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Reflections On Black Colleges The Historical Perspective of Charles S. Johnson

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FROM 1928 WHEN HE moved from the National Urban League to Fisk University until his untimely death in 1956, Charles S. Johnson was a major spokesman for black higher education in general and private, black southern colleges in particular. During that almost thirty year period he defended the uniqueness of their role in American higher education, while persistently urging them to elevate their academic quality to a level equal to that of mainstream colleges and universities.

An analysis of Johnson's perceptions of the role of black colleges in American higher education reveals insights into a debate that remains lively in the 1980s. In some instances that debate is whether black institutions should be permitted, or encouraged, to survive, while in others it revolves around the question of whether historically black public and private colleges should continue their identity as black colleges. The issues of survival and identity include, of necessity, consideration of their missions.

Black and white Americans have debated the missions of black institutions since they first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Until recent decades, however, the key issue was what should be taught, for what personal and career goals should black colleges prepare students. Operating in an openly racist society, there was little or no question about their continued existence as long as education was governed by the "separate but equal" doctrine. Earlier court decision had undermined segregation in a number of areas of higher education, but it was the *Brown* verdict that raised the issue of the continued existence of black colleges to the level of a national debate.

Historians have written extensively on the motivations of the good white New England missionaries who led in the founding of black colleges throughout the South after the Civil War. They have examined in depth, as well, the debate at the beginning of the twentieth century between DuBois and Washington over the pedagogical methods and goals of higher education for blacks. It is the contention of this paper that Charles Johnson advocated a role

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for black colleges that spanned the debate about their purposes. He was very aware of the DuBois-Washington dichotomy, but he also lived long enough to ponder the meaning of *Brown* for black institutions. His ideas on the role of black colleges provide both an historic and contemporary perspective to the debate. They also explore the function, if any, of black colleges in the race's social and economic survival, as well as its cultural identity, once segregation in education was declared unconstitutional and white colleges opened their doors to black students.

Charles S. Johnson experienced first hand every possible relationship with black institutions in the South. Born and raised in Bristol, Virginia, Johnson attended both Wayland Academy and Virginia Union College. After graduate study at the University of Chicago and eight years with the National Urban League, he returned to the South in 1928, to Fisk University where, while chairing the Department of Social Sciences, he molded the department into a major center for research on black Southerners and interracial relations. The culmination of Johnson's career as a leading sociologist and educator occurred in 1947 with his inauguration as the first black president of Fisk University. Thus, as a student, teacher and administrator Charles Johnson knew the achievements and potential of black institutions.

Charles Johnson's first major statement on the role of black institutions in the life of the race appeared in 1938 with the publication of *The Negro College Graduate*. The work reflected both his Chicago training and several themes which appeared repeatedly in his writing while with the Urban League and later at Fisk. The methodology combined an objective analysis, undergirded by statistical data, of the contemporary condition of college and professionally trained blacks, with personal portraits of what those conditions meant to individuals who were part of the statistics. A less explicit statement in the study is one which compares the status of blacks in higher education with their status in American society, underscoring the "interaction of social factors and the routine process of education." After the presentation of the data, Johnson delineates the implications of the nation's racial structure for the personality of blacks, a concern which pervades most of his research and publications.

From his analysis of the statistical and personal data gathered for *The Negro College Graduate*, Johnson developed a portrait of contemporary black collegians and in so doing he spoke to the purposes and future directions of black colleges. Blacks who attended college in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were motivated largely by aspirations for leadership, he found, while recent graduates had more utilitarian reasons for attending college. However, many were unclear just what their vocational direction should be. Consequently, he concluded, vocational guidance and preparation must be a primary objective of the college, although with course work that enabled the graduate to function successfully in the political, social and economic world beyond the campus.[1]

