

# CMSI RESEARCH BRIEF

## The History of Predominantly Black Institutions: A Primer

By Alexis M. Johnson, University of Virginia School of  
Education and Human Development

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alexis M. Johnson is a third year doctoral student in the Social Foundations of Education program at the University of Virginia's School of Education and Human Development. She specializes in the History of Education, and serves as the Associate Director for the Teachers in the Movement Oral History

Project, and as a graduate research assistant with the Center for Race and Public Education in the South. Alexis is also a graduate research assistant with the National Park Service's Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site Ethnographic Resource Study. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, Alexis worked at two Predominantly Black Institutions as a Writing Center Coordinator and an Academic Advising Director. Alexis holds a B.A. in English from Francis Marion University (a Predominantly Black Institution) and an M.A. in Pan-African Studies from the University of Louisville.

For questions about this brief, please contact Alexis M. Johnson at [amj4rf@virginia.edu](mailto:amj4rf@virginia.edu).

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) are colleges or universities whose student bodies comprise 40% or more of Black American students, and that are eligible for discretionary funding through Title III of the Higher Education Act. Although PBIs were granted federal designation in 2008, these institutions have been in existence since the mid-1960s. This research brief documents the very first PBIs that emerged on the higher education landscape. Additionally, because PBIs were not founded for the explicit purpose of serving African American students, this brief describes four factors that account for their emergence.*

### INTRODUCTION

Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) are colleges or universities whose student bodies comprise 40% or more of Black American students, and which are eligible for discretionary funding from the federal government through Title III of the Higher Education Act.<sup>1</sup> Enrolling 9% of Black collegians,<sup>2</sup> PBIs play an integral and important role in providing postsecondary access, attainment, and increased upward mobility for African American students.<sup>3</sup> Although PBIs were first given federal recognition in 2007 with the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, and subsequently granted federal designation in 2008 when Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act,<sup>4</sup> these institutions have been in existence since the mid-1960s. In order to recover the lost history of these institutions, and to move them from the margins of research on Minority Serving Institutions,<sup>5</sup> this research brief documents the very first Predominantly Black Institutions that emerged on the higher education landscape, and describes four factors that contributed to their emergence. Consequently, this brief is guided by the research questions:

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1. What were the first Predominantly Black Institutions and when did they emerge?
2. Because PBIs were not founded for the explicit purpose of serving African American students, what factors account for their emergence?

## IN SEARCH OF PREDOMINANTLY BLACK INSTITUTIONS

Predominantly Black Institutions were hidden in plain sight when they first populated the higher education landscape in the 1960s. It was only through the federal government and nonprofit organizations tracking the enrollment of Black students in higher education during the 1960s and 1970s that PBIs were discovered. In 1974, the Bureau of Postsecondary Education sponsored the Institute for Services to Education to produce a report, “Degrees Granted and Enrollment Trends in Historically Black Colleges: An Eight Year Study.” The 1974 report, which covered 1966–1973, is the first known identifier of Predominantly Black Institutions. In the process of collecting data on the enrollment and degree attainment of Black students at HBCUs, the authors discovered 16 institutions that were “identified as predominantly Black institutions by the Federal Interagency (FICE) Committee on Education or the Institute for Services to Education (ISE).” PBIs were defined as “those institutions with Black enrollments greater than fifty percent, [and which] were founded for a general population but because of their geographical location, are now mostly Black.”<sup>6</sup> The report noted that of the 248,636 Black students enrolled in Black colleges, 67,347, or 27%, were enrolled in PBIs.<sup>7</sup>

In 1978, the Southern Regional Education Board published “Black Enrollment in Higher Education: Trends in the Nation and in the South.” This report, based upon data from Fall 1976, tracked Black student enrollment across all postsecondary institutions, and found that the “[t]otal Black enrollment surpassed one million.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, it found that of the 145 Black colleges in existence, 39 were “newer institutions with a predominance of Black students.”<sup>9</sup> Then, in 1979, the National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Colleges and Universities

issued a report, “Access of Black Americans to Higher Education: How Open is the Door?” The report served as a “technical review of the status, programs, and issues relating to the access of Black Americans to all forms of productive postsecondary education,” and offered recommendations on how governmental officials—from federal to local—might address issues of college access for African Americans.<sup>10</sup> Because of its focus on access, the Committee tracked the enrollments of Black collegians, and found that African Americans continued to pursue college degrees at Historically Black institutions. Yet they also found—using data from Fall 1976—that Black students were enrolled in 42 “[n]ewer Predominantly Black College[s]...”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, in 1981, “Predominantly Black Institutions of Higher Education in the United States: A Changing Picture,” the first known scholarly manuscript on PBIs, was published. This “introductory and classificatory” dissertation was a comparative study between the traditionally Black institutions (HBCUs) and the new predominantly Black institutions.

