

# CMSI RESEARCH BRIEF

## The Mis-Engagement of Higher Education: A Case for Liberation Engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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### Executive Summary

The purpose of this research brief is to highlight the role Historically Black College and University (HBCU) presidents play in the preservation and promotion of the distinctive civic engagement of their institutions. Seeking to understand HBCU presidents' perceptions of the kind of institutional civic engagement traditionally defined by the community work of Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) prompted an exploration of the language and processes HBCUs use to work with their communities toward Black uplift as well as the development of civic agency in their students.

The study's findings suggest that these HBCU leaders are facilitators of a unique Black college - Black community relationship. To facilitate that relationship, the presidents use **three leadership strategies: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence and community message congruence.**

The use of these three strategies reinforces a synergistic system between the HBCU and community, which I name institutional responsiveness. Institutional responsiveness is reflective of the bond that exists between the Black college and the Black community, grounded in shared history, that fosters a community perception of these institutions that stands in stark contrast to that of an ivory tower. **Ebony sodality** is a new term used to describe what the presidents referred to but could not name when explaining

the community perception of their institution and its civic engagement leadership.

In addition to presenting an analysis of the HBCU leadership strategies used to facilitate institutional civic engagement, another new term, **liberation engagement**, is offered to more accurately describe that distinctive and nuanced civic exchange. Liberation engagement includes aspects of civic engagement, but is best understood as an evolution of democratic engagement theory. Where democratic engagement's desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge to address community problems and build democracy, liberation engagement's desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge to address systemic problems that oppress people within the democracy. A theoretical paradigm for HBCU liberation engagement is presented to summarize the interaction of the tripartite interplay between the HBCU president, the institution, and the shared space between the institution and the community. This research brief concludes with six recommendations for future research on the liberation engagement of HBCUs and other institutional types.

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## Background

Civic engagement, philosophically and rhetorically, has been embedded in the American higher education ethos since its establishment (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, Stephens & Shulman, 2003). Nearly every college or university has a mission to educate students with the goal of producing moral and just citizens. More recently, the system of higher education has received considerable criticism for deviating from its initial purpose of developing civically motivated individuals who are engaged with society's most pressing concerns (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Not only has this work been criticized for its changing emphasis, but also for its heavy focus on HWCUs to the near exclusion of HBCUs—institutions that were “founded with and, in many cases, have maintained these purposes through their histories” (Gasman, Spencer & Orphan 2015, p. 4). While the genesis of this work was established in the founding of this institutional sector, it was nourished in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and flourishes in many HBCUs today, despite little scholarly attention.

Therefore, this research was as much a response to Saltmarsh and Hartley's critique and Gasman et al.'s pronouncement of limited research as it is a desire to give voice to HBCU leaders who have largely been nameless and faceless beyond their immediate communities of engagement. The research relied on the perspectives of six current HBCU presidents to elucidate their leadership role in the exemplary civic engagement of their institutions.

After centuries of legalized non-personhood and slavery, HBCUs emerged as institutions dedicated to the educational and social development of African Americans. These vital institutions were developed to provide access to education and economic opportunity during a time when all other institutions were inaccessible.

HBCUs have been the epicenter of Black hope and aspiration since their humble beginnings in the 18th century. The American ethos, which holds up educational attainment and personal achievement above birthright, has not always been applicable to Black people. In fact, Black skin has

often been the determining factor for what those wrapped in its covering could achieve. This single determining factor has influenced this racial group's education, employment, residence, and practically every other sociocultural and socioeconomic aspect of existence. Black people's lack of education, historically dictated and legislated, became the rationale for perpetual subjugation, ultimately justifying the great societal divide (Kozol, 2005).

The establishment of HBCUs was an effort to bridge the social and economic divide by way of education and equal opportunity. For African Americans, establishing their own schools and matriculating at an HBCU was about far more than just the acquisition of knowledge; it was the acknowledgement of their personhood, and an opportunity to uplift themselves and their community.

The establishment and advancement of Black personhood, pride and citizenship is rooted in HBCUs. By providing educational access to the disenfranchised, whether through open and vocational certification or selective and liberal arts curricula, and inculcating an ethic of collective uplift as moral obligation, HBCUs develop Black citizens and leaders who positively influence the world.

While HBCUs have a multi-faceted approach to providing education, a singular mission may distinguish them from other institutions (Jones, 1993; Kennard, 1995). That singular mission is an understood obligation or social contract for HBCU students and graduates to be civically engaged in order to advance the economic, educational, political and social uplift of Black people throughout the diaspora. To share their knowledge with those not afforded the opportunity of higher education in ways that will improve their lives and their community is an expectation—one not commonly referred to in the HBCU community as civic engagement.

There is no singularly agreed upon definition of civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Deep divides relative to civic engagement's merits and strategies have persisted over decades of research. Jacoby (2009) said it best when alluding to the diversity of civic engagement

theory and practice: “There are probably as many definitions of civic engagement as there are scholars and practitioners who are concerned with it” (p.7). However, the differences in civic engagement definitions seems justifiable given that civic engagement seeks to respond to what constitutes good citizenship and a good society, about which there are myriad opinions. Thomas Ehrlich (2000), an early leader of the field, defined civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes” (p. vi). Prentice (2007) argued that the definition of civic engagement should be expanded to non-political actions with the community providing a segue to the encompassing description offered by Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, and Stevens (2010) which most institutions use:

**Campuses have used a variety of terms to describe their civic engagement activities and the ways these activities link to learning. Some of the most widely used are service-learning, community engagement, community-based research, civic education, community experiences, community-based learning, democratic practice, and philanthropy education, not to mention a variety of co-curricular offerings for students. Regardless of the term used, if part of the purpose of the activity is to educate or enhance students’ understanding of civic life, the work generally can be referred to as civic engagement (p.4).**

This research has been informed by these definitions and influenced by my own practice in this field. For purposes of this research, civic engagement herein is defined as the process of linking the pursuit of education to the pursuit of equity and social justice. HBCUs had no other option, as a result of circumstances under which they were established, than to practice this definition of civic engagement in order to facilitate the physical, as well as the intellectual freedom of their students and their communities.

Today, because of a perception by some that HBCUs have abdicated

their community leadership role, they are questioned as to their current viability and necessity. This research, through the prism of HBCU presidential leadership, silences that critique.

