nation, HBCUs educate, *cultivate*, and graduate 40% of Black engineers, 50% of Black lawyers, and about 50% of elected Black members of Congress, including the nation's first woman—and woman of color—to serve as Vice President of the United States.

Any written history about HBCUs is bound to be incomplete as it is difficult to capture in a single report or paper what these “national treasures” have done and continue to do for so many. But as I mention in the report, our greatest challenges to delivering on the “pledge of allegiance to HBCUs” are not only time, resources, and bipartisan cooperation where Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and others *work across the aisle* to strengthen and sustain Black colleges, although these are unquestionably significant. It also takes a political will to do more than talk *about* HBCUs—it's time to work *with* them, work *for* them, and commit to the work of “building Black better” for the future.

The main section of the report synthesizes the *Biden-Harris HBCU Agenda*. That plan includes investing upwards of \$80 billion in strategic areas that directly, or indirectly, affect HBCUs. The plan's key priorities include [1] Increasing the maximum Pell grant award [2] Creating a “Title I” program for postsecondary education [3] Strengthening research capability at HBCUs [4] Building infrastructure [5] Reducing, if not eliminating, educational debt and expanding academic programs and [6] Promoting student success through federal sources. Taken together, these proposals reflect an ambitious policy agenda and a significant pledge to HBCUs.

There are many *promising* proposals in the new administration's policy agenda. But there's a long history of broken promises and inequitable treatment when it comes to HBCUs. The Biden-Harris team must acknowledge that history, accept the science that exposes decades of funding gaps, and then work **stronger together** to solve them. The Center for the Study of HBCUs will use its research and programming to regularly assess the federal government's progress toward delivering on the promises made to HBCUs. It's time to move from rhetoric to reality, from pledge to practice, from rhetoric to reality.

## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for the Study of HBCUs was established in 2020, with creative inspiration from VUU President, Dr. Hakim J. Lucas, to serve as an incubator of Black intellectual capital at Black colleges. The Center is dedicated to supporting and ensuring the sustainability of HBCUs through effective governance, visionary leadership, student success, and more. To accomplish its mission, the Center conducts research, convenes the scholarly community, mobilizes resources, and disseminates evidence-based information within and beyond the HBCU sector.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Terrell Strayhorn is Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Virginia Union University, where he also serves as Professor of Urban Education and Director of the Center for the Study of HBCUs. An internationally-recognized higher education policy expert, Strayhorn is author of 11 books including *Charting the Future of Today's HBCUs* (forthcoming) and over 200 refereed journal articles, chapters, and reports. His research focuses on significant policy and practice issues in higher education including access, affordability, racial equity, and student success. He is Subject Editor for *Social Sciences & Humanities*, Chief Editor of the Higher Ed Specialty for *Frontiers in Education*, Guest Editor of *Healthcare*, and serves on several editorial boards. Grants exceeding \$5 million have supported his research and campus interventions.



## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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**A PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO AMERICA'S**  
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### **ABOUT THE TITLE**

It is probably obvious that the title of this report was inspired by the nation's "Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag." Although titles usually come last for me as a writer, this one was different and emerged much earlier in the process than usual. It could be a random occurrence, perhaps divine intervention, or subconscious recall of words and phrases that line the margins of my writing notebooks. Much more likely, it is the result of my observing the "State of the Union," at the time of this writing.

By the time this report makes its way into the hands of readers, the nation would have witnessed a historic transfer of power with now former President Donald J. Trump leaving the White House and President Joseph R. Biden assuming the country's highest office. In just the last 12 months, we've witnessed the invasion of a global coronavirus pandemic with over 99 million cases worldwide, claiming more than 419,000 lives in the United States. The "United States" have long since been divided over issues of race and racism and protests across the country in response to the shameful killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor—just to name a few—ushered us further into a historic reckoning with racial justice and healing that's long from over. And, just recently, on January 6th the nation watched in awe as domestic terrorists stormed the US Capitol to keep elected officials from certifying the electoral college. From pandemic to protests, immunizations to insurrection, the urgency for healing, justice, and unity has never been clearer. In short, these ambitious aims must be top-line priorities of the new Biden-Harris administration.

Unlike other "big ticket" policies like climate change, most readers will be unfamiliar with key priorities of the Biden-Harris education agenda that relate most directly to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Similarly, most people know little to nothing about the history of the Pledge of Allegiance. It started as an oath of obedience—just 18 words—drafted by Civil War veteran, Colonel George Balch in 1885. The original version (see Figure 1) had limited circulation and no formal use until it was later revised significantly by Francis Bellamy in 1892 for public debut at the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival to the new world. Bellamy, from upstate New York, composed the new flag salute in just 2 hours, according to historical records. With a couple of additions over time—for instance, including "of the USA" in 1923—Bellamy's version was formally adopted by Congress in 1954 and evolved into the 31-word iteration that persists to this day (see Figure 2).

#### **Figure 1**

"We give our heads and our hearts to God and our country; one country, one language, one flag."

#### **Figure 2**

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Despite the controversial (and at times racially insensitive) history of the pledge and the pledge-writer—Bellamy once remarked that "alien immigrants of inferior race[s]" were eroding traditional values, referring to non-White newcomers—I'm inspired by the premise, spirit,

and aspirations of a pledge. That it aims to put on paper what is often hidden in one's heart. That it puts into words what is typically left unspoken. It publicly pronounces 'promises to keep,' as the old gospel hymn goes, and toasts the very things we treasure. So, I try my hand at composing a toast to these national treasures, our nation's 101 HBCUs that have stood the test of time (see Figure 3). This pledge is not meant to be legal, prescriptive, or indoctrinating; no, rather it is offered to acknowledge, celebrate, and honor these beloved institutions that have made and continue to make America stronger together.

### Figure 3

"I pledge allegiance to the federally designated historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) of the United States of America, and to the rich history and promising futures upon which they stand, 101 institutions, in 21 states and territories, unique yet united, creating equity, opportunity, and justice for all."

Interestingly, my HBCU pledge is 46-words, aligning perfectly with the fact that Joe Biden is now the 46th President of the United States of America. Kamala Harris is now the 49th Vice President of the United States, breaking through a number of glass ceilings, as the first woman, first Black and South Asian woman, and first HBCU graduate to take the 2nd highest seat of power. Together, Biden and Harris have an ambitious plan for higher education, chock-full of significant promises to America's HBCUs. Like so many others, I pray that they will lead the nation out of darkness into 'the marvelous light,' where promises become practices, oaths give way to opportunities, and allies are called to action. Only time will tell. #HBCUPledge

## INTRODUCTION

This report is the first in a series that will be published by the Center for the Study of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), headquartered at one of the nation's leading Black institutions, Virginia Union University. The Center for the Study of HBCUs is the first of its kind in the nation—a national research center with a broad outreach mission focused unapologetically on the sustainability of HBCUs, located at an HBCU. This in-depth report directs much-needed attention to the key priorities of the Biden-Harris education agenda, detailed in their "Build Back Better" and "Lift Every Voice" reports<sup>1</sup>, that relate most directly to the 101 HBCUs in the United States.

Before enumerating the top priorities that constitute Biden-Harris' HBCU agenda for the future, it is necessary to review the remarkable histories and courageous contributions of these national treasures.

*HBCUs are more important now than ever before. Across the nation, corporations, cities, and communities are looking for leaders who know what it means to lead diverse populations and be sensitive to their needs. HBCUs offer students academic programs and experiences where they grow and develop cultural, spiritual, economic, and political sensibility which sets them apart as global leaders.*

—Dr. Hakim J. Lucas  
President & CEO  
Virginia Union University

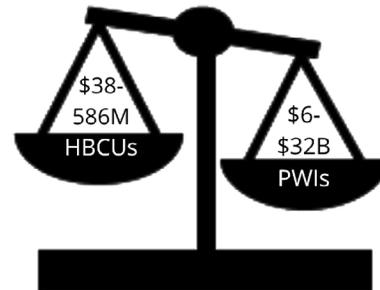
<sup>1</sup>Murakami, K. (2020, November 16). Biden's HBCU agenda. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/11/16/bidens-hbcu-research-agenda>

## ABOUT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) play an important and unique role in the higher education enterprise within the United States (US). Consider that just 101 HBCUs, representing only 3% of all US postsecondary institutions, enroll nearly 300,000 students and graduate 25% of all African Americans earning bachelors degrees. One-third of Black Americans with a doctorate in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) fields earned their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs. In fact, HBCUs produce over 30% of Black engineers, 50% of Black elected members of Congress, and 80% of Black federal judges. As if that's not remarkable enough, the first Black US Vice President—also the first woman to hold the 2nd highest office—is an HBCU graduate. There can be no question that HBCUs have long since been physical manifestations of Black excellence, cultural repositories of the Black lived experience in America.

HBCUs have made, and continue to make, extraordinary contributions to society and the general prosperity of the nation. HBCUs punch above their weight, outpacing their expected contributions to local, state, and national economic development. For instance, in total, the nation's 101 HBCUs generate \$14.8 billion in economic impact annually, according to a UNCF report.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, HBCUs generate 134,090 jobs in the local and regional economies they serve, placing them collectively on par with global corporations. Indeed, HBCUs are important engines of economic growth, upward social mobility, and help grow a

stronger, more inclusive middle class in America. In that way, they help reduce, if not eliminate, the racial wealth gap.



## TOP 10 UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENTS

Despite their prominent role providing access to higher education for African American, first-generation, low-income, and other diverse students, HBCUs face significant challenges that threaten their current and future positioning. They have often been expected to “do more with less,” reflecting the fact that state and private financial investments in HBCUs pale in comparison to their predominantly White institution (PWI) counterparts. One report showed that Johns Hopkins University received \$1.6 billion in federal, state, and local grants and contracts in 2014, which was more than the \$1.2 billion that all HBCUs received combined that year.<sup>3</sup> Other perennial issues include, but are not limited to, affordability, enrollment, infrastructure, finances, and student success.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Humphreys, J. (2017). HBCUs make America strong: The positive economic impact of historically Black colleges and universities. Washington, DC: UNCF Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute. [https://cdn.uncf.org/wp-content/uploads/HBCU\\_Consumer\\_Brochure\\_FINAL\\_APPROVED.pdf?\\_ga=2.205383120.1140156010.1610915594-751381617.1610915594](https://cdn.uncf.org/wp-content/uploads/HBCU_Consumer_Brochure_FINAL_APPROVED.pdf?_ga=2.205383120.1140156010.1610915594-751381617.1610915594)

<sup>3</sup>Toldson, I. A. (2016). The funding gap between historically Black colleges and universities and traditionally White institutions needs to be addressed. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 97-100. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.2.0097?seq=1>

<sup>4</sup>Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). (2014). Top strategic issues facing HBCUs, Now and into the future. <http://agb.org/sites/default/files/legacy/2014TopStrategicIssuesFacingHBCUs.pdf>

Of course it's important to note that not all HBCUs suffer from these challenges, neither do these problems affect HBCUs in the same exact way. HBCUs are not a monolithic group and they are just as diverse as the students who attend them. Some more affluent HBCUs have diverse revenue streams and comparatively greater shares of federal grants through R&D. Others have garnered recent attention thanks to unprecedented financial support through private charitable grants, public-private partnerships, state contracts, and historic transformational gifts like the \$40 million to LeMoyne-Owen College from the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis and the nearly \$6 billion from Mackenzie Scott to over 384 organizations, including \$560 million to 23 HBCUs.

More than money, overcoming the issues facing HBCUs will require time, energy, bipartisan cooperation, resources, and a political will to “**build Black better.**” But, perhaps most importantly, we need a plan that charts a way forward; this is the focus of the next section.