Though he wished it were otherwise, the economic and racial environment

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of the 1930s meant that students who prepared to teach or to practice law should be ready to accept the limitations of geography, income and clientele. Johnson, the hard-nosed sociologist, held his sense of injustice in check when he wrote of the limitations, "This is not necessarily related to the need for any peculiar kind of racial education, but it does suggest the need for focusing attention upon those problems which are an inevitable part of Negro life in American civilization. When these conditions are changed, or when these graduates themselves can change the situation, educational method can, with appropriateness, change its own status as it would be expected to do.[2]

In vocational choices, black students, and the colleges which trained them, must be sensitive, Johnson argued, to the particular needs of the race. For example, the high incidence of certain diseases among blacks "should have some influence on the direction of specialization in medical training to the end of expanding interest in public health." Similarly, because of the race's limited financial resources, colleges which train blacks in economics and business administration should plan the curriculum with sensitivity to the racial environment. In view of the rapidly changing vocational world of the late 1930s, Johnson felt the need for a study of professional opportunities for blacks in "seldom tried fields which demand a new orientation to the world of work and living, and to the standards of precision and thoroughness which are inherent in a competitive society."[3]

Influenced by hard, empirical data, Johnson the pragmatist was developing a philosophy of black higher education that emphasized the vocational responsibilities of the colleges. But he was also aware of the unique cultural characteristics of his race and recognized that black colleges must assist not only in their development, but also sustain them for the identity of the race. Johnson was adamant that "adjustment to the economic imperatives of this culture" not "preclude expression of music or art or religion by gifted individuals and in any direction." Emerging from the data, then, was a threefold mission for the black college: "a realistic social orientation" and "some moral as well as technical equipment for overcoming those disabilities which are attributable to the factor of race."[4]

Johnson's response to the liberal arts-vocational dichotomy which had divided those who debated the goals of higher education for blacks since the DuBois-Washington controversy of the early twentieth century was to bring the emphases together. Given the economic status of blacks in the mid-1930s, he found interpretations of a liberal arts education which spoke of "ennobling" the "use of leisure time," or of developing one's ability to assist in "securing the highest good in human society," lacking in understanding of "the relationship of most college students and graduates—Negroes and others—to real life." Indeed, Johnson argued that too sharp a dichotomy had been drawn between vocational preparation and cultural training: "In the current discussion of educational objectives a distinction of importance is drawn between excellence in human qualities and excellence in professional training. In practice this distinction is extremely difficult to draw, and the

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objective of a liberal education still more difficult to achieve, even in the most liberal of the colleges."[5]

Training in the liberal arts and for a vocation came together if one prepared for a vocation which had, simultaneously, social and personal values. It was imperative that black colleges make the connection between collegiate training and the profession pursued after college. Regretfully, Johnson found, too few black colleges advised students adequately about the preparation required to secure employment in particular professions. "The Negro colleges, even yet, remain undeveloped in this most urgent educational service," he wrote. "In part this lag may be due to achieving first the status of a liberal arts college, but in general it can be said to be due to the actual limitation of knowledge about vocations which may be entered by their graduates, apart from teaching."[6]

To Charles Johnson, a key concept for understanding black students and thus for defining a role for black colleges was that of the marginality of their cultural status.[7] Education created for many students "deep-lying conflicts," because their daily world was "frequently at odds with the ideal world into which American education with its democratic tradition introduces him." It meant attempting to meet the "cultural standards of American schools" by seizing "upon the forms of instruction without fully grasping its content." Johnson knew why: "This is perhaps inevitable in view of the urgent necessity for rapid progress. But acculturation, even when expedited by formal education, is a time process." Finally, education meant trying to prepare for a vocation in a constantly new technological world, one in which "the economic basis of life" changed "more rapidly than the educational traditions in which Negro education rested."[8]

The reactions of black students of the 1930s to the incongruencies between the world for which they prepared in college and the one in which they had to live as graduates ranged widely: "hope, disillusionment, compensation, submission, challenge, tolerance, bitterness, defeat and avoidance." The agenda for black colleges, Johnson concluded, was to bring both actual and formal education together so that graduates would be prepared to live in two worlds:" (1) in the social world of the Negro group, to the extent that it is limited by social segregation; (2) in the broader economic world in which he must compete for a living."[9]

On the one hand, the collegiate experience "is a break with many of the implications of Negro life and status"; on the other, because of it there is greater recognition of a racial status and of the need to cope with it. Reconciling the freedom reaped from education and the restrictions of the racial milieu, Johnson concluded, is a cultural dilemma for black students, one which black colleges must help them resolve.[10]

Throughout his life Charles Johnson sought to turn adversity to advantage, and the "marginality" of black students was no exception. It presented a challenge and opportunities for both black collegians and black education. "While opposing in spirit the patterns of life imposed by racial segregation,

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this education might have the value of fortifying Negro youth against the discouragement and frustration which a persistent and seemingly fruitless struggle against their world undoubtedly incurs." Confronted by the need to live in two worlds, the black student is more alert to "control and self-correction in adjustment to, or in anticipation of, broad institutional changes in progress or impending." So sensitized, and because of the racial environment, most college-trained blacks turn "to their own people, where as professionals and as teachers, they add ferment to and step up the processes of civilization among the mass, incidentally increasing the economic power of the people with whose welfare their own fortunes are ineluctably bound up."[11]

In the end, Johnson derived from the data gathered for the study recommendations for black education at every level from elementary through higher education. Black youth must be thoroughly familiar with their own lives and traditions, for only then can knowledge of the outside world be meaningful. "In short, the education of the Negro, like that of every other race or people must reckon with the fact the human beings are inevitably and incorrigibly ethnocentric. They must view the world from their own points of view, or they cannot see it at all."[12]

Black youth must be given a realistic education, one that acquaints them with their present and past environment, and one that assures them that self mastery can lead to spiritual emancipation, even if the external environment remains unaltered. Simultaneously, they must be introduced to and develop skills required in a rapidly changing technological society. "They should be conditioned early to accuracy and precision of manual movements, as well as to precision of thinking. No longer should the tradition of picturesqueness and 'local color' which surrounds their work be given place over sheer efficiency." Finally, the education of black youth must include continual reinforcement of the value of thoughtful "cooperative action" in both social and economic undertakings. "Only through such reinforcement of personal values and resources," Johnson wrote, "can minorities escape the folly and destruction of individual competition with an institution. Only by collective action, directed to sound social ends can they gain self-assurance and dignity in themselves."[13]

This argument became the agenda for black education, and particularly for black colleges, which Johnson garnered from the statistical data and personal statements gathered for *The Negro College Graduate*. It was an agenda which guided his scholarly work as a sociologist and his actions as college teacher, administrator and spokesman for black higher education.

One detects a sense of urgency in Johnson's analysis of blacks and higher education, for he assigns a special mission "to individuals of exceptional ability and opportunity," namely,

> to carry back to the masses who need it most the fruits of their wider experience, the knowledge of a wider world, the techniques of cooperative living and enterprise, the

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traditions of accuracy and precision, which are at once the foundation of the occupational skills and basic technical competency of the higher forms of labor and of all intellectual life, either in the learned professions or elsewhere.[14]

For individual black graduates, education should lift their sights to the world beyond their immediate environment, instilling in them new expectations. It should have an effect upon the spirit which enables them to transcend their daily experiences. Education should give to the black student's "personal family and racial life," Johnson concluded in 1938, "that inner harmony and deepened spirituality which is relatively independent of and superior to material conditions, and which is the ultimate of all human life."[15]

In 1946 Charles Johnson was elected the first black president of Fisk University. He held that position until his death in 1956. From Fisk he expanded his role as a spokesman for higher education in general and black institutions in particular. Soon after his election he wrote of Fisk's past and his expectations for its future, "It is no mere rhetoric when I say that in my opinion Fisk University is one of the most important educational institutions in America. For eighty years it has been pioneering on the frontiers of education and human relations. It has an insistent obligation and opportunity to continue and enlarge the service to society."[16]