## The Study

The president, as the Chief Executive Officer of the university, with support from the Board of Trustees and faculty, is responsible for achieving the institution’s mission and strategic goals. While HBCU presidents are confronted with organizational and operational challenges, similar to their counterparts at HWCUs, there are perennial structural and societal issues that define the Black presidents’ leadership role in dramatically different ways (Gasman, 2011; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Robbins, 1996). It is abundantly clear that academic, financial, and governance issues affect all of higher education’s infrastructure and the ability to meet or exceed organizational goals. However, HBCU presidents have an additional responsibility to continue their institutional identity significance, within higher education and American history, further contextualized by their legacy of civic engagement (Brown, 2010; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). This identity is often reflected in the HBCU commitment to service and community, referred to in the scholarly literature as civic engagement. What is not clear from the civic engagement literature is if, and how, the HBCU presidents’ perspective influences the institutions’ civic engagement practices and motivations toward community interactions, and if those differ from the methods and motivations of HWCUs.

To grasp the complexities of the HBCU presidency, it was necessary to examine the history of Black higher education institutions. The social context out of which these schools were created, in relation to the role civic engagement played in their development and its impact on their current viability, provides important background information for understanding the unique responsibilities of HBCU leaders (Boyce, 2014). Given that most early Black college presidents were ministers, their focus was, understandably, on teaching Black people to love their God and their Blackness (Cone, 2004). Therefore, fully comprehending the nuances of their collective mission toward uplifting the Black

community (Roebuck, 1993; Whiting, 1991) may only be achieved by highlighting the relatively obscure story of HBCUs' civic engagement. Properly spotlighting these institutions, within the history of higher education's public purposes, can provide context for appreciating the challenges and opportunities faced by those that established them and those that lead them today.

Six HBCU presidents provided perspectives on their institution's civic engagement which until now had, largely, been untold. Their collective story of shared struggles and forged cooperation for the mutual improvement of the campus and community extend beyond current definitions, including the one offered herein, of civic engagement and traditional descriptors of campus-community interactions.

## Findings

The study's findings suggest that these HBCU presidents are facilitators of a unique Black college - Black community relationship. To facilitate that relationship, the presidents use three leadership strategies as identified by this study: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence and community message congruence. The implementation of these three leadership strategies, creates a synergistic system between the campus and community that impacts student, campus, and community success. I refer to this synergistic system as institutional responsiveness. Institutional responsiveness honors HBCUs' past, sustains the present, and shapes the future of students, the university and community. It is one way the presidents measure civic engagement's value to and impact on student success. More will be said about the strategies, institutional responsiveness, and other ancillary findings later in this article.

From the presidents' words, informed by past civic engagement theories, deeper understanding of HBCUs' engagement with their communities emerged; a realization that while past theories were informative, they fall short of explaining some of the nuances of the Black college - Black community civic exchange. Therefore, in addition to presenting an analysis of HBCU leadership strategies used to facilitate their role in

institutional and student civic engagement, new language if offered—supported by historical civic actions, for context, in order to define and describe the distinctive relationship as well as the complexities of those HBCU campus and Black community civic interactions which underpin HBCU engagement. Those complexities are presented as a theoretical paradigm, representing my preliminary understanding of how the unique components of HBCU engagement fit and work together.

Three overarching factors evolved from the analysis and form the basis of the theoretical paradigm: 1) HBCUs and surrounding communities have a shared history which constitutes a unique bond; 2) the bond between the campus and the community is preserved and promoted by HBCU presidents implementing key leadership strategies; and 3) the president's leadership role in advancing that unique campus-community bond is inextricably tied to the impact and success of the HBCU's civic, or more accurately called, liberation engagement. It is important to note that the HBCU presidents' leadership role does not operate in isolation, but rather in cooperation with campus and the Black community.

## Black Community Uplift, HBCU Leadership, Ebony Sodalities

Unlike their White counterparts, HBCUs have not been viewed by their communities as ivory towers—born of disputed purposes (Bok, 1992), detached from their communities, and above the masses. Nor have they, contrary to the terminology offered by Joy Williamson Lott in her book *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, been viewed as “ebony towers” in the same vein as HWCUs differentiated only by their darker hue. HBCUs are distinctive in their color, but more so in their conception. They, generally, are seen by the Black community “as being one with the community” (personal communication, Jackson Hammond, 2015). HBCUs, led by the strategic and intentional actions of their presidents, did not build “metaphysical fences” (Frankle, 1999 p. 90) but rather formed relationships with people and resources to facilitate positive change in their communities.



Working together in mutual support, HBCUs and Black communities have a special bond from which both are able to thrive. That special bond provides the foundation from which HBCUs' singular civic purpose of Black uplift is constructed.

As we seek to understand the bond that exists between the HBCU and its community and the community and the HBCU, it is informative to look to social psychology's social representation theory. Social representation theory considers the role of history in the social identity development of groups, specifically, applying social and historical context to the commonalities within group formation as well as differences among groups. This theory says that historical and social context can assist us in understanding the social identity development of groups, specifically how groups operate now but also how groups will likely act in the future (Liu, Wilson, McClure & Higgins, 1999, p. 1022). According to Liu et al (1999):

**A group's representation of its history will condition its sense of what it was, is, can and should be, and is thus central to the construction of its identity, norms, and values. Representations of history help to define the social identity of peoples, especially in how they relate to other peoples and to current issues of international politics and internal diversity (p. 537).**

HBCUs and Black communities share the historical experiences of chattel slavery, disenfranchisement, marginalization, oppression, and systemic racism. That shared history creates and perpetuates commonly held shared beliefs and is the basis of group formation (Bar-Tal, 1990). These commonly held shared beliefs are passed down from generation to generation through both interpersonal communication and propagated by trusted institutions which for Black people are HBCUs and the Black Church. As Liu et al. (1999) have argued, "History can be a unifying device for social identity and it can be used as a divisive lever" (p. 1022). In the case of HBCUs and their communities, I assert that the bond created in shared history has created a community view of the HBCU as an "Ebony Sodality."

First used in the 1600s, the term "sodality" was defined as an organized society or fellowship of the Roman Catholic laity (Catholic Online, n.d.). Later, sodality came to be interpreted to mean possessing a special connection, with an emphasis on brotherhood and sisterhood, in a devotional or charitable relationship. I have borrowed the term, sodality, and applied it, consistent with the descriptions of the presidents interviewed, to the unique relationship a civically engaged HBCU has with its surrounding community. Passed down common beliefs about shared history binds the community and the HBCU in a unique and deep psychological way. Bar-Tal (1990) called shared beliefs "group beliefs." The social psychologist went on to say, "sharing beliefs is an integral part of group membership...some of which serves as the basis for group formation" (p. xii). His later research expanded the notion of group beliefs to "societal beliefs" in which he found victimization to be a key element of group formation around shared beliefs.

Black America's victimization, historic and current, forged and perpetuates a unique psychological bond, an ebony sodality, between the HBCU and the Black community. Social psychologists used to assert that group and societal beliefs are carried out at the macro and micro level. However, current social psychology research has identified three levels of group culture: macro, meso and micro (Erez and Gati, 2004). Based in this research, people of the African Diaspora share common beliefs at a macro level; Black communities share common beliefs at the meso level, and Black individuals share common beliefs at a micro level.

