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Unique University for Negroes

Hebert Hollander

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Hollander, Herbert
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UNIQUE UNIVERSITY FOR NEGROES

IS LIFTING RACE TOWARD CULTURE

Howard, in National Capital, Only Such Complete Institution of Higher Learning in the World—Is Single University Receiving Direct, Annual Aid From Federal Government—Sports Over-Emphasis No Problem As Students, Drawn From Every Section, Put Education First

By HERBERT HOLLANDER

For Ullman Feature Service

Washington, D. C.
WHEN the Public Works Administration recently set aside more than $500,000 for the construction of new dormitories at Howard University, Washington, D. C., attention was focused upon an institution unique not only in the United States but in the world.

Behind the bald announcement of the PWA grant is a fascinating story of pioneer effort which had its beginning in a prayer meeting held at the First Congregational Church in the National Capital immediately after the close of the War Between the States.

It was then that the first seed was sown for a university for Negroes. In the years which have followed the institution which then had its inception has become the outstanding source of higher learning for Negroes and the only complete university of its kind in any country.

First projected as a school for the training of an intelligent religious leadership for the freedmen who flocked into the National Capital after the War Between the States, the plan had been broadened, even before Congress issued its charter in 1867, into a university including elementary and secondary branches of learning, with normal department and college courses. Today, Howard University consists of nine schools and colleges; namely, graduate school, liberal arts, engineering and architecture, music, religion, law, medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

Howard is unique in several other respects. In addition to being the only complete university for Negroes, it is the largest of all Negro institutions of higher learning.

And, of perhaps greatest interest and importance, it is the only university of any description receiving direct, annual aid from the Federal Government.

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![LEARNING TO BUILD](image)

A class in architecture at unique Howard University, Washington, D. C.

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It is a story marked by trials and hardships, by struggle and sacrifice on the part of both students and faculty, sometimes by sharp differences of opinion, and by a slow, gradual climb in scholastic standards.

Graduates of Howard today have taken their places, in the United States and throughout the world, in the arts and sciences, in the
professions and in the business world. The cultural growth of the American Negro parallels the growth and development of the unique institution in the National Capital.

The present enrollment of Howard is approximately 1,700 students. These young men and women are drawn from every quarter of the United States and its possessions and from many foreign lands. As a Class A university, Howard’s entrance requirements are strict, and these students may be assumed to represent the cultural vanguard of their race in this country.

The grounds and buildings of the university are situated upon an eminence overlooking the National Capital. The beautiful and spacious campus is dotted with fine buildings which, in addition to lecture halls, include a library donated by Andrew Carnegie, a chapel and art gallery, conservatory and other edifices. Combined, these structures provide Howard with an unusually attractive and efficient "plant."

Adjoining the university is Freedmen’s Hospital, erected on land formerly owned by Howard and subsequently ceded to the Federal Government, with which the medical school has a close working, clinical and laboratory connection. The law school, formerly located in downtown Washington near the District of Columbia Supreme Court, has now been moved to the campus.

Relatively few of the thousands of tourists who come to Washington each year take the time to inspect this unique institution—or, indeed, know of its existence. Yet it is doubtful whether a visit to any single building in the Capital will yield more of genuine human interest than Howard.

Especially arresting is the fact that most of the men and women attending the university are doing so either through tuition or work scholarships or by after-hours employment on their own, or as the result of the greatest sacrifice on the part of parents.

The "college bum" is a species which, while not entirely foreign to Howard, yet is in a very striking minority. Howard has a full quota of fraternities and sororities, dramatic societies and the like, and an active social life, but the tremendous undercurrent of serious effort, and the heavy emphasis upon scholastic accomplishment by the students themselves, is quickly observed and without question is the most outstanding and impressive characteristic of the university. Due attention is paid to sports, both intercollegiate and intramural, and
stadium and gymnasium are used regularly, but the moot question of over-emphasis—which continues to plague so many schools throughout the country—is not a problem at Howard.

In other words, virtually every student at Howard, man or woman, is there for the earnest business of wringing every ounce of cultural advantage out of the courses offered. In many cases students have come to the university inadequately prepared because of below-

ANDREW CARNEGIE'S GIFT
This library on the beautiful Howard campus is a mecca for the university students.

standard secondary school training. This means that they must bend every effort not only to keep up with their new work but also must make up their deficiency in grounding.