His inaugural address in November, 1947, gave Johnson the opportunity to describe in detail the educational philosophy which undergirded his guidance of Fisk and, indeed, reflected his sense of the special mission of this University and of other black colleges. Entitled "Four Pillars of Faith," Johnson's speech identified the four pillars in general terms as a belief in work, justice, freedom and moral power. These terms he translated to mean commitment to "a practical realism and scientific discipline in education, social responsibility in human relations, international knowledge and understanding as the key to survival and self-discovery, and an unambiguous, well-supported ethical universalism."[17]

As the author of *The Negro College Graduate,* Johnson had urged students to merge liberal arts and professional training by preparing for a vocation that served both social and personal ends. President Johnson reiterated that position with an even stronger rejection of the value of merely acquiring knowledge for its own sake. Not surprisingly, then, he emphasized the importance of "practical and functional education."

With such a commitment, a crucial factor in setting the mission of Fisk was determining the use of knowledge, that is, the end to be served, and for Johnson that end was clearly not personal but social. "The most important asset that a society can have," Johnson told his audience, "is the men who can apply the knowledge of the time to the needs of the time." Since the work environment is the place in which most people will be most socially useful, their collegiate experience must make possible the "fusing of culture, knowledge and skill."[18]

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What distinguished this form of education from mere vocationalism is the teaching methodology itself, by which Johnson meant utilization of a scientific attitude in the classroom that gave students both physical and intellectual contact with problems, as well as inculcated "habits of intellectual honesty and efficiency, courage and tolerance." With such an attitude the fusing of culture, knowledge and skills during the collegiate years was readily transferable to their future work environments.[19]

As the result of his strong advocacy of an education that was socially useful, and his years as a practicing social scientist, it is not surprising that Johnson urged upon colleges the need to be "a living part of the community, the region and the nation." Indeed, a student's collegiate training was incomplete if he was unprepared to understand and to participate in the constantly changing economic, political and social life around him. Johnson's commitment to training for social responsibility underscored a particular mission he envisioned for Fisk and by implication for other black colleges:

> Its location is a part of its function as an institution of learning. Dedicated primarily to the education of Negro youth, it is a part of that essential educational structure through which the youth of the South and of the nation alike seek to raise their levels of living, their understanding of the society in which they live, and those habits and capacities that lead to sound and progressive leadership. . . . It has a mission in the South to help make it, as part of the nation, a land whose resources—social, physical and spiritual—are developed for the welfare of all its people.[20]

Faculty had a particular obligation to demonstrate the interrelationship of classroom instruction and the social fabric in which the instruction was to be applied. "It is utterly futile," Johnson maintained, "to learn a skill without a functioning acquaintance with the economic structure into which this skill and its human practitioners are expected to fit." Faculty who sought to apply their expertise in the social environment could do so in areas as varied as union-management relations, the quest for satisfactory provisions for housing and health, and the need for leadership in community organizations.[21]

Obviously, the social responsibilities Johnson asked colleges to assume involved potential problems for them, not the least of which would be political reactions to unpopular positions the institutions might advocate. Johnson wrote, though, not of external inhibitions to response but of those internal to institutions:

> A program of this kind is new and must be formulated. Our colleges have not provided for it in their courses, nor always in their teaching personnel. The teachers have vested interests and established ways and are not always sincere in dealing with these issues. Many of our colleges have been developed in terms of a technical curriculum, and the new knowledge and function cannot easily be fitted in.[22]

As Fisk University president, Johnson was involved actively in the fund raising drives of the United Negro College Fund. Speaking out in behalf of the Fund gave him the opportunity to expose the contradictory attitudes of

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Americans toward education—for example, everybody should have an education, but it is easier to appropriate large sums of money for highways and preparation for war—as well as to speak to the unique position of black institutions in higher education. Certainly no sector of the educational establishment suffered more from the ambivalent American attitude toward education than black institutions. Not only had they been undersupported by public and private funds, but, as Johnson observed, they had been pawns "of the dual social system, overtly in the South, indirectly in the North."[23]

But Johnson found in the unfavorable conditions confronting black colleges "a few unexpectedly rich values—values which hold promises for American education generally."

In this instance, Johnson recalled for his audience the divergent educational philosophies guiding black colleges and those eastern institutions which spawned them. The latter, he felt, emphasized education for material success, while the educational philosophy of most black colleges stressed "education for adversity," a position more in tune with the daily reality confronting black and white students alike. Johnson described "education for adversity" as

> training and discipline of moral and intellectual qualities for difficult and dangerous crises; for stamina and hope when the going is rough; for the ability to cope with new and difficult and even hostile situations. The skills, the techniques and the tools are a part of the discipline, but there is also another quality that can come best from the sense of being bound together in the process of a social accomplishment that is in the spirit of the best of our democratic and Christian tradition.[24]

While Johnson was quite aware that the values black institutions brought to the education process—cultural realism, understanding of the cultural milieu, ability to confront irrational situations without being frustrated—were not primarily racial qualities, they did influence America's racial environment, if only because nine-tenths of the country's black leaders came from institutions which emphasized such values. Even the federal government, Johnson observed, recognized black colleges "as the best models of education in rugged action," for it is to them that the government sent "people of many races and cultures, who have by any circumstance been cast against unholy tides of custom or catastrophe—the German expellees, the Japanese, the newly free peoples of overthrown imperialism, the colonials yearning for self-determination, the underdogs, the impoverished and hopeless, needing the stimulating pattern of people who could in their own emancipation free their masters, and give verity and conviction to the dreams of both for a free nation under God."[25]

The challenge Johnson presented to those who heard his speech was to provide support for black colleges not because they were black or segregated but because they embodied a particular educational philosophy that could develop the vast untapped human potential in the nation's most im-

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poverished region. Johnson rejected the refusal of whites to contribute to Fisk because it promoted "segregated" education until the same persons gave a scholarship for a black student to a college outside the South. He made similar demands of blacks. One could adhere fervently to democratic principles, denounce segregation, and in good conscience support black institutions for, in Johnson's mind, "the Negro college exists to make itself unnecessary as a segregated institution. It can even be said," he went on, "that the Negro college is essential to the achievement of this objective and that, if in some mysterious manner all of the colleges for Negroes were abolished overnight, realization of the objective would be enormously and perhaps altogether prevented."[26]

Turning from their general mission to the particular one of focusing upon young black people, President Johnson asked a question similar to one which contemporary defenders of black institutions raise, namely, at what other institutions could students meet teachers who understood their backgrounds and taught with those backgrounds in mind. This did not mean inferior academic training, for Johnson had insisted since his days with the Urban League that blacks must be well prepared in their academic work so that "they will yield to none in accuracy, thoroughness, or keenness of analysis." But black students need training in human relations, as well, training that would help them "meet difficult situations with poise and perspective, and without personal rancor."[27] Johnson's attitude toward the teaching of academic excellence and personal composure mirrored perfectly his own approach to scholarship and to contacts with segregation and discrimination.