At the diasporic level, generally people of African ancestry recognize the global effects of world colonization. At meso community level, generally Black Americans recognize the devastating and persisting effects of slavery and discrimination. At the micro individual level, Black people recognize that being Black in America means that institutionalized racism and systemic oppression factors into one's daily life. These shared recognitions, create empathy for others like you because you have felt what "the other" feels, you have experienced what "the other" experiences. The shared history, shared pain, shared disenfranchisement, shared marginalization fortifies a unity of purpose that has been forged in victimization.

The common experiential bond or oneness of thought and mutual identification was echoed, although un-named, repeatedly in the presidential interviews. This connection served as a firm foundation for the relationship between the HBCU and its surrounding community. Not only are HBCUs' identities grounded in this bond, but it helps to fuel an institutional commitment to serve, support and liberate the community. The higher purpose of HBCU engagement is the purpose of liberation—freedom from oppression. More will be said about this purpose later, however understanding more deeply the role of the HBCU president as leader will further illustrate the facilitative role of the president in the HBCU and in the community.

## HBCU Presidents' Leadership Strategies and Styles

Junarso (2009) defined leadership as consisting of practices used by leaders “to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It’s about leadership that creates the climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes” (Junarso, 2009; p. 99). My study sought to understand how HBCU presidents perceive their leadership role in the preservation and promotion of their institutions' and students' civic engagement. For this study, the definition of leadership put forth by Kouzes and Posner (2002) provides a solid framework for analysis. Their definition of exemplary leadership has five factors: modeling the way; inspiring a shared vision; challenging the process; enabling others to act; and encouraging the heart. Taylor et al. used Kouzes and Posner's (2002) five factors to explain the foundations of servant leadership, finding that school principals were often able to create feelings of motivation among faculty and students, and facilitate the achievement of their goals (2007). Servant leadership, which was specifically addressed by at least one of the HBCU presidents in this study, focuses on understanding the needs and interests of others as way of serving through collaboration and empowerment. The five factors of the Kouzes and Posner's definition of leadership contextualized by servant leadership was used to analyze the perceptions of the participating six HBCU presidents compared to

other presidents that have been classified as effective or exemplary.

Based on their selection for this study, all the participants have exemplary campus civic engagement as defined previously. For that reason, this research was not an assessment of the quality or quantity of the participating HBCU campus' civic engagement but rather an attempt to hear from the HBCUs presidents on the subject of civic engagement. The research and anecdotal data reviewed provide an overview of presidential leadership from a historical perspective to provide insight into the scope and substance of HBCUs' civic engagement. It should be noted that this study was timely given governmental and societal pressure on higher education in general and HBCUs, in particular, to provide outcome measures as validation of their worth.

As has been mentioned, HBCUs have a thinly documented but broadly known history of engagement in the Black community. Using historical survey data collected from 39 United Negro College Fund supported HBCUs, Gasman et al. (2015) expanded awareness about the civic engagement of HBCUs. The study provided important empirical data which substantiated that HBCUs have done incredible and largely unacknowledged work with their communities since their beginnings (Gasman et al., 2015). However, even that important study was limited by the historical data available from UNCF, which only included private HBCUs. The study gave no insight into the president's role and influence on the institution's civic engagement nor did it attempt to understand the deeper motivations, beyond the methods, of HBCUs' civic engagement.

While there has been limited scholarship on the civic engagement of HBCUs, even less is known about the role the president has in shaping the campus community civic interaction and what motivates those actions. At a time when HBCUs are under intense pressure to prove the need for their continued existence, their approach to connecting academic research and teaching with community issues and concerns merits a closer look. Recent research, confirmed by this study, shows that HBCUs' relationships with their communities, speaks to their social relevance and useful purpose, collectively and individually. Repeatedly,

the HBCU presidents in this study alluded to the importance of the university community relationship, and its centrality to both their work as president and to the institution's very existence.

Although research on academic leadership have examined the role of university presidents (Brown, 2010; Burgess, 2011), none explained the leadership of university presidents at HBCUs, much less within the context of civic engagement. One of the most current and comprehensive quantitative studies on the effect and impact of presidential leadership in the development of civic engagement was done by Burgess (2011) in completion of the requirements for her dissertation.

In her effort to determine the extent that presidential leadership impacts institutional civic engagement, Burgess asked respondents, via emailed surveys, to indicate what factors contributed most and least to the success of civic engagement on their campus. Offering twelve of the most commonly referred to factors in the literature and an "other" category, Burgess found that "presidential leadership is integral to the success of campus-wide civic engagement on a university campus" (p.114). She also found that "although there is a large amount of rhetoric supporting civic engagement at higher education institutions, ultimately there is far less actual practice to develop and support civic engagement efforts" (p. 114). A tangential but illuminating finding from Burgess' research was that the most dominant form of emphasis placed on civic engagement was having a dedicated office for civic engagement efforts. Given Burgess' parameters for institutional selection—2010 members of Campus Compact and those with 2008 Carnegie Community Engagement classification—coupled with her findings relative to funding and designated offices, it is probable that there were no HBCUs in her study of 155 institutions, as most HBCUs would not meet Burgess' requirements for successful civic engagement. Despite the possibility that Burgess' study included no HBCUs, her findings relating to her one constant variable of presidential leadership is consistent with earlier research (Colby et al., 2003; Ward, 1996) and informs this study.

As previously noted, HBCU presidents play a major role in defining the purpose of their institutions. How the HBCU president functions

in and communicates with its community relative to the institution's civic purpose, on and off campus, is a key factor in the civic success of their institution. Largely due to their institutional size and governance, HBCU presidents are positioned, on and off campus, to facilitate their institution's civic work. Through the three leadership strategies previously mentioned: 1) presidential community presence—being a visibly committed leader for causes important to the community and campus; 2) leveraged presidential influence—using the clout of the presidency to leverage positive change on behalf of the community as well as the campus; and 3) community message congruence—being clear about a consistent message that is backed up with action, these presidents and their institutions appear more attuned and responsive to their communities' needs. I define the resulting leadership phenomenon of acute community awareness and cooperation as "institutional responsiveness." The three leadership strategies and resulting leadership phenomena effectuate the HBCUs' distinctive civic engagement which will be redefined later in this article.

**Presidential community presence.** Presidential community presence is primarily an outward facing leadership strategy with both outward- and inward-facing results. Presidents engage in community activities that make them conspicuous, reinforcing their institution's civic mission to community members and influential others who are external to the community, but also their campus faculty, staff, and students. The HBCU presidents in this study also function as facilitators of civic engagement by brokering new relationships or new aspects of existing relationships, and then connecting community entities to appropriate campus faculty, departments, and students. By exhibiting high levels of active engagement, the HBCU presidents operate in contrast to many of their contemporaries (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1996; Bomstein, 1995; Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership, 1984; Ehrlich, 2000). "In a departure from the role of earlier presidents, many current college presidents are not actively engaged in public discourse regarding social issues nor are they actively involved in community affairs" (Hoyle, 2002 p. 2).

*Neighborhood demographics, relationships and engagement.* Unlike what much of the research indicates about HWCU presidents' civic engagement, these HBCU presidents do not shirk away from the public visibility brought about by their participation in civic matters on behalf of their institutions. In fact, many HBCU presidents reported that these engagements are some of the most personally rewarding aspects of their role. I assert that due to their unique bond, based in shared identity, these leaders are not disengaged from their campus' surrounding communities, nor from the social policy issues that affect them. These HBCU presidents insert themselves in contentious political matters such as police brutality, public education, and social reform, sometimes finding themselves at odds with board members and donors. Despite this, while they may professionally share the concern of presidents who indicate that they "fear offending donors and therefore minimize their own civic engagement or close affiliation with community organization and other groups" (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988), these HBCU presidents do not allow those concerns to dissuade them from what many of them refer to as their "moral obligation" to their community.

The HBCU presidents' choices of what issues to address is influenced and informed by their upbringing, their shared common beliefs and shared history with their campus' surrounding community. The leadership strategies exhibited by the HBCU presidents in this study stand in stark contrast to the behaviors of presidents that completed the Fisher/Tack Leadership Inventory (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988). In that research study, Fisher, Tack and Wheeler (1988) found that effective presidents were different than others in that they were less collegial and more distant. The HBCU presidents' perceptions of their community relationships signal much more collegiality and familiarity with their community and campus. As a result, these HBCU presidents report that they are more in touch with the needs and issues of their communities contrary to the effective leaders in Fisher & Tack's study who rely more on respect than affiliation (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988). The HBCU presidents in this sample are risk takers, particularly when it comes to their community engagement, which is also in opposition to the leaders classified as effective using the Fisher/Tack Effective Leadership Inventory (1988).

One aspect of Fisher, Tack and Wheeler's study that shows similarity between the HBCU presidents in this study and those deemed effective by Fisher/Tack Effective Leadership Inventory relates to their commitments to "an ideal or a vision than to the institution." Yet, what may be distinctive, even on this point of convergence, is related to what informs the presidents' vision for the institution. HBCU presidents report gaining insight from the community on what the vision of university should be.

**Leveraged presidential influence.** Like presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence is primarily an outward-facing strategy with both inward- and outward-facing results. HBCU presidents see addressing community issues as a key civic responsibility of the institution (and they as the institutional leader) to support the community. The notion of the university as a community anchor is based in this line of thinking. In the presidents' view, because the university is part of the community, and often one of the stronger community-based entities, it has a responsibility to serve as an engine of Black community uplift.

HBCU presidents, similar to other university presidents, are able to gain access to people with power, money and influence. What is important to note is how these presidents tend to use that access. HBCU presidents, due to their unique positioning within the Black community, can facilitate the university acting as an anchor institution in several ways. They can leverage their influence because of who they know, and also because of what they know. Like all presidents, HBCU presidents gain access by using their academic credentials to connect with people that have money or other resources. But, distinctively, HBCU presidents also gain access to the people of the community by using their street credibility—their shared history.

All of the presidents in this study talked about how sharing information about their upbringing, in addition to their academic credentials, provides credibility in both worlds. So, while they make the usual and customary rounds to corporate and political types, they also make certain to attend church functions, family events, and even go door-to-door to talk to people. In all these diverse settings, the HBCU presidents can, when



appropriate, speak truth to power with earned validity. Under the veil of intellectualism, they can speak truth to the Black community based in their shared history, and they are able to speak truth to students—inspiring them to use their knowledge to give back to the community. With each constituency group, HBCU presidents exert considerable influence.

E.D. Brown (2010) studied presidential leadership at three HBCUs, exploring factors that either promoted or constrained the presidents' influence. He found that HBCU presidents are highly influential and that their influence conforms to French and Raven's (1959) theories of social power. French and Raven's updated framework posits six bases of social power: (1) Reward Power—the ability to influence the behavior of others by providing benefits; (2) Coercive Power—the ability to influence others' behavior through the application of punishments; (3) Legitimate Power—the ability to influence one's internalized values (based on cultural values or occupancy of position) resulting in feelings of obligation; (4) Referent Power—the ability to influence based on likeability and personality; (5) Expert Power—the ability to influence based on special knowledge; and (6) Information Power—the ability to influence based upon knowledge of facts in the organization (French & Raven, 1959). Based on the framework, the HBCU presidents in this study use social power as they leverage their influence in various spheres for the benefit of civic engagement. The HBCU presidents provide benefits to others by where they choose to be visible and what they choose to say or write about relative to public matters.

**Community messaging congruence.** Presidents are critical for making civic engagement legitimate (Ward, 1996). They are also the key spokespersons for mobilizing their institutions' civic engagement commitment (Ward, 1996). Murrain (2002), addressing presidents' rhetorical support of civic engagement, asserted that in order “to achieve true compatibility between the higher educational mission and community partnerships, higher education institutions have to change [in ways that recognize] campus public engagement as a major public policy priority” (p. 271). Weerts (2014), in his examination of the civic engagement commitments of land grant institutions, used

five categories to define engaged universities: (a) institutional history and culture; (b) leadership; (c) organizational structure and policies; (d) faculty and staff involvement; and (e) campus communications. Weerts (2014) connected these categorical factors to how community perceptions were informed by university presidents' rhetoric and behavior. In addition, Weerts (2014) looked at the extent to which campus and community relationships were based on respect, shared goals, and trust.

It is relatively common these days to hear university presidents tout their institution's civic engagement—to speak with great pride about the public purposes of their universities. Many of them wax poetic about the virtues of faculty research and service, with some going so far as to highlight the words ‘civic engagement’ in university publications complete with glossy photographs of students ‘serving the community.’ The words sound good, the pictures illicit emotional responses, and all of it plays well with parents, alumni, donors, and organizations that give out awards for such actions. Yet beyond public pontifications, it is often challenging to find substantive evidence of real presidential commitment. Ward (1996) found “that if universities can receive credit for their rhetoric concerning civic engagement, there is no incentive to up that rhetoric into practice” (p. 110). But the participating HBCU presidents can point to evidence of their civic engagement rather than talking points. Rhetorical community messages that promise civic action to address social issues is not an option for the HBCU presidents in this study.