Stewart (1979) found that as of 1976, 153 Black institutions existed; 98 were HBCUs, and 55 were predominantly Black institutions.<sup>12</sup> Stewart additionally found that of the 55 PBIs, 20 were founded as white institutions before 1954, and eventually gained a majority Black student body population, while the remaining 35 were founded after 1954 and gained a majority Black student body.<sup>13</sup>

Out of these four publications emerged the conclusion that Predominantly Black Institutions were institutions that were not Historically Black Colleges or Universities, but whose student body enrollment comprised 50% or more of Black students. Another significant finding was that the majority of these institutions were public community colleges.

## METHODS

The authors of the aforementioned publications each provided a list of the Predominantly Black Institutions that they were able to locate. In order to develop a comprehensive list of the first PBIs, I compiled the list of PBIs as recorded in all four publications. Because most institutions were recorded across all four publications, I listed each college and university



only once. After eliminating duplicates, I found that between 1966 and 1979, 59 colleges or universities were Predominantly Black Institutions. Table 1 lists these institutions. The institutional type, location, and year established were added to the table for further context. Colleges or universities whose names have changed are notated in parentheses.

## FINDINGS

The following is a categorization of PBIs by institutional type:

- 61.7%: Public, 2 year
- 11.7%: Private, 4 year
- 10.0%: Public, 4 year
- 8.3%: Private, 2 year
- 5.0%: For-profit, 2 year
- 3.3%: For-profit, 4 year

The institutions were located in the following geographic regions:

- 35.6%: South
- 28.8%: Midwest
- 27.1%: Northeast
- 8.5%: West

These data reveal that the first Predominantly Black Institutions were primarily public community colleges, and that nearly two-thirds of the institutions were located outside of the South. While these data provide important descriptive information, in the next section of the report, I identify four factors that explain the emergence of these institutions.

## ANALYSIS: FACTORS ACCOUNTING FOR THE EMERGENCE OF PREDOMINANTLY BLACK INSTITUTIONS

### THE GREAT MIGRATION

One of the greatest internal migrations ever experienced in America took place over a 65-year period (1915-1970) as approximately six million African Americans fled the South for the Northeast, Midwest, and West. Known as “The Great Migration,” the two waves of the migration were bracketed by the two World Wars. Between 1916 and the end of the 1920s, an estimated 1.5 million African Americans left the South, driven by the promise of better economic opportunity, as a brief suspension in European migration created a labor vacuum in northern industries that



**TABLE 1: PREDOMINANTLY BLACK INSTITUTIONS: 1966-1979**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Institutional Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Year Established</b>
Atlanta Junior College (Atlanta Metropolitan State College)	2 year, public	Atlanta, GA	1974
Bay College of Maryland	2 year, private	Baltimore, MD	1969
Beaufort Technical Education Center (Technical College of the Lowcountry)	2 year, public	Beaufort, SC	1868
Borough-Manhattan Community College	2 year, public	New York City, NY	1963
Bronx Community College	2 year, public	Bronx, NY	1957
Central YMCA Community College	2 year, public	Chicago, IL	1961
Chicago State University	4 year, public	Chicago, IL	1867
College for Human Services (Metropolitan College of New York)	2 year, public	New York City, NY	1964
Collegiate Institute	2 year, for-profit	Brooklyn, NY	1854
College of Alameda	2 year, public	Alameda, CA	1968
College of the Virgin Islands (University of the Virgin Islands)	4 year, public	St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John	1962
Community College of Baltimore (Baltimore City Community College)	2 year, public	Baltimore, MD	1947
Community College of Philadelphia	2 year, public	Philadelphia, PA	1965
Compton Community College (Compton College)	2 year, public	Compton, CA	1927
Cuyahoga Community College (Metropolitan Campus)	2 year, public	Cleveland, OH	1963
Daniel Hale Williams University	4 year, private	Chicago, IL	1891
D.C. Teachers College	4 year, public	Washington, D.C.	1851
DeKalb Community College (Perimeter College at Georgia State University)	2 year, public	Atlanta, GA	1964
Detroit Institute of Technology	4 year, private	Detroit, MI	1891
Donnelly College	4 year, private	Kansas City, KS	1949
Durham Technical Institute (Durham Technical Community College)	2 year, public	Durham, NC	1961