A first hand inspection tour about the campus under the guidance of a third year student proved to be a genuine revelation. While the observer's guide indicated substantial pride in the material evidences of Howard's progress, he definitely was more interested in the university's cultural attainments.

Since the young man assigned to the role of guide was chosen quite
at random from a campus group and it was clear that he is typical of the student body generally, his attitude seems to be distinctly significant.

Furthermore, throughout the rather lengthy tour the question of sports was touched upon only in passing despite the fact that the football season was in full swing.

Briefly, this third year student, who may be accepted as representative of the Howard student body as a whole, revealed very clearly his preoccupation with curricular rather than extra-curricular affairs. That this is not the case at all American institutions of higher learning is a point which will not be argued either by parents or educators.

During the early years of the development of Howard there was a sharp cleavage of opinion with respect to the course Negro education should take. Although the fierce fire of this debate now seems to be confined to a far smaller area than in those formative years, it is still a live issue.

On the one hand was represented that group headed by Booker T. Washington, who, born in slavery, founded Tuskegee Institute, which was and remains a vital factor in Negro education. Washington felt, however, that the Negro should provide for himself a thorough vocational and industrial training as a basis for future cultural upbuilding. Washington's first concern was economic, although he recognized fully the eventual need for and value of professional training.

Those who opposed Washington felt that the progress of the Negro would be hampered by this very heavy and almost exclusive emphasis upon the purely vocational aspects of education; that it was a means of impeding rather than aiding the mental and spiritual growth of the race.

It is a matter of interest and some significance that the present secretary of Howard University, Dr. Emmett J. Scott, was associated with Booker Washington for more than eighteen years. It would seem that his presence at Howard marks a present-day meeting of the two views. Tuskegee continues to function actively and constructively in its sphere, and Howard goes forward in its own.

At any rate, the situation seemingly is in that admirable spirit of intelligent compromise which characterized Washington and made him such an outstanding vehicle of progress, notwithstanding a measure of latter-day criticism on this very score by some members and groups within his own race.
Discussing the unique position of Howard University among the country’s institutions of higher learning, its president, Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson, says:

"It constitutes the only complete university organization in the United States, including undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools, ministering directly to the colored people.

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The more than 1,700 students at the university, Dr. Johnson points out, are drawn from thirty-eight States, the District of Columbia, and from fourteen foreign countries. Of the 1,626 students enrolled last year, 939 were men and 687 women. Enrollment at Howard reached a peak of 2,600 in a pre-depression year. While below that figure at present, enrollment again is trending upward.

The great success which has attended the work of Howard University during the decades since its inception is inspiring interested persons to assist in the development of similar centers of higher education for Negroes elsewhere in the United States. There are three other centers which private philanthropy is assisting with this end in view.

They are Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.; Atlanta University, at Atlanta, Ga.; and Dillard University, at New Orleans, La. Of these centers, Howard is the only one to receive public (that is, Federal or State) support of any kind. Among the private sources contributing to the upkeep of Howard are the Julius Rosenwald Foundation and the General Education Board.

In view of the fact that until recently the Rosenwald Foundation concerned itself almost entirely with the problem of Negro primary and vocational education, it is considered to be important recognition of the steadily increasing significance of Howard in relation to the whole scheme of Negro education in the United States that Foundation funds lately have been made available to the Washington institution.

The total annual operating expense of the university is about $1,000,000.

Of the 300 professors, associates, assistants, instructors, and other teachers at Howard, all but about a score are Negroes, and all, of course, have collegiate qualifications equal to other Class A university faculty members.

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In connection with the acute economic problem which confronts so many Howard students it is noteworthy that 81 per cent of the male and 21 per cent of the female members of the student body are wholly
or partially self-supporting. The cost per student at Howard, including board, room, clothing, and a little recreation, is about $500 annually, with the average running somewhat higher for medical students.

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But, as Dr. Johnson says, it is not in physical equipment alone that the progress of this unique institution must be measured, but rather in its increasing influence through the trained leadership it is giving to the colored people of the United States in the fields of education, law, medicine, and economic and social development.

(Frédéric Douglass Memorial Hall—Classroom Building.)

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