McGovern, Foster & Ward (2002) researched the changing role of college presidents from higher education's start in America until early 21st century. He found that among a president's primary responsibilities is the duty to reflect upon and articulate the institutional value, goals, and mission (McGovern et al., 2002). Each HBCU in this study has a mission statement that communicates the importance of service to community. Each of the presidents addressed their commitment to remain individually and institutionally aligned with that mission statement in word and actions.

For the HBCU presidents in this study, walking the talk is the way they earn the community's trust. For these presidents, having the trust of community is just as important as having the trust of their boards, their faculty, and government officials. The development and nourishment of that trust fortifies the HBCU as an ebony sodality as defined earlier in this article. In some instances, these presidents began their current positions rebuilding community trust while others, by virtue of past community experiences, had presumed trust. Trust is a critically important factor, from the presidents' perspectives, in facilitating effective engagement. It is not enough for them to articulate, particularly in venues with high visibility, a message of civic purpose because the community will take them to task, publicly, if the president's words are not backed up with clear and consistent action. The presidents report the critical importance of backing up their words with action to protect trust. The presidents remain congruent in their words and actions, which they report critically important to preserving and promoting civic engagement. Without message congruence, trust is compromised and can erode community relationships.

Often, HWCUs rhetoric of civic engagement doesn't quite match reality (Ward, 1996), likely the result of conflicting societal and institutional expectations. Originally, the university as the 'ivory tower' was expected to be lofty in its pursuit of intellectual ideas. Later, the university was expected to make practical contributions to fixing society's problems. These conflicting expectations, as knowledge purveyor versus knowledge transferor has confused HWCUs 'third mission' (Chantler, 2016) and "begun to erode their ivory tower status" (Chantler, 2016). The third mission, attempts to synthesize ivory towers into engaged universities, shifting the original focus from knowledge-purveyor and knowledge-transferor to now "knowledge-exchanger" (Chantler, 2016). In this vein, many HWCUs are undergoing an identity crisis as engaged universities because to become an engaged university they must embrace the community as intrinsic to their identity which, heretofore, as an institutional type they have never done. However, HBCUs have always embraced the Black community as central to their identity.

**Institutional responsiveness.** Kent Keith (1998), asserted the need for institutions to be responsive to their students as well as society at large (The Responsive University in the Twenty-First Century). Gillard (2005) describes aligned institutional leadership behavior as the most challenging part of serving the public good. She contends that "eventually [all management practices] must undergo scrutiny framed by the question: What might be possible if this process were aligned with the vision and values" (p. 312).

Research, past and current, illustrates that the phenomenon of institutional responsiveness is not isolated to HBCUs (Ward, 1996; Gillard, 2005). "A number of education institutions and non-profit organizations seek to be responsive toward the stakeholders they serve....and engage in evaluative processes to be perceived as responsive" (Bheda, 2013, p. iv). According to Bheda (2013), "[institutional] responsiveness is the process of assessing the needs of its community, meeting those needs, and collecting feedback from the community that its needs have been met" (p. 19). Institutions with resources have elaborate evaluative systems that can be used to determine how well the institution is meeting its stakeholders needs. For purposes of this study, I borrowed from Bheda's (2013) definition of needs, where she describes needs as what people must have to be in a satisfied state where the context is restricted by location, time, and group belonging. For institutions to be responsive they must be clear about what needs they are seeking to satisfy and for what stakeholders.

For HBCUs, a review of their limited available institutional archival data reflects historical precedent from past presidents to the current which indicates that the phenomena of meeting identified community needs shapes HBCU identity, institutional life, and operational structure. By taking institutional action in response to current community social issues, and consistent with past pronouncements, HBCU presidents reinforce their community commitments. Thus, their institutional responsiveness illustrates how the presidents lead their campus on matters of civic importance. Also demonstrated is that institutional responsiveness can be an indicator that the rhetoric of civic engagement is real.

**A larger purpose.** Black community uplift or, in more direct wording, freedom from oppression, has been and generally remains the larger purpose of HBCUs in that they, by origin, were to act as a countermeasure to the devastating vestiges of slavery and the persisting effects of institutionalized racism. Constitutional laws, such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, served to legislate separate learning environments for Black and Whites and all but ensured that HBCUs would not be academic institutions exclusively but would need to serve as freedom schools as well. As a result of their history, HBCUs' have existed for the purposes of educating Black people through knowledge and skills, but equally important has been their role of enlightening Blacks, raising Black consciousness about social justice, citizenship rights, fairness, and equality as a means to empower Black people to fight against persisting discrimination and marginalization and to seek equality. These civic goals, articulated as Black community uplift by HBCU presidents, are intrinsically interwoven with HBCUs' academic goals. The landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, making separate but equal unlawful, has not diminished HBCUs' larger purpose to lift up, in cooperation with it, the Black community out of oppression, primarily because what gave birth to them, racism, persists.

This analysis of HBCU presidents' leadership strategies, phenomena, and engagement goals led to an examination of related outcomes of this work. Thus, attention is given next to the potential evolution and intentions of the distinctive civic engagement of HBCUs –liberation engagement.

## Critical Ancillary Findings

**Liberation Engagement.** The interviews conducted for this research, bore out the influence of common beliefs and shared history on the unique bond between HBCUs and the Black community. Five of the HBCU presidents are Black Americans—two came from working class backgrounds, one came from an early childhood of abject poverty, one from a family of sharecroppers, and one was born and raised in another

country, and came to America as a college student. The five American-born presidents spoke about how their backgrounds influence their civic actions as HBCU presidents. They expressed an understanding of, and appreciation for, the challenges of their community's residents in a way that signaled empathy, not just sympathy.

HBCU presidents' shared history and common beliefs with the people of their surrounding community fosters their leadership strategies. Their leadership strategies result in a high level of institutional responsiveness to their community (Bheda, 2013). However current definitions of civic engagement do not adequately describe, according to the HBCU presidents, how they interact—civilly and civically with their communities. Therefore, based on the evident need for new language (Gasman et al., 2015) to describe this unique engagement approach, I coined the term, liberation engagement. While seeking to define new language was not part of the original research questions, liberation engagement emerged and as critical finding of this study.

Liberation engagement includes aspects of civic engagement but may be best understood as an evolution of democratic engagement theory. Democratic and liberation engagement are similar. Their understanding of community as possessing assets, their approach to working with community in a collaborative, relational and contextual manner, and their similar focus on process and purpose are the same. However, where democratic engagements' desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge with shared authority to address community problems and build democracy, liberation engagement's desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge with shared authority to address systemic problems that oppress people within the democracy.

At engaged HBCUs, liberation engagement is focused on the amelioration of the systemic problem of Black oppression and the simultaneous mitigation of the current consequences of that oppression. Democratic engagement stops short of pursuing this type of systemic change, although as HBCUs implement liberation engagement, some of what they do, specifically the mitigation of current consequences of oppression, certainly would be considered by definition and description

democratic engagement.