Dyke College (Chancellor University)	4 year, for-profit	Cleveland, OH	1848
Edgecombe County Technical Institute (Edgecombe Community College)	2 year, public	Tarboro, NC	1967
Essex County Community College (Essex County College)	2 year, public	Newark, NJ	1966
Federal City College (University of the District of Columbia)	4 year, public	Washington, DC	1966
Highland Park Community College	2 year, public	Highland Park, MI	1918
Interboro Institute	2 year, for-profit	New York City, NY	N/A
Kennedy-King College	2 year, public	Chicago, IL	1935
Laney College	2 year, public	Oakland, CA	1953
Loop College (Harold Washington College)	2 year, public	Chicago, IL	1962
Los Angeles Southwest College	2 year, public	West Athens, CA	1967
Malcolm-King College	2 year, private	Harlem, NY	1968
Malcolm X College	2 year, public	Chicago, IL	1911
Martin Technical Institute (Martin Community College)	2 year, public	Williamston, NC	1976
Medgar Evers College	4 year, public	Brooklyn, NY	1970
Mt. Providence Junior College	2 year, private	Baltimore, MD	1963
Nairobi College	2 year, private	East Palo Alto, CA	1969
National College of Education-Urban campus (National Louis University)	4 year, private	Chicago, IL	1886
New York City Community College (New York City College of Technology)	2 year, public	Brooklyn, NY	1946
Olive-Harvey College	2 year, public	Chicago, IL	1970
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	2 year, public	Orangeburg, SC	1968
Passaic County Community College	2 year, public	Paterson, NJ	1971
Paul D. Camp Community College	2 year, public	Franklin, VA	1970
Roanoke-Chowan Technical Institute (Roanoke Chowan Community College)	2 year, public	Ahoskie, NC	1967

Roxbury Community College	2 year, public	Boston, MA	1973
Saint Louis Community College at Forest Park	2 year, public	St. Louis, MO	1967
Shaw College at Detroit	4 year, private	Detroit, MI	1936
Shelby State Community College (Southwest Tennessee Community College)	2 year, public	Memphis, TN	1972
Southeastern University	4 year, private	Washington, D.C.	1879
State Community College	2 year, public	East Saint Louis, IL	1969
Strayer College	4 year, for-profit	Washington, D.C.	1904
Taylor Business Institute	2 year, for-profit	Chicago, IL	1962
Trident Technical College-Palmer Campus (Trident Technical College)	2 year, public	Charleston, SC	1973
Trinity College (Trinity Washington University)	4 year, private	Washington, D.C.	1897
Washington Technical Institute (University of the District of Columbia)	2 year, public	Washington, D.C.	1966
Wayne County Community College	2 year, public	Detroit, MI	1967
West Los Angeles College	2 year, public	Culver City, CA	1969
Vance-Granville Community College	2 year, public	Henderson, NC	1969
York College	4 year, public	Queens, New York	1966

*Of note: This list contains both for-profit and non-profit institutions. In the 1960's, the U.S. federal government and other organizations tracked both for-profit and non-profit enrollments of colleges/universities with 50% or more of Black students.*

African Americans could fill.<sup>14</sup> But the promise of an economic future that did not involve toiling away as sharecroppers was not the only push factor for southern migrants. The North and West also offered African Americans recourse from the racial violence to which they were subjected, as well as the opportunity to gain political power, which they lacked due to systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South. While the Great Depression curtailed the migration during the 1930s, America's entry into World War II, and the subsequent need for wartime laborers—as during World War I—stimulated the second wave of the migration which lasted until approximately 1970. Throughout the Great

Migration, New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Cleveland, San Francisco-Oakland, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore received the highest population of southern migrants.<sup>15</sup> It is thus no coincidence that PBIs emerged in (or near) each of these cities during the 1960s and 1970s (see Table 1).

While The Great Migration served as an exodus for millions of African Americans from the South, there were many that chose to remain, and instead relocated from rural to urban areas. For example, as historian Luther Adams writes in *Way Up North in Louisville, African American*

*Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970*, “At a time when roughly half the Black population left the South seeking greater opportunity and freedom in the North and West, that same desire was often a catalyst for some Blacks to remain in the South.”<sup>16</sup> These migratory patterns thus account for the select presence of the first PBIs in the urban south hubs of Atlanta and Memphis.