Johnson reiterated for his audience, as well, a theme he developed frequently in the past, namely, that out of adversity "Negro Americans and the colleges which they have developed" have a unique contribution to make to America's emerging international posture. That contribution, which Johnson described as "a new world citizenship," was more likely to emerge among blacks than whites because their national experience made them less susceptible than most Americans to the snares of super-nationalism. As Johnson developed the theme, he proposed at the end a special role for black educational institutions:

> We have been conditioned to detecting the realities behind glittering democratic generalities. Knowing how often the generalities have concealed racial discrimination in domestic affairs, we know that they may also be used to disguise nationalistic bias in foreign affairs. Because we have become sensitized to discrimination against ourselves, we are more sensitive to the similar disadvantages of oppressed and minority peoples everywhere. It would be indeed a noble role if we could so direct ourselves and train our youth that a sensitivity and realism, sharpened by difficult experience [,] could become our contribution to a newly developing world society.[28]

By late 1953, Charles Johnson was speaking of a "critical period" for black colleges, and his focus was consciously upon the South. It was a "critical period" for several reasons. Attendance at these colleges was unduly restricted

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by the educational and economic hardships forced upon potential students by the South's discriminatory policies. Simultaneously, the colleges were unable to prepare students in some of the professional areas where employment opportunities were opening. Noting "the lag of preparation of Negroes" in fields such as science, medicine, economics, law, engineering and technology, Johnson argued that it was "due not so much to lack of interest as lack of places in the region to go for training, and lack of prepared teachers in these fields for the institutions to which they could go freely within the region."[29]

Pending the Supreme Court's decision on *Brown* and other desegregation cases before it at the time, Johnson urged the South to increase the number and support of its liberal arts colleges, while simultaneously improving their quality. "Our next wisest step," he argued, "would be that of improving the quality of instruction in the existing institutions by the elimination of those which are hopelessly below standard, and combining the resources of other weaker institutions."[30]

To achieve the quality of instruction he desired, Johnson urged that a single standard of evaluation be applied by one accrediting agency to both black and white schools. While this assessment might mean the loss of some black colleges, its long term effects could be salutary, for "it will set new standards and remove the protective walls of segregation from uninspired and unchallenged mediocrity."[31]

As University President, Johnson reiterated a theme he developed initially in the 1920s while a young executive with the Urban League and emphasized again and again over the years. Black institutions had a special mission to fulfill in American society, but that mission was not an excuse for expecting less of themselves, their faculty and students. Indeed, their mission required greater expertise and sensitivity in teaching and research, for more was demanded of their students in the still sceptical professional world the graduates sought to enter. Undoubtedly, Johnson felt keenly the need for quality in education in the early and mid-1950s, for he sensed a "new climate of cultural opportunity" developing for black youth. So encouraged was he in late 1953 that he wrote,

> Only a few years ago there was an excellent excuse that could always be used, that there was no need to go through a long and serious and perhaps costly period of preparation for a career, because racial prejudice would limit the opportunity for using the training in the end. This is no longer true, and I know it. . . in spite of the continued existence of racial barriers, opportunities today for soundly prepared Negro youth go begging because they cannot be found.[32]

The frustration for Johnson was that so many black youths were lost to quality higher education and to preparation for emerging professional opportunities between the grindstones of regional economic and educational discrimination. Venting this frustration, borne of years of research, teaching and administration at Fisk, he wrote,

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Our experience at Fisk with students from southern high schools suggests that many of them are 'under-achievers,' that they have better intelligences than they have the tools or the discipline to express or reveal.

Further, our experience suggests that the educational system loses a very large number of highly capable youth for the very reason that they cannot be spared the years of college training from essential aid to the family or partial family to keep it going.[33]

While Johnson knew that altering regional economic and educational discrimination, and thus their effects, required pressure from the black community and its supporters, he also argued that the potential of many black students went undeveloped because of poor teaching. Part of the blame for the poor teaching must rest, he wrote, "with the predominantly Negro colleges." Challenging again black private colleges such as Fisk to carry out their special mission with an unfailing commitment to standards equal to those of any other American college, he continued,

It is true that these colleges have been under the obligation to repair damage done by deficient high schools and elementary schools, through remedial programs added to the standard college work. But these colleges, and especially the private colleges that are not bound to accept any condition of miseducation that a high school may pass on to it, have the obligation to set and maintain standards that are more consistent with the national norms.