When HBCUs were founded, the systemic problem liberation engagement sought to solve was oppression manifested as physical bondage. Through time, the systemic problem was still oppression but took the form of Jim Crow, segregation and today it is oppression manifested as mass incarceration, voter suppression and myriad other forms of institutionalized racism. The HBCU and the Black community feel the weight of these oppressive systems and seek freedom from them.

Liberation engagement borrows from the Black Liberation Movement in that its focus, as applied herein, is direct and indirect community and campus efforts that can produce social progress and full freedom for Black people. In addition, liberation engagement can produce scholar-activists who will either directly or indirectly serve the ongoing cause of liberation. For HBCUs, their history and that of the people they were founded to educate dictates that those within them, as faculty, staff, and students act as activists and/or activist allies toward a liberation agenda. Despite the changing demographics at HBCUs, the agenda and work of liberation engagement has not changed. It is this conceptual definition of liberation engagement that is referenced within the remainder of this dissertation whenever the term “liberation engagement” is used.

Kwame Ture (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael) wrote, “we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized” (Carmichael (1966), p. 639). While all the presidents in this study were actively engaged with their communities, fulfilling the civic purposes of their institutions and their personal actions, none of them could point to a common term that they believed captured the essence of their community work. Most of the HBCU presidents rejected the term “civic engagement,” calling it “poverty studies” or “misuse or abuse of intellectual power” or “privileged people serving underprivileged people in ways that exacerbate power differentials that already exist between the academy and communities they tend to serve—Black, Brown, urban and poor.” Even those that use the

term “civic engagement” to describe the work they do, qualify its use by specifically stating, “while the methods may look the same, the motivations are very different.” When asked what their motivations are, the presidents cited the uplift of the Black community or liberation of Black people through education and service so that restoration and reconciliation can occur.

Liberation engagement is the predominant engagement facilitated by HBCU presidents in this sample. While not all the engagement work of these HBCUs is directed exclusively at the Black community, the motivation for all of it is liberation from oppression. This type of engagement has been alluded to in the literature but those researchers never named the work explicitly (Frankle, 1999). This type of engagement combines social, political, and economic activism and academic intellectualism to pursue the liberation of a historically and perpetually disenfranchised and marginalized people.

**Liberation Engagement and the Black Liberation Movement.** As Ture and Hamilton (1992), asserted, “The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks” (p. 54). Racism provided the impetus, and Plessy v. Ferguson institutionalized separate learning environments for Black and Whites. As a result, HBCUs were never only academic institutions; they were always freedom schools—places to learn academic, social, cultural, and liberation lessons. Due to this reality, HBCUs have always operated to educate and empower their students and community. Although liberation engagement as defined herein is about the liberation of Black people, it does not highlight racial divisions, but instead is an action of closing ranks.

Black Power, a term popularized by Kwame Ture in the late 1960s, was focused on Black people closing ranks by focusing on self-help, racial pride and unity (Ture & Hamilton, 1992). The Black Power or Black Liberation Movement was supported, in part, by HBCUs. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded on the campus of Shaw University and many of the initial actions of the Civil Rights Movement are credited to students at North Carolina



Agricultural and Technical College, Morgan State University, Tennessee State University, and others.

The Black intelligentsia of HBCUs began merging activism and intellectual production from their beginnings. HBCUs, like Wilberforce University, provided shelter and protection for escaped slaves at the same time they were providing skills training and a liberal arts education. The practice of merging social activism with academic endeavors has persisted because Black academia realized, then and now, that Black liberation required both an academically- and politically-engaged community.

Reading the personal accounts of members of the Black Panthers and others involved in the Black Liberation Movement (Newton, 1973; Shakur, 1987; Ture & Hamilton, 1992), it is clear that campus-based scholar-activists were involved in the Black Liberation Movement, serving the cause of liberation as analysts and advisors, while others were more involved in direct action. There was vast diversity of their actions and efforts, most likely due to the diversity of specific Black community needs and goals. In fact, part of its dynamism was found in the work's creativity and experimentation—organizing and working with Black communities to bring about liberation from oppression for Black people. Despite developing a liberation agenda by fusing academic pursuits and activist actions, the originators of this type of engagement never named or defined what they were doing. A former HBCU president, Ronald Mason Jr, alluded to this phenomenon when he asserted, based on his personal experiences, that HBCUs have what Gasman et al., referred to as a “natural inclination to be civic minded” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 350), but without naming or defining these actions, HBCUs’ liberation engagement was relatively easy to ignore.

**Liberation Engagement: A Brain Revolution.** The intra-communal liberation efforts of the Black academy and the Black community was and remains, largely, about disrupting cultural ignorance in order to uplift the community. The disruption of cultural ignorance “by those that share a cultural history is not seen as culturally demeaning but

rather culturally uplifting” (Ture & Hamilton, 1992, p. 208). To liberate a people requires a shift, a revolution of the thinking. In this regard, it may be that HBCUs act as boot camps for a brain, not blood, revolution—the peaceful disruption of social and economic conditions through education and liberation engagement.

Freire (1969/1993) indicates that “Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit...not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized” (p. 55). Liberation theologians like Helder Camara, a Brazilian Catholic archbishop, see revolution as a “second violence”; that is, one that is a proper reaction to oppression” (Kirk, 1979, p. 31). It may be that the educational revolution that occurs through liberation engagement can be seen as a second but intellectual violence that interrogates the origins and manifestations of the oppression as a means of systemic change. According to Freire, home and school transmit oppressive myths from generation to generation for the purposes of controlling them (Freire, 1969/1993). The threat that HBCUs pose is that they uniquely have the opportunity to interrupt the transmission of oppressive messages and offer common beliefs based in a shared history through liberation engagement education and practice. HBCUs can revolutionize a student's thinking—countering the oppressive messages they may have received in their K-12 educational experience. HBCUs, as was evinced by the Civil Rights Movement, have the ability to create a brain revolution to come out from under the oppressor's domination, but it requires a total reconstruction of society which is what HBCUs were and, in some cases today, are attempting to do through liberation engagement.

Freire (1969/1993) embraced and envisioned the teacher as the revolutionary leader. A commitment to the systemic liberation of oppressed people is the distinguishing factor for liberation engagement and is what differentiates it from civic or democratic engagement. Those committed to social justice for others that have been treated unjustly are committed to a revolution that is the liberation of a disenfranchised people, most particularly within a democracy. The Martin L. King, Jr. said, “All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny (Baldwin, 2013). Whatever affects one

directly, affects all indirectly.” The liberation of one group of people contributes to the liberation of all people. Therefore, liberation engagement, while originating at HBCUs, can and should be the work of all colleges truly seeking to fulfill their missions of citizen development and participation.