For all of the African Americans who fled the South, or elected to stay but relocate to an urban city, there were still numerous African Americans who never left the rural South. The choice to stay is reflected in the small number of PBIs that emerged in the rural towns of North Carolina and South Carolina. For example, a few institutions opened in the Choanoke region of North Carolina, the state’s “little Mississippi” and home to its poorest Black citizens,<sup>17</sup> while one of South Carolina’s PBIs opened in Orangeburg, SC, the county seat of the largely agricultural and majority Black Orangeburg County.<sup>18</sup> That PBIs opened in these areas of NC and SC is not solely explained by the lack of out migration by Black Americans; it also points to another significant factor contributing to the emergence of PBIs.

## THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Beginning in the mid-1960s, a massive trend swept the nation: the community college movement. As Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel note, between 1965 and 1969, more than one community college opened every week, on average. Furthermore, by 1968, every state, except for Nevada, had a community college.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Carolinas, the major impetus behind the development of a community college system was the South’s transformation from an agrarian to an industrialized society. The South’s “economic restructuring”<sup>20</sup> meant that workers had to transition from the cotton fields to the factory floors, and community colleges—then widely known as technical education centers—were integral to the transformation. As in the case of SC, political leaders pushed for northern industries to relocate to the South, and the primary recruitment tool was the promise that within 100 days, a technical school would provide a fully trained workforce—at no cost to the company—ready to enter the plants and factories.<sup>21</sup>

The example of the Carolinas reveal that the opening of community colleges—particularly those that would gain majority Black student bodies—was driven by larger societal issues. For example, Los Angeles Southwest College (LASC) opened in 1967, two years after the rebellion that engulfed the South Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts in 1965.<sup>22</sup> LASC, alongside Boston’s Roxbury Community College (RCC), additionally illuminate that while community colleges provided access to marginalized populations, they also reinforced racialized hierarchies in college access, given that these institutions opened in segregated Black neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup>

## WHITE FLIGHT

That LASC and RCC opened in segregated Black neighborhoods is not surprising given the hardening of residential segregation in America’s metropolises, as African Americans populated them over the course of the Great Migration. As Leah Platt Boustan notes, “...the residential isolation of northern Blacks in majority-Black neighborhoods increased as the migration got underway, due primarily to the departure of urban white households from central cities. By 1970, 70 percent of Black residents in northern and western cities lived in majority-Black neighborhoods...”<sup>24</sup> As Boustan points out, much of the residential segregation was attributed to whites fleeing the city core and relocating into suburban areas, a phenomenon known as “white flight.” White flight’s consequential effect on the emergence of PBIs is not only evidenced in the case of LASC and RCC, but also accounts for the emergence of many bachelor’s granting PBIs. Chicago State University is illustrative. Initially founded as a white teacher training school, the institution eventually gained a majority Black student body by 1971,<sup>25</sup> as whites fled Chicago’s South Side, transforming the neighborhood into a majority Black enclave. Thus, white flight resulted in some proximal higher education institutions in segregated Black neighborhoods transforming from historically white colleges to predominantly Black institutions.

## FEDERAL INTERVENTION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Despite the convergence of The Great Migration, the community college movement, and white flight, there was no guarantee that students would pursue a postsecondary credential. Beyond students’ individual

desire to pursue college, whether for personal fulfillment or to attain upward mobility, it is also likely that students were influenced by the “massification” and diversification of higher education, that reached its peak in the 1960s, but which began in the 1940s with the passage of the Veterans Readjustment Act (1944), better known as the GI Bill. While the bill served mainly white male veterans, effectively locking out most gay and lesbian, women, and African American veterans, it did contribute to a growing diversity of higher education. For example, historically Black colleges experienced a surge in enrollment due to the GI Bill’s educational provisions.<sup>26</sup> Then, in 1947, President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education released *Higher Education for American Democracy*; among its calls were an end to segregated higher education, increased support for adult education, and a substantial increase in the enrollment of colleges and universities within ten years.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1950s, even as the onset and peak of the Cold War tempered them, colleges continued to expand their public reach. As historian Christopher Loss notes, “The belief that millions more Americans—white and Black, young and old—were not only deserving but capable of at least some advanced study fueled widespread interest in the so-called ‘democratization’ of higher education during the 1950s.”<sup>28</sup> The increasing massification and diversification of higher education collided with the height of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, as well as President Lyndon Johnson’s vision for a Great Society, which included extending educational opportunity to the racially and economically marginalized. Johnson’s educational vision was codified into law with the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Act incentivized higher education for the nation’s low-income students, with the promise of loans, grants, and work-study—via Title IV—to help subsidize their college education.<sup>29</sup> For many African Americans, particularly those southern migrants and their progeny from working-class backgrounds,<sup>30</sup> then, the passage of the Higher Education Act almost certainly provided the financial keys to open up previously closed doors of access and opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