*“I am eager to see how the Biden-Harris administration will show up as action-oriented advocates for HBCUs. As I think about the current climate of racial injustice and equity-minded practices, HBCUs are the foundation of this hard, purpose driven work. Therefore, it is critical that the new administration deliver. It’s beyond time for HBCUs to receive due justice...”*

—Dr. Kellie Dixon  
 Director of Student Affairs Assessment  
 and Staff Development  
 North Carolina A&T State University

## BIDEN-HARRIS’ HBCU AGENDA

The Biden-Harris administration has an ambitious plan for higher education, chock-full of significant promises to America’s HBCUs. Totaling \$70-80 billion in strategic investments, the plan covers a broad range of issues including infrastructure, affordability, enrollment, and student success. In summary, the plan’s key priorities affecting HBCUs include:

1. Increasing the maximum award for federal Pell grants, nearly doubling its current value;
2. Creating “Title I” for postsecondary education, similar to what’s available for K-12 schools/districts;
3. Strengthening research capability at HBCUs through centers and grants;
4. Building infrastructure for updated facilities, labs, and services;
5. Reducing, if not eliminating, educational debt and expanding graduate degree programs; and,
6. Promoting student success through Title III and Title V commitments.



**\$30B investment for increasing  
 Federal Pell Grants**

### 1. INCREASING PELL GRANTS

**A \$30 billion investment, the new administration plans to increase the maximum value of federal Pell grants doubling its present value.** Nearly 7 million students per year receive Pell grants to help cover the costs of their college education. However, the value of Pell has not kept pace with the rising costs of college. In the 1970s, Pell grants covered approximately 70-80% of costs at 4-year public institutions; now it’s just 30%.

Based on Pell’s current value of \$6,345, the Biden-Harris plan proposes to increase the maximum award to twice its value. Not only would that significantly increase Pell recipients’ purchasing power, but it would cover total in-state tuition and fees at 67% of HBCUs, as reported by IPEDS. ***By increasing Pell, we’re opening access, closing affordability gaps, and delivering on the promise.***



**\$10B investment for creating Title I**

## 2. CREATING TITLE I FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

**A \$10 billion investment, the new administration proposes creation of a federal Title I program for postsecondary education.** This would follow the form of what’s available at the K-12 level for districts, schools, and local education agencies (LEAs) through Title I (Part A) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. The K-12 Title I funding formula recognizes that schools and districts with high concentrations of low-income students need more resources and supports than peer institutions in affluent neighborhoods serving wealthy families. For instance, Department of Education indicates K-12 Title I funds are allocated through four different grants totaling \$14.3 billion, with the largest component going to basic grants (45%) underwriting pre-school, after-school, and summer school programs that expand students’ opportunities to learn (OTL).

The Biden-Harris plan earmarks significant dollars to programs that increase enrollment, retention, completion, and employment for college students, especially for those attending institutions serving large numbers of Pell-eligible students (hereafter,

“Pell-serving” institutions [PSIs]). Postsecondary Title I funds could be used to support veterans, student parents, foster youth, or those who need remediation or development. Funds could also be used to create partnerships with external agencies for wrap-around services that address college students’ food and housing insecurities or other basic needs like family/childcare and counseling. Emergency grant programs, like the “Last Mile” initiative, also meet the proposed criteria. ***By creating a new Title I, we’re leveling the playing field and ensuring student success.***



**\$10B investment for increasing research capacity**

## 3. STRENGTHENING RESEARCH CAPACITY

**A \$10 billion investment, the new administration plans to strengthen research capacity at HBCUs.** One primary driver of this effort is the creation of 200 Centers of Excellence that will serve as research incubators connecting students to high-need fields in areas of national priority like climate change, cancer, and public health, to name a few.

Another major proposal that holds promise for strengthening research capacity at HBCUs is increasing *and prioritizing* funding streams at federal agencies for grants to HBCUs. A previous report showed that HBCUs received less than 1% of the \$18.4 billion in grants awarded to higher education by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Less than 1.7% of the \$5 billion in National Science Foundation (NSF) grants were awarded to HBCUs. And, distressingly, an NSF report indicated that among the top 30 institutions receiving federal research and development (R&D) support between

2016-2018 (year of most recent data), none were HBCUs.<sup>5</sup> Increasing and prioritizing federal grants for HBCUs can help “move the needle” upward on HBCU R&D revenue, in ways that deal with long-standing disparities.

