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Teaching at Howard University: Part II

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Howard University

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In the December 1960 issue of The Study of Current English there appeared the eighth article in a series on American educational circles. It was entitled "Teaching at a Negro College" and was written by Miss Kimi Kimura. Miss Kimura bases her reactions, judgments, and conclusions about Howard University and the educational system it represents on a stay of nine months at the University, as a temporary teacher, during 1958-1959. The article was accompanied by a photograph of the present writer, incidentally without his knowledge. It happens that he has spent something more than 25 years on the Howard campus. A comparison of his experiences with those of Miss Kimura is certainly in order.

To begin with, it is necessary to clarify the basic facts concerning the origin, development, purposes, and objectives of the University, especially because the preceding article contained much misinformation. Howard University touches the American educational system at many root points. A very distorted picture can result if these points, which are grounded in indisputable historical fact, are not from the start made clear. Misinformation is here corrected, therefore, only when it relates to vital phases of the total story.

For example, the informant, described as a French woman, who told Miss Kimura that the University was founded by the United States Government, was very far from accurate. Howard University was assuredly not founded by the United States Government, nor has it at any

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**TEACHING AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY:**

**PART II**

by John Lovell, Jr

—Professor of English, College of Liberal Arts, Howard University
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The present writer's main purpose, however, is not to correct misinformation. Since there were eight articles in a series on the subject of American educational circles, it can be reasonably assumed that the Japanese reader is interested in the broad outlines as well as the accurate ramifications of the subject. Howard University touches the American educational system at many root points. A very distorted picture can result if these points, which are grounded in indisputable historical fact, are not from the start made clear. Misinformation is here corrected, therefore, only when it relates to vital phases of the total story.

For example, the informant, described as a French woman, who told Miss Kimura that the University was founded by the United States Government, was very far from accurate. Howard University was assuredly not founded by the United States Government, nor has it at any
time in its history been under basic governmental control. The concern of the United States Government in supporting Howard University will be described in just a moment. First, let us establish the true story of its founding. The present writer has a great interest in that story since years ago he served as editorial adviser to the late Professor Walter Dyson, who published the only authoritative history of the University.

The idea of the University originated in a prayer meeting held in the First Congregational Church of Washington, D.C., on November 9, 1866. The Civil War had been over for 18 months, and many Americans were deeply concerned about what to do with the new crop of more than 3,000,000 freedmen. Attending this prayer meeting and active in its discussions was General Oliver Otis Howard, who had fought with distinction on the Union (Northern) side and who was at the time Commissioner (chief officer) of the Freedmen's Bureau, a governmental agency set up to administer the affairs of the new freedmen, and to insure their early integration into the American body politic. For him, a few years later, the University was named.

This prayer meeting and the men in it, who became the founders of the University—the University Library is named for them and their names are enrolled in honor near the Library entrance—, came to a momentous decision. Many philosophers of American democracy—Thomas Jefferson at the head—had demonstrated the truth that the kind of democracy for which Americans yearned would be possible only if there were universal education, from the lowest to the highest levels. But many sincere well-wishers of the freedmen, who were now the most serious and severe test of democracy, were proclaiming—and have since proclaimed—that the education of freedmen would have to be done on a segregated basis, that is, through Negro schools and colleges, taught by Negro teachers, administered by Negro administrators, exclusive from the whites in every respect.

The Howard founders were among a very few planners who decided from the start that this philosophy in education would not do. It would obviously prepare the freedmen and their children for life in an unrealistic and unidealistic world. Despite abnormal segregated laws and practices, everyday life in America is basically integrated. The people work together, live together, dream together, believe in the same social, economic, and religious principles, and fight for their rights under a common law. Although aware that a theme of segregation would remain in many areas for a long time, the founders of Howard University with...
the Middle States Association, of which Howard has been a member in full and regular standing since 1919, along with Johns Hopkins University, the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Columbia University, and Cornell University. In company with other members, Howard is subjected to periodic and thorough academic examination, the last one having taken place in 1955. In addition, each of Howard’s ten individual colleges is accredited, periodically, by a national accrediting agency in the academic field of that college; for example, the Law School is accredited both by the Association of American Law Schools and by the American Bar Association. Other evidence of the preservation of high standards is that the colleges have been investigated and approved for chapters by the major national honorary societies, such as Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi.

### Communism

Revolutionary socialism, basing its thinking on Marx's criticism of the excesses of the early laissez-faire capitalism, rejected the feasibility of a peaceful social emancipation of the capitalist society and declared its program of an abrupt, violent change. Pushed by its intolerant radicalism, it soon broke off completely from the humanitarian spirit of the French Revolution, and based its program and practice on the materialistic doctrine of class war. It preaches irreconcilable class struggle in which the historical mission of the working class (or proletariat) is to usurp political power by force, abolish private ownership of all property and the means of production and, after a transitional period of “dictatorship of the proletariat,” establish a “classless society.”

By Lubor J. Zink