This research brief unveiled the long-hidden history of Predominantly Black Institutions. It revealed that while PBIs were granted federal

designation in 2008, these institutions have occupied the higher education landscape for at least 44 years prior to the designation. Today, as one of the seven types of Minority Serving Institutions, PBIs are praised for doing so much to contribute to student success with so few resources, compared to majority and historically white institutions. The fewer resources illuminate why the federal designation and the subsequent ability to apply for additional funding is so important to the continued life and sustainability of these institutions. The history told here illustrates that PBIs accomplished quite a remarkable feat by providing a collegiate education to Black students for decades without the federal support afforded to them by Title III of the Higher Education Act. This fact is a testimony to the resiliency of these institutions.



## ENDNOTES

**1** Alexandra Hegji, “Programs for Minority-Serving Institutions Under the Higher Education Act” (Congressional Research Service Report, Washington, D.C.), 29-30.

**2** Brandy Jones, “Predominantly Black Institutions: Pathways to Black Student Educational Attainment” (CMSI Research Brief, Philadelphia, PA), 1.

**3** Robert T. Palmer and Jared Avery, “A Portrait of Predominantly Black Institutions in Facilitating Success Among Low-Income, First-Generation Black Collegians,” in *Pulling Back the Curtain: Enrollment and Outcomes at Minority Serving Institutions*, eds. Lorelle L. Espinosa, Jonathan M. Turk, and Morgan Taylor (ACE Center for Policy Research and Strategy, Washington, D.C.), 18-21.

**4** Hegji, “Programs for Minority-Serving Institutions,” 29.

**5** Jones, “Predominantly Black Institutions,” 1.

**6** Elias Blake, Jr., Linda Jackson Lambert, and Joseph L. Martin, “Degrees Granted and Enrollment Trends in Historically Black Colleges: An Eight-Year Study” (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.), 10.

**7** Ibid., 16.

**8** James R. Mingle, “Black Enrollment in Higher Education: Trends in the Nation and the South” (Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA), 3.

**9** Ibid., 8.

**10** Linia Lambert, “Access of Black Americans to Higher Education: How Open is the Door?” (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.), 1.

**11** Ibid., 13.

**12** Jewel Hope Stewart, “Predominantly Black Institutions of Higher Education in the United States: A Changing Picture” (doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1979), 28.

**13** Ibid.

**14** James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3-4.

**15** Steven J. Diner, *Universities and Their Cities: Urban Higher Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 43

**16** Luther Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 1.

**17** Robert Korstad and James Leloudis, *To Right these Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 175.

**18** Lauritza Salley Hill, *African Americans of Orangeburg County* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 7.

**19** Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, *The Diverted Dream: Community College and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 84.

**20** Greta de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice After the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 2.

**21** Tom Poland, *Transforming South Carolina's Destiny: SC Technical College System's First 50 Years* (SC Technical College System, Columbia, SC), 28

**22** “History of Los Angeles Southwest College,” accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.lasc.edu/about-lasc/history>.

**23** For more information on the opening of LASC, see Josh M. Beach, *Gateway to Opportunity? A History of the Community College in America*, (Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2011), 90. Historian Lily Geismer describes how Boston's neighborhoods became racially segregated: "The deliberately discriminatory policies of the Federal Housing Administration, Boston Housing Authority, and urban renewal agencies combined with mass suburbanization left African Americans across the economic spectrum largely concentrated in increasingly overcrowded neighborhoods. By the early 1960s, 80 percent of the city's African American population remained largely confined to fifteen contiguous census tracts in the South End, Roxbury, and North Dorchester." Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 26.

**24** Leah Platt Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 3.

**25** "Chicago State University and Progressive Education," accessed June 14, 2020, [http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/csu\\_digi](http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/csu_digi).

**26** Christopher Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 116.

**27** Ibid., 118.

**28** Ibid.

**29** Alexandra Hegji, "The Higher Education Act: A Primer" (Congressional Research Service Report, Washington, D.C.), 9-19.

**30** For example, as Steven Diner writes, "A modest number of African American students, mostly from middle-class homes, had attended college since the nineteenth century. They had enrolled primarily in historically Black institutions, located mostly in the South. But after

World War II, as many African Americans relocated from the South to northern cities, increasing numbers of Black students enrolled in public institutions to which they could commute." Steven J. Diner, *Universities and Their Cities: Urban Higher Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 43.