One other idea will likely be hotly debated in both national and Congressional convenings: required HBCU subcontracts. Specifically, this part of the plan holds that 10% of federal grants to universities with endowments exceeding \$1 billion *must go to* partnering, through subcontract, with HBCUs or other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) including tribal colleges. Data from the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) indicates that there are 112 institutions with endowments exceeding a billion dollars (see Table 1). Although there’s already been some push back to the proposed idea by groups like the Association of American Universities (AAU) that warns against tying endowments to federal grants, there is precedent for doing so—the Trump administration pushed institutions with large endowments to refuse coronavirus relief through the CARES Act of 2020. Targeting funding to HBCUs in this way requires Congressional support and staunch advocates like those the Senate gained in newly-elected Senator Raphael Warnock (D-GA) and Vice President Harris. ***By strengthening research capacity, we’re ensuring the sustainability of HBCUs.***

**Table 1**  
**University Endowments Exceeding \$1 Billion**

#	Institution	Endowment (in billions)
1	Harvard University	\$38.3
2	University of Texas (System)	\$30.9
3	Yale University	\$29.4
4	Stanford University	\$26.5
5	University of Michigan	\$11.9
6	Washington University, St. Louis	\$7.6
7	University of Virginia	\$7.0
8	Rice University	\$6.3
9	UNC Chapel Hill	\$3.4
10	University of Miami	\$1.02

*If America is going to truly make African Americans full members of this society, this nation is going to have to fully respect and fund HBCUs. The talent and ingenuity is there. But if the resources are not allocated, we will be perpetually running behind, and that isn’t good for the long term health of Black America.*

—Roland Martin  
#RolandMartinUnfiltered  
Host/Managing Editor

<sup>5</sup>Gibbons, M. T. (2019). Higher education R&D funding from all sources increased for the third straight year in FY 2018 (NSF 20-302). Washington, DC: National Science Foundation. <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2020/nsf20302/>



**\$20B investment for increasing infrastructure**



**\$5B investment for decreasing student debt, increasing graduate programs**

#### 4. BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

A \$20 billion investment, the new administration plans to build and, in some cases, rebuild infrastructure at America’s 101 historically Black “national treasures” that have stood the test of time. Think about it, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (formerly “Cheyney Institute for Colored Youth”), the very first and oldest HBCU was founded on February 25, 1837 and has been in existence for nearly 184 years. Cheyney’s Humphreys Hall is the oldest building on campus, originally opened in 1904, making it 117 years old.

Like most historical treasures, many HBCUs need financial support to build new facilities, upgrade laboratories, and update deteriorating facilities, according to a GAO report.<sup>6</sup> Another strategy for developing infrastructure is ensuring access to low-cost federal capital financing programs and ear-marking dollars for private, low-endowment HBCUs. *By building infrastructure, we’re securing the future of HBCUs and their graduates.*

#### 5. REDUCING DEBT, EXPANDING PROGRAMS

A more than \$5 billion investment, the Biden-Harris administration plans to reduce educational debt, while encouraging development of new graduate degree programs. For instance, one part of the plan would make public colleges and universities tuition free for all families with incomes less than \$125,000 per year. This would disproportionately impact public HBCUs that accommodate large numbers of Pell-eligible students who might also be first-generation, Black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC). It’s important to note that 44 million Americans have \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt nationally.

Other strategies for tackling school-related debt include reducing payments on educational federal student loans (undergraduates only) using an income-based repayment system that removes repayment for those making \$25,000 or less, slashes repayment for others to 5% of their disposable income, and improves the *Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program* allowing \$10,000 in debt relief for every year of service up to 5 years (or \$50,000).

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<sup>6</sup>General Accounting Office (GAO). (2018). Historically Black colleges and universities: Action needed to improve participation in Education’s HBCU Capital Financing Programs (GAO-18-455). Washington, DC: Author. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/692809.pdf>

Beyond debt relief, the Biden-Harris team promises federal support for graduate programs in teaching, health care, and STEM fields. This includes marquee internship, fellowship, and career pathway initiatives into federal agencies. ***By reducing debt and expanding graduate programs, we're lifting all boats in service to solving pressing global problems.***



## 6. PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS

A \$3 billion investment, the Biden-Harris education plan devotes \$750 million each year to Title III and Title V<sup>7</sup> funds that serve as critical lifelines at HBCUs and other MSIs. Title III (Part B), Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities, grants are awarded to eligible institutions to underwrite construction/renovation of campus facilities, financial literacy of students, faculty/staff development, faculty exchanges, endowment, and other legislatively allowable activities. For instance, in a previous role, my team used Title III funds to support faculty development travel, campus-wide staff trainings, and a male retention initiative comprised of mentoring, peer advocacy, and tutoring. In Fiscal Year 2020, \$324.8 million was awarded through Title III, according to DOE data.

Despite their outsized contributions to producing graduates of color, especially Black bachelors degree recipients, graduation rates at HBCUs fall below the national average (see Table 2). Scarce resources affect some HBCUs' ability to offer adequate support services for students who need remediation, development, or supplemental instruction to increase college readiness. To achieve Biden's goal of ensuring that a student's educational opportunity is not determined by one's zip code will require providing equal resources through more equitable means. The new administration's proposal holds promise for leveling the playing field and increasing persistence by accelerating degree attainment through guided pathways, course (re)alignment, year-round scheduling, and college credit for on-the-job training. ***By promoting student success, we're delivering on the promise of a limitless future!***

**Table 2**  
**Top HBCU Graduation Rates**

#	Institution	Location	Graduation Rate (4-year)	Graduation Rate (6-year)
1	Spelman College	Georgia	68%	75%
2	Howard University	District of Columbia	52%	65%
3	Hampton University	Virginia	41%	62%
4	Morehouse College	Georgia	33%	54%
5	Fisk University	Tennessee	38%	47%

*Diversifying revenue streams is a key strategy for supporting the sustainability of HBCUs, especially for small privates.*

—Terrell L. Strayhorn

<sup>7</sup>Title V funds come from the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program and support LAAs similar to those via Title III.

## AN HBCU POLICY AGENDA

To ensure the sustainability of HBCUs, we need to move beyond merely talking about HBCUs to working with, working for, and working on their behalf to “build Black better” in this country. This in-depth report includes relevant data and fresh perspectives that illustrate the systemic issues that impact equity and full inclusion of HBCUs in the nation’s higher education enterprise. To deliver on the pledge, several policy and practical solutions are necessary.

- **We need proactive strategies**, like the HBCU Capital Financing Program, that not only make HBCUs an administration and policy priority, but that also alleviate the crushing burden of debt that has cascaded over time due to years of inequitable funding, opportunities, and treatment.
- **We need creative, evidence-based approaches** to bridging the gap between high school and college, especially for HBCUs and the schools from which they recruit *or might draw* potential students.
- **We need strong HBCU voices on Capitol Hill**, championing the collective and individual needs of HBCUs in the presence of elected officials, lobbyists, and congressional staffers.
- **We need advocates to engage their local, state, and federal officials**—from school boards to superintendents, city council members to mayors, governors, and Congress—acknowledging HBCUs as vital engines of economic growth, social development, cultural advancement, and democratic participation. Write to them. Visit their offices (when it’s safe) or attend their virtual town halls. Speak truth to power. Make “good trouble,” to quote the late US Representative John Lewis, an HBCU (Fisk) alumnus.
- **And, we, *The People*, need to exercise the power of our vote and voice.** Much like we’ve seen in the recent national election and run-offs contests in southern states like Georgia, minority voices can be in the majority. Our vote is our voice...and they matter because *we matter* and #HBCUMatter and #BlackLivesMatter. Use your vote and your voice—no matter how strained from the stress of racial injustice, social unrest, decades of dehumanization, pandemic panic and more—in service to things about which you care deeply, HBCUs are an excellent cause.





