

Epilogue

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By now you have come to the conclusion of *Reimagining Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Survival Beyond 2020*. You might be wondering what you can do to ensure that historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) not only survive beyond 2020 but indeed thrive in the twenty-first century. To assist you, I offer the following suggestions:

- (1) If you have means, give to HBCUs. Over the past five years, I have offered to match contributions to HBCUs as the year comes to a close. I have many, many friends and followers across various social media platforms who have graduated, work at, profess to love, and value HBCUs. However, over five years, only seven people have taken me up on my offer to match their donation if they send me the receipt. I notice that a lot of people (in the multiple hundreds) will like my posts that state that I'll match donations, but rarely does anyone make a contribution. We put our money toward those things, ideas, organizations, and institutions we value. If we value HBCUs, we have to give to them.
- (2) If you have influence, make sure to talk with policymakers and politicians about the value and contributions of HBCUs across myriad areas. Write op-eds for newspapers in state capitols and in the Washington, D.C. area. Prepare policy reports that are written in clear, straightforward prose that is easily digestible by everyone. Host webinars on these policy reports and invite policymakers and legislative staff to attend them.
- (3) Always center HBCUs in higher education conversations. All too often, HBCUs are left out or are an add-on to conversations about important topics. Make sure to connect HBCUs to important issues and talk about their role and impact across various topics from health care to science to leadership to K–12 education to law to art. Make sure that you are well read and cognizant of the many ways that HBCUs make a difference in the lives of African Americans and also others in society – both in the United States and abroad.
- (4) If you know people who own or lead businesses, remind them that HBCUs are essential sources of talent for internships and job openings. We should never hear any companies or corporations say that there isn't enough African-American talent. And if we do, we need to follow up

these ignorant statements with a list of the contributions that HBCUs make to the preparation of students in business, medicine, the arts, the sciences, the professoriate, and beyond.

- (5) If you know a student at an HBCU, volunteer to mentor them. Provide them with the social and cultural capital that they need to succeed. Create a pathway free of roadblocks to success for them. Ask these same students to pay the gesture forward and mentor someone who comes after them. Mentoring is essential to success in any field, and being able to see someone who looks like you achieving success is even more powerful.
- (6) If you are a researcher, do rigorous research related to the contributions of HBCUs. Always operate with an ethic of care, while at the same time make sure to look for the strengths and weaknesses within HBCUs. Using an asset framework is important, but that doesn't mean that we as researchers should ignore the problems and the weaknesses. For example, there is evidence of sexism among boards of trustees at some HBCUs, and this sexism has manifested in very difficult and alienating experiences for black women leaders. It is essential that we are honest and forthright in our research related to HBCUs in order to move to increased levels of excellence. The only way for positive change to happen is if we address the problems that stand in its way.
- (7) If you are a quantitative researcher, think about ways that you can quantify the contributions of HBCUs. Funders, policymakers, and media are dazzled by quantitative data, and although they like a good story, they need data to support anecdotal stories. It is important that more researchers writing about HBCUs engage quantitative methods, working with qualitative researchers and historians to tell complete stories of HBCUs.
- (8) If you are a professor at an HBCU in the field of education, business, sociology, history, economics, or any field that crosses over with education, provide your students with opportunities to do research and tackle questions related to HBCUs. It is essential that there are more African-American scholars conducting research related to HBCUs as African-American perspectives are essential to the research process and implementation of findings. An example that I love took place at Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas. When the college was fighting the city of Dallas because the city leaders were trying to put a landfill next to the college, the faculty used their classrooms to educate students. Faculty in business, history, and political science talked about the power of using African-American intelligence and buying power to make change with examples of African Americans and HBCU students in boycotts, marches, and sit-ins. Students researched the strategies of civil rights activists hailing from North Carolina A&T State University, Bennett College for Women, Spelman College, and Fisk

University. This project resulted in the landfill being moved and students who understood the power of research, the power of HBCUs, and the power of black communities.

- (9) If you have connections across various media outlets, tell the story of HBCUs. One of the reasons (in addition to systemic racism) why predominantly white institutions get so much media coverage is that they have large communication staffs that are focused on getting positive press. HBCUs don't have large communication staffs and as such, it is crucial that everyone who cares about HBCUs tells their stories. If you know reporters, send them positive stories to share. If you see positive stories, share them across social media. If you enjoy writing for public consumption, write opinion essays focused on specific accomplishments, innovative programs, and contributions to local communities and the nation.
- (10) Lastly, talk about HBCUs to everyone. Don't keep these conversations only among African-American communities. We don't want HBCUs to be the "best kept secret." African Americans make up 13% of the population, so it is essential that others support HBCUs as well as African Americans. But to support HBCUs, others need to know about them, their contributions, and their needs. Take the time to explain the history, explain the current contributions, and talk about the needs. For me personally, there is no one who knows me who doesn't know about HBCUs. I bring them into conversations with every organization with which I engage. I talk to funders about HBCUs. I talk to researchers about HBCUs. I include HBCUs in every course I teach. I recommend HBCU students, staff, faculty, and presidents for jobs, awards, committees, etc. We have to be active in our support and love for HBCUs or they won't thrive in the twenty-first century.

The epilogue from renowned researcher, Dr Marybeth Gasman.