The original notion for this study was that civic engagement at HBCUs somehow differed from civic engagement at HWCUs. It was further postulated that an HBCU’s engagement was heavily influenced and largely guided by its president. What has emerged from this study is confirmation of the distinctiveness of civic engagement at HBCUs and confirmation of the important role HBCU presidents have in determining the substance and scope of the institution’s work with the community. Although not an expected outcome of this study, uncovering specific leadership strategies that facilitate an institution’s responsiveness to its community provides some understanding of the “actionable strategies” called for by Gasman et al. (2015).

What was not envisioned at the study’s origin was that the data would elicit new language to define the engagement work of HBCUs and their communities. As such, it could not have been hypothesized that liberation engagement had a supporting, if not initiating role, in the Civil Rights Movement. An attempt to understand the civic interaction between HBCUs and their surrounding communities yielded another unanticipated study outcome. The term, “ebony sodality”, surfaced from the analysis, and it is hoped that it will prove viable in the future as researchers seek to describe how communities view HBCUs in contrast and comparison to HWCUs. The unique and interesting campus-community interplay, albeit described with the new language of liberation engagement and ebony sodality, between the HBCU and surrounding community does not effectively happen, as this study shows, without the intentional actions of the president.

A deeper analysis of the findings suggests an interplay between the HBCU president, the institution, and the shared space between the institution and the community. To summarize the interaction of this tripartite relationship, I offer a theoretical paradigm of HBCU liberation

engagement in Figure 1.

In the theoretical paradigm for HBCU liberation engagement, presidents implement three leadership strategies: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence, and community message congruence, which supports the community perception that the institution is responsive and supportive. The community perception of the HBCU, which I have named ebony sodality, provides the basis for liberation engagement to successfully operate. The president, on the campus or in the community, exercises the leadership strategies based on their shared history and common beliefs with both the HBCU and the community. The university works toward its goal of providing knowledge to students by offering engaged curricular and co-curricular opportunities to increase their knowledge, awareness, and skills in preparation for the civic actions, however they do so with the motivation toward freedom from oppression. The community provides knowledge and expertise, as well as community-based opportunities for faculty, staff, and students

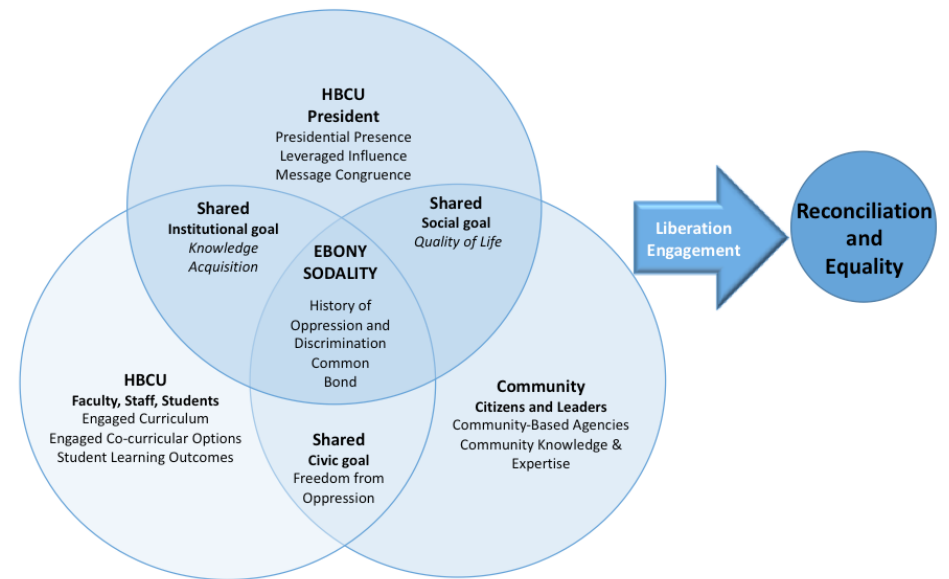


Figure 1. Theoretical paradigm for HBCU Liberation Engagement

to work with them in support of their quality of life goal. Through liberation engagement the three entities in this tripartite relationship work toward the shared goal and purpose of reconciliation and equality. In the theoretical paradigm, while the university acknowledges its goal to transfer knowledge for student learning, student learning is not the only goal. At HBCUs, the end goals are twofold—student learning for freedom from oppression—reconciliation and equality. This binary focus fortifies, in the community’s view, the university’s role as an ebony sodality.

## Summary

This foray into the largely unexplored territory of civic engagement at HBCUs elicited a number of new and unanticipated discoveries. Those discoveries were analyzed without the benefit of a significant swath of academic literature relative to this institutional type. Therefore, the literature of social psychology, Black power and liberation movements, and Black liberation theology along with higher education theories was used to construct a strong analysis. Beyond analyzing the study’s findings, I grounded myself in the important and well-documented theoretical constructs of civic and democratic engagement, as presented. That literature points heavily to the role of the president, which initially influenced my focus on the presidents’ lens and their role at the micro level. However, onsite data collection coupled with the HBCU presidents’ perspectives, informed my thinking and deepened my analysis such that I realize HBCUs’ liberation engagement work is inextricably linked, at the meso level, to the campus’ surrounding Black community as well as the HBCUs institutional identity and history. And broader still macro level, the diasporic community, HBCUs, and their presidents are all impacted at the macro level by the realities of Black existence in the United States and around the globe.

## Conclusions

The existent, and much larger, body of research on the civic engagement practices of HWCUs evinces a recurring issue that has some application

to HBCUs: specifically, the impossibility of scripting a proven plan for successful civic engagement among and across institutional types with similar demographics. The first aspect of this perspective is the result of differences across institutional variables such as structure, human and financial resources, and faculty by-in. This aspect of the theme holds true for the HBCUs. HBCU leaders in this study advanced the notion that their institutions implemented engagement in a fashion I view as liberation engagement. The second issue challenging the practice of community engagement, is tied to the homogeneity of the institutional types studied. Homogeneity of the institutional types studied for civic engagement practices has stymied our understanding of the work. However, this research contributes to our knowledge of civic engagement by examining the unique aspects of HBCU leadership perspectives.

This study’s findings support the conclusion that HBCUs possess a unique relationship with the Black community and their leaders broker a unique relationship with that community, which leads to a distinctive type of engagement, liberation engagement.