And we observe similar patterns of behavior today, for instance, in granting federal R&D dollars to Black colleges. That HBCUs together receive less than a single PWI (Johns Hopkins) alone in federal, state, and local grants and contracts is cause for attention. Attention is necessary, but insufficient, for creating a call to action. So, too, is the preparation of annual plans to identify “policy gaps” negatively affecting HBCUs. Gap-gazing rarely results in change. Neither do annual reports from federal agencies describing aspirational efforts to strengthen the capacity and competitiveness of HBCUs for federal opportunities. Or wordy, lengthy proposals imagining more favorable conditions under which HBCUs might compete for federal and private sector grants. Yes, that’s a start—most revolutions begin with revelations. But creative ideas are not enough. Ideas must translate to implementation. Words must inspire work. Rhetoric give way to reality. And, aspirations must move us to action and accountability.

**Think about it.** There has been a shameful killing of unarmed Black folx, or otherwise diverse persons, in every single place where HBCUs are located, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting database. Trayvon Martin in Florida. Michael Brown in Missouri. Tamir Rice and John Crawford III in Ohio. Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. Atatiana Jefferson in Georgia. Walter Scott in South Carolina. Yvette Smith and Patrick Warren in Texas. And so many more, I can’t bear to list them all without crying (again)...though I affirm that we must continue to “Say their Name.” That so many shameful shootings of Blacks and people of color have taken place in states where HBCUs are located says something important about the intersections between race, racism, demography, and geography. That virtually none of the shooters—some call assassins—have been charged or face charges reveals something else about the failing accountability structures. To deliver on the “Pledge of Allegiance to HBCUs,” we’ll need more than fresh ideas and creative capacities. We need to build, implement, and monitor accountability systems that track progress toward measurable goals, changes in competitive conditions, improvements in federal review panels, and strategic solutions for addressing gaps, both in the short- and long-term. To do anything less would be...well, an injustice.

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SOURCE: Information discussed in this section of the report was informed indirectly by the author’s forthcoming edited volume on HBCUs, past scholarship, and Bracey’s (2017) *The Significance of HBCUs in the 21st Century: Will such institutions of higher learning survive?*, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. Throughout this report, the terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably, referring to individuals whose ancestral origins lie in groups of African descent including African Americans, Africans, Haitians, West Indians, among others.

## CONCLUSION

While ambitious, the budget proposals included in the Biden-Harris education plan make sense when one considers that just 101 HBCUs collectively enroll 300,000 students and that 70% of HBCU students rely on federal grants, loans, and work study to finance their education. Their comprehensive plan outlines the broad contours of specific actions designed to sustain HBCUs and the communities they serve. I agree with President Biden and Vice President Harris—location shouldn't predict one's vocation and geography growing up shouldn't determine one's destiny *in life*. Neither should the racial composition of one's college or university dictate the resources and supports available to enable student success. The Biden-Harris team have pledged significant support to HBCUs amid the nation's historic present-day reckoning with race and racism, as well as a global COVID-19 pandemic that has taken way too many lives. Rising to meet the challenges of today will require the nation to benefit from the creativity, contributions, and leadership of socially-conscious, "woke" graduates produced by HBCUs, institutions where Black lives have always mattered. #HBCUPledge

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**Figure 1**

Original Version by Colonel George Balch (1885)

“We give our heads and our hearts to God and our country; one country, one language, one flag.”

**Figure 2**

Revised Version by Francis Bellamy (1892)

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

**Figure 3**

Novel HBCU Version by Terrell Strayhorn (2021)

“I pledge allegiance to the federally designated historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) of the United States of America, and to the rich history and promising futures upon which they stand, 101 institutions, in 21 states and territories, *unique yet united*, creating equity, opportunity, and justice for all.”