In the wake of the 1954 *Brown* decision, Johnson saw black colleges finally emerging "from under the admittedly dual standard of acceptability as collegiate institutions."[34]

Charles Johnson lived long enough to evaluate the meaning of the *Brown* decision, as well as that of other Court decisions related to segregation in higher education.[35] As he pondered the meaning of *Brown* for the black population, he saw a continuing vital mission for black institutions. In words reminiscent of earlier years, he repeated his theme about professional opportunities which awaited the vast untapped potential among black Americans if only they were prepared: "The exploitation of this opportunity must still await the development of sufficient ability and talent, and this is the responsibility of the pioneering Negro colleges." In a stinging rejection of the argument that with the opening of white colleges to blacks black institutions lost much of their special mission, Johnson wrote,

It is no solution simply to say that the college level Negro youth in the South, in particular, can solve this problem [inadequate schools and lack of encouragement] by going to white colleges. Unless the academic rules are changed a large majority cannot get into these colleges, any more than they can get in the colleges of the North. A reason for this is the poor and inadequate preparation of teachers at the elementary and secondary levels.

Indeed, Johnson argued, turning black students over to integrated institutions would have far reaching effects upon their personalities:

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Let us not deceive ourselves. The gains in legal integration are illusory unless and until the inherent capacities of Negro youth can be drawn out. Turning them over cold to integrated schools simply means exaggerating the effects of long years of segregation and inequity and their debilitating effects on incentive and personality.[36]

The legal gains in civil rights achieved during the previous decade, Johnson feared, would be lost if these gains were not undergirded with "educational substance." Consequently, he appealed to black and white Americans to support private black colleges, for they were the institutions which were able to prepare black students for the new freedom of the post *Brown* era. Indeed, Johnson told his audience, it is from these colleges that the leaders who paved the way for *Brown* came: "I ask you to identify the Negro men and women who today are leaders of the democratic forces seeking total integration. They are the graduates of these mission-centered institutions. . . ." Contrary to those who argued that the ending of legal segregation in educational institutions made black colleges unnecessary, Johnson saw a continuing vitality for their mission on both national and international settings:

The time is now to strengthen these colleges; to give their virtues greater power in this crisis. These institutions are not beggars; nor are they or should they ever become the pathological and apologetic symbols of the intellectual products of their nurturing. The time is now to help them set the example for the nation, of a democratic and dynamic education, that can save the nation itself for its greater destiny in the world.[37]

It would be easy to attribute the expectations Johnson expressed for the future role of black institutions to the rhetoric of fund raising. There may have been a tinge of that, but only a tinge, for Johnson the social scientist rarely practiced the art of hyperbole during his entire career. He was well aware of the social reality created by segregation and discrimination, and occasionally he lashed out in anger and frustration at that reality; but to yield to frustration and anger meant being controlled by an unjust racial environment.

Johnson did not yield. He sought ways to turn adversity to advantage. Challenging black educators to develop institutions that equalled in quality the best in American society did not reflect naivete on his part. He was well aware of the academic inadequacies of many black schools, and he never argued for the survival of all of them. He fought for the elevation of academic quality at Fisk and other southern black colleges from a sense of academic quality ingrained at the University of Chicago and with the realization that only more rigorous training would enable black students to compete successfully in the American economic system.

Black Americans depended upon black institutions for their leadership. Unless that leadership received intensive intellectual training it could not be effective in advocating the race's demands for civil and political justice, economic and social equality. Those who followed needed to be prepared, as

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well, to assume new roles as the doors of American institutions opened, however begrudgingly, to them.