## Significance of Study Findings

The 30th Anniversary of “Campus Compact,” was commemorated two years ago with presidents and chancellors coming together to reaffirm their shared commitment to the public purposes of higher education. According to Campus Compact’s 2014 Member Survey Affinity Report: Minority, HBCU and Tribal Institutions, none of the 87 respondents to the survey were Campus Compact member institutions (Campus Compact, 2014). Yet, the major outcome of the 30th Anniversary commemoration was an Action Statement, a written commitment of institutional leaders to “deepen engagement work that maximizes impact for students and communities by building effective partnerships, preparing students for lives of citizenship, embracing place-based responsibilities, and challenging inequality” (Wasescha, 2016). There was no mention of the need to examine HBCUs, which have a historical record of civic engagement (liberation engagement) grounded in the

freedom and liberation of Black people.

In the midst of presidential action statements of national engagement organizations (which are overwhelmingly White), there is a persistent absence of best practices, which contributes to the ongoing variance in civic engagement quality and quantity. Further, there is a lack of acknowledgement and research about the civic engagement of HBCUs which shortchanges the knowledge base upon which these organizations might rely. Therefore, a resulting narrow view of civic engagement and how it can be successfully carried out persists. Understanding the perspectives of HBCU presidents regarding their leadership role in preserving and promoting civic engagement may help to shape the civic engagement practices of HBCUs.

### **Alignment of Study Findings to Existing Research**

Although Gasman et al. (2015) is the only empirical study to examine the civic engagement practices of private HBCUs from 1944 to 1965, there are other studies that can be used to contextualize and validate this study's findings. Four studies, Allen et al. (2007), Allen (1992), Awwad (2009), and Ward (1996) are relied upon to draw parallels for this study's findings and conclusions.

Allen's (1992) identification of six goals that HBCUs share elucidates their common purpose, aligned with the Black community's agenda of progress and personhood. The six goals are: (1) preservation and evolution of Black culture and protection of Black historical traditions, particularly those originating in the Black community; (2) preparation and provision of Black community leadership in addressing community concerns; (3) facilitation of economic function in the Black community, historically as one of the largest economic centers in the Black community; (4) provision of Black role models to inspire the aspirations of other Blacks in the community; (5) preparation and provision of Black college graduates with competencies to act as mediators for Black community issues with the White community; and (6) the cultivation of Black change agents that provide and disseminate critical knowledge for the edification of the Black community. Acknowledging

the development role, according to Allen et al. (2007), that HBCUs have in the Black community substantiates that the president is a key factor in facilitating the institution's engagement with its surrounding community.

Black institutional characteristics reflective of the goals identified by Allen (1992) are reported to result in more cohesive educational outcomes than at other institutional types (Simms & Bock, 2014), and can be encapsulated into four common purposive themes (Allen et al., 2007) that are confirmed by this study's findings: 1) HBCUs have a developmental role in the Black community; 2) they also have a transforming role in American society; 3) they operate within educational politics at the intersection of class and race; and 4) their role continues to evolve in a post-Civil Rights context. These historic institutional frames allow for a greater understanding of the role HBCU presidents play in preserving and perpetuating their common civic purposes in the 21st century, particularly as we consider the trends, prospects, and challenges they often face. In every presidential interview, elements of each goal are evident in the actions, behaviors, and values the presidents espoused as part of their leadership strategies to effectuate liberation engagement.

This study's findings confirm Awwad (2009), which concluded that university presidents' wide influence, as related to civic engagement, is primarily due to the alignment of the university's history to the culture of the community in which it serves, shared identity. Archival and current documents as well as field notes and the presidents' responses substantiates that each of the leaders, as well as their predecessors, viewed the institution's work with the community as a moral obligation, which they take great care to fulfill. They are aware of and accept that moral obligation because of the shared university and community culture and history. The HBCU and its surrounding community's history, people, and future are perceived by the presidents to be intertwined, thus the presidents' perceived obligation to be engaged with the community.



## Recommendations

The primary objective of the study was to understand the role HBCU presidents perceive themselves to have in the preservation and promotion of their institution's and students' civic engagement. Since much of the research related to civic engagement is based on the practices of HWCUs, this focus on HBCUs provides a basis for beginning to understand this institutional type. Although the study produced some clear findings, it also indicated areas that would benefit from further research.

1. Ward (1996) suggested that there were only two types of engaged institutions: those that incorporate service as part of the academic experience, and those that merely express it rhetorically. As a result of this study, I assert that there may be a third type that has incorporated service as a part of the academic experience but also has a highly-committed president whose rhetoric is made authentic by their own engaged leadership actions. Further, does the institution's historic use of liberation engagement play a role in this dynamic?
2. The three leadership strategies found in this study: presidential community presence; leveraged presidential influence; and community messaging congruence were consistent across all six presidents interviewed. However, this sample is made up of exemplars. Would these leadership strategies be exhibited by all HBCU presidents? Knowing if these leadership strategies are consistent across this institutional type in general, would be important as a means of vetting these strategies as well as unearthing others. If these strategies are found to be consistent, these findings may increase our understanding of what makes HBCUs more or less successful and distinctive in their civic engagement. Further, that research could assist in the development of a proven plan for successful civic engagement for all institutional types.
3. The study suggested that institutional responsiveness results

from the HBCU presidents' use of the three leadership strategies. I have introduced the term "ebony sodality" to describe the institution's responsiveness and relationship to its community. It would be helpful to determine if the relationship between the three leadership strategies and institutional responsiveness is causal, and if it is, can ebony sodality be confirmed as a more descriptive term to designate the HBCU academic environment as connected to the practical concerns of the Black community?

4. Since it has been determined by other studies and confirmed by this particular article that presidential leadership is important to the preservation and promotion of civic engagement, it could be useful to examine the motivations that prompt presidents to do so. Relatedly, what, if any, impact does family and/or community background variables contribute to making the president more likely to accept the moral obligation expected by these institutions?
5. The study suggests that HBCU civic engagement, as I have termed it, liberation engagement, is distinct from civic and democratic engagement at HWCUs. Further research to either confirm or refute this finding would be beneficial. If liberation engagement is different, can other institutional types do liberation engagement? If so, what are the essential characteristics they must possess in order to practice liberation engagement?
6. Given that I have introduced a theoretical paradigm for HBCU liberation engagement, the specific aspects of this model, which my sample uncovered and the literature supports, needs to be fleshed out. Further research to determine if the theoretical paradigm would be applicable to other samples of HBCU presidents would also be enlightening.

Despite study limitations, overall this study has unearthed an intriguing notion that HBCU liberation engagement is intricately tied to its historical context, the dynamics of the HBCU presidency, and the community in which the HBCU exists. Given further study, it is hoped that the rich lessons hidden within these powerful and historically significant

institutions will illuminate lessons for all who wish to pursue the noble work of community engagement and service. This is the work upon which our nation's institutions of higher education have used to transform the very world in which we exist, and impact our next generation of leaders for the better. Potentially, this study has pointed us in a promising direction.

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