**Table 1:**

University Endowments Exceeding \$1 Billion

#	Institution	Endowment (in billions)	Enrollment	% Pell
1	Harvard University	\$38.3	31,655	11.4
2	University of Texas (System)	\$30.9	—	—
3	Yale University	\$29.4	13,609	17.4
4	Stanford University	\$26.5	17,249	16.9
5	University of Michigan	\$11.9	48,090	16.6
6	Washington University, St. Louis	\$7.6	16,191	13.2
7	University of Virginia	\$7.0	25,012	13.2
8	Rice University	\$6.3	7,282	15.5
9	UNC Chapel Hill	\$3.4	29,877	23
10	University of Miami	\$1.02	17,811	14.1

*Note.* Calculations based on data from the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education. Percent Pell based on number of Pell students reported in Financial Aid, divided by total undergraduate.

**Table 2**

Top HBCU Graduation Rates

#	Institution	Location	Graduation Rate (4-year)	Graduation Rate (6-year)
1	Spelman College	Georgia	68%	75%
2	Howard University	District of Columbia	52%	65%
3	Hampton University	Virginia	41%	62%
4	Morehouse College	Georgia	33%	54%
5	Fisk University	Tennessee	38%	47%

*Source:* US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

*"HBCUs are more important now than ever before. Across the nation, corporations, cities, and communities are looking for leaders who know what it means to lead diverse populations and be sensitive to their needs. HBCUs offer students academic programs and experiences where they grow and develop cultural, spiritual, economic, and political sensibility which sets them apart as global leaders."*

**—Dr. Hakim J. Lucas**  
President & CEO  
Virginia Union University

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*"I am eager to see how the Biden-Harris administration will show up as action-oriented advocates for HBCUs. As I think about the current climate of racial injustice and equity-minded practices, HBCUs are the foundation of this hard, purpose driven work. Therefore, it is critical that the new administration deliver. It's beyond time for HBCUs to receive due justice..."*

**—Dr. Kellie Dixon**  
Director of Student Affairs Assessment and Staff Development  
North Carolina A&T State University

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*"If America is going to truly make African Americans full members of this society, this nation is going to have to fully respect and fund HBCUs. The talent and ingenuity is there. But if the resources are not allocated, we will be perpetually running behind, and that isn't good for the long term health of Black America."*

**—Roland Martin**  
Host/Managing Editor  
#RolandMartinUnfiltered

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*"Daily...HBCU...faculty demonstrate their deep commitment to developing students' academic skills and their confidence to address the challenges our world and nation face effectively. Ensuring HBCUs can continue to support students' success requires continued support."*

**—Alma R. Clayton-Pedersen, Ph.D.**  
CEO, Emeritus Consulting Group and Distinguished Fellow  
Association of American Colleges & Universities(AAC&U)

*"The Biden Administration must start by announcing a reset in the economics of higher education. It should start by canceling at least fifty percent of the 1.7 trillion student loan debts and apply low-interest rates to remaining individual balances. This allocation will signal that the administration sees student loans and their impact on individuals as a national economic challenge. Finally, the administration should mandate economic reparations be paid to HBCUs for past discrimination. Moving forward, the federal government should ensure state legislatures who historically have been inclined to have a bias in favor of predominantly white state institutions, allocate fair funding levels for HBCUs."*

**—Cynthia P. King,**  
Professor  
Department of Communication Studies

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*"Higher education policy should focus on eliminating barriers to college access, college affordability and college success. This should include doubling or tripling the average Pell Grant, mandating a standard financial aid award letter, and updating the loan limits for federal education loans. If the goal is to help Black or African-American students, why not just forgive the debt of all Black or African-American students? If one cannot target loan forgiveness by race, then direct it at students who attended a HBCU, since HBCU students are much more likely to borrow than students at other types of colleges. Forgiving the student loan debt of just students who borrowed to attend a HBCU would cost about \$25 billion."*

**—Mark Kantrowitz**  
Financial Aid Expert, Publisher  
[PrivateStudentLoans.guru](http://PrivateStudentLoans.guru)

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*"Diversifying revenue streams is a key strategy for supporting the sustainability of HBCUs, especially for small privates."*

**—Terrell L. Strayhorn**  
Provost & Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs  
Director, Center for the Study of HBCUs  
Virginia Union University

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