Historical essays are written not only for their analysis of past phenomena but also for their interpretation of the phenomena. In this instance, the analysis and interpretation of Johnson's reflections on black colleges, his philosophy of black higher education, related to both historical and contemporary events. As with contemporary black and white educators, Johnson discussed in print and verbally the role of blacks institutions as the walls of segregation in higher education came down. He concluded that their mission remained, and there is no reason to challenge that conclusion in the 1980s. Just as there are sound pedagogical, social and psychological reasons for supporting institutions that serve particular clientele—the underprepared, women, the gifted, students at various socio-economic levels—so black students need the option of selecting a college that has been historically sensitive to their educational and emotional needs. The role of bringing a special understanding to the needs of black students that Johnson assigned to teachers in blacks colleges is as crucial in the 1980s as it was three decades ago.

The particular missions Johnson gave black colleges demanded thorough preparation of students in traditional academic programs, as well as sensitivity to the psychological, professional and educational needs of individuals who lived in the marginal world between black and white. Black colleges must continue to respond to those needs, and they must be given the means to meet them. The political and economic community should not be asking if we continue to need black colleges, but, with Johnson, ask how we can assist them in elevating their academic programs so that the students they serve can become part of the nation's economic and cultural mainstream. In that sense, the perspective of Charles Johnson is of interest not only to the historian, but also to a society that must still deal with the dilemma of two societies, one black, the other white.

NOTES

1. Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1938), pp. 247-249.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 250-251.
4. Ibid., p. 257
5. Ibid., pp. 298-299.
6. Ibid., p. 300.
7. Scholars have used the concept of "marginality" to interpret Johnson and his work. See, for example, Richard Robbins, "Charles S. Johnson," in James E. Blackwell and Morris Janowitz (eds.), *Black Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 56-59.
8. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate*, p. 356.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 365. Johnson's position on the existence of an independent black tradition in America was, and is, challenged by black and white scholars. See, for example, Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977).
11. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate*, p. 366
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., pp. 366-367.

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14. Ibid., pp. 367-368.
15. Ibid., p. 368.
16. Pres. [*sic*] Charles S. Johnson's Message to the Alumni," *Fisk News*, 20 (December, 1946): 2.
17. Charles S. Johnson, "Four Pillars of Faith," inaugural address, Fisk University (November 7, 1947), Fisk University Library, Johnson papers, p. 1. (Hereafter references to the Johnson papers in the Fisk University Library are noted simply as Johnson papers.)
18. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
19. Ibid., p. 2.
20. Ibid., p. 3.
21. Charles S. Johnson, "The Social Responsibilities of Higher Education," in Tenth Yearbook of the John Dewey Society, *Democracy in the Administration of Higher Education*, ed. by Harold Benjamin (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 21.
22. Ibid., 23
23. Charles S. Johnson, "American Education and the Negro College," Text of Address To Be Delivered By Dr. Charles S. Johnson . . . Principal Speaker at the 10th Annual United Negro College Fund Convocation at the Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, Monday Evening, January 12, 1953, Johnson papers, p. 2.
24. Ibid., p. 3.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 4.
27. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
28. Ibid., p. 8.
29. Charles S. Johnson, "Next Steps in Education," *Phylon*, 15 (First Quarter, 1954), 10; see also Charles S. Johnson, "The Future is Here," speech given at Booker T. Washington High School, Houston, Texas, May 7, 1954, Johnson papers, p. 16.
30. Johnson, "Next Steps . . . , 16.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 9.
33. Charles S. Johnson, "Comment on Ginzberg's "The Negro Potential" Chapter on The Educational Preparation of the Negro," Johnson papers, p. 3.
34. Ibid., p. 5.
35. In 1956 Johnson expressed his expectation that higher education would lead in the desegregation of American institutions: "With no defense of segregation remaining, save custom and the political expedient of states rights, it is not unlikely that the first area of total integration in southern education will be in the college and universities." Charles S. Johnson, "Integration in American Colleges and Universities," *Institute of International Education News Bulletin*, 32 (October, 1956): 5.
36. Charles S. Johnson, "The Time is Now," Remarks for UNCF Campaign Meeting, Detroit, Michigan, July 18, 1956, Johnson papers, pp. 3, 4, 5.
37. Ibid., pp. 6, 7, 8.

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