

# New Directions

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## Toward a Greater Tomorrow

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highly placed Black Americans who were given the advantage of higher education by traditional Black colleges and universities. Among them is Andrew Young, the current United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

I wish to place on record our gratitude to Dr. James E. Cheek, president of Howard University, and the Board of Trustees for their understanding and encouragement of Africans studying at the university. Although in Nigeria we are investing heavily on higher education, it remains impossible for us to provide enough places for all Nigerians who want to have and are qualified for higher education. We, therefore, rely heavily on supplementing our own efforts with places made available to our students in universities all over the world. The gap filled by Howard University is numerically significant and stimulating both psychologically and academically.

### ***There is no doubt about Black people's contributions to human civilization in the past.***

During my opening address to the colloquium of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, I offered an argument that all Black and African peoples, wherever they may be, cannot work or think in languages indigenous to them. I also suggested that, to overcome this handicap, they needed unruffled patience and painstaking dedication. I also implored all participants to de-emphasize self-glorification and self-justification, but rather to turn the light of inquiry on finding a direction for freeing our people from mental and material poverty and bondage. There is no doubt about Black people's contributions to human civilisation in the past. For example, the University of Timbuktu ran a flourishing research centre well ahead of Europe. But I lamented on that occasion the fact that the long history of our achievement and contribution to human civilisation has been completely suppressed and obliterated by colonial domination.

All Black intellectuals must construct a new bridge-head to assault this misrepresentation of history. This is an absolute pre-requisite for preparing ourselves to regain control over our destiny. Our intellectuals and schools must ensure that their work in the various universities and research centres today sets the course of this new sense of values that will do justice to the roots of the African

and Black people everywhere.

The task precedes any search for technological and material presence we might seek to curve out in the world. Technological and material abundance is our main objective. But we cannot be motivated by a psychology of dependence and an imposed belief of being second rate. No nation or peoples drew inspiration and made any impact on history by a state of mind dominated by doubt about its capacity and pride in its history.

For many Blacks in this part of the world, there are two bridges to cross. The first concerns their relationship to the society in which they must live, and the second is the question of their relationship with their origins. The two are interwoven, but still capable of separate treatment. In regard to the first, I wish to acknowledge that without the active collaboration of some of our ancestors, some of your ancestors would not have been brought here. In any case both of us descend from this same stock. History, however, is not a backward looking exercise. For us, it emphasizes the need to be one with you, to make today and tomorrow much better than yesterday. In this effort to improve the lot of the Blacks in American society, we acknowledge the long line of fighters, from Booker T. Washington, through the hall of fame of the NAACP, Malcom X, Martin Luther King and the younger generation of fighters for the improvement of Blacks in the United States of America. Others, the likes of W. E. B. DuBois, are the bridge-builders between you and us. Alex Haley is the latest in line in this category.

As I said earlier, Howard University has contributed its quota to the development of the capacity of the Black American for active participation in this society. There is an input output ratio to every human undertaking. Everything possible must continue to be done to increase and improve this capacity on either side.

There are two broad vehicles for achieving this objective. One is political and the other intellectual. Some progress has been made on the former front. The foundation for regaining and ensuring equal political opportunity for Blacks has been laid. The price has been paid and we are now approaching the end of the tunnel. The prospects are now bright and the end is definitely in view. In regard to the intellectual equipment for increasing Black input and output, we

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By Olusegun Obasanjo

*The following was taken from the address of Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo at Howard University on October 12, 1977. The Nigerian Head of State was in the United States on an official visit. Ed.*

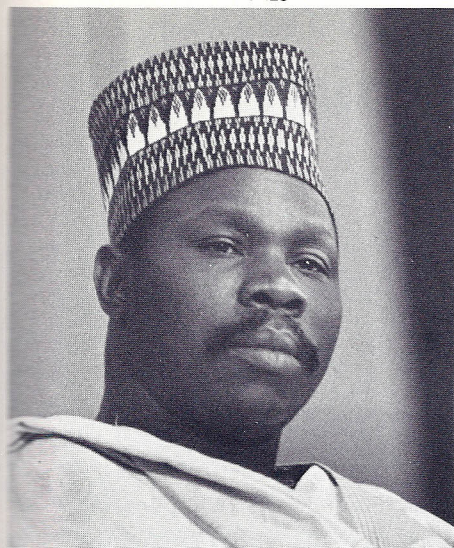
More than any other Black educational institution in the United States of America, Howard University has for over a century been among the traditional Black colleges and universities which continue to perform a significant role in the overall educational, economic and social development of Black Americans and Africans.

These institutions championed the cause of equal opportunity for quality education and have continuously provided this opportunity to those who were denied it or could not afford it.

I wish to acknowledge the good will of the Howard University Board of Trustees and faculty towards foreign and African students in general, and Nigerian students in particular. In spite of the great demand on places by Black American students, and the great need to give these places to them, this university has adopted an open-door policy towards Blacks from all over the world. From the 1930s, Howard has provided succor to hundreds of Nigerians, quenched their thirst for knowledge and provided jobs at all levels for many among them who needed it and were qualified. To the greater glory of this institution, it can name among its alumni a past president of Nigeria, a former ambassador of Nigeria to the United States of America and innumerable highly placed persons in all walks of life in my country.

No doubt this great university has contributed its quota to the number of





Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo

are luckier here, but we must keep up the pressure.

Let all Blacks in this society develop a thirst for knowledge. You are living in a "knowledge society" and any group within such a society who is short on knowledge power will have itself to blame. I implore you, therefore, to take the call and challenge to your churches and mosques, to the pool rooms and dance halls. The time has come for all Blacks, through universities and colleges, through on the job training, through community and individual efforts, to close ranks and increase the input of Black Americans to the knowledge society. Happily, the returns are high and the effort worth making. Some of you may wonder what is in this for us on the continent of Africa.

***In Nigeria, Black Americans with high technical skills are working shoulder-to-shoulder with their brothers and sisters.***

I should start by saying that since the ship left shore we too have been through subjugation only slightly less humiliating than yours. We are just beginning to emerge from this period, having recovered our right to political self determination. However, a lot of damage has been done to the structures of our society. We are busy buckling down to the hard work of putting the damage right. In this exercise, we have had to rely heavily on external help. I am glad to say that in Nigeria, for example, Black Americans with high technical skills are working shoulder-to-shoulder with their brothers and sisters. Consider-

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**New Directions, Vol. 5 [1978], Iss. 2, Art. 5** ing the size and scope of problems facing a nation such as ours, there is infinite opportunity for co-operation and your experience and know-how are both welcome in helping us in our very considerable task of building a nation.

In Nigeria, for example, we have embarked on a 60-billion-dollar program of economic development between now and 1980. One of the major constraints to this effort is the shortage of technical know-how and manpower. To combat this shortage, we have mounted a special drive to bring home all our qualified manpower from abroad and have a crash program to train more. In the short term, help in this direction is welcome from all quarters. Every qualified American who has taken advantage of the educational and research facilities in this great country can make his services available to us, to the material and psychological satisfaction of both parties.

On a second but very important platform is the fact that Africa and the United States of America need greater collaboration on the political plane. Your great country is a world power and its position and posture on many issues can be, and most often is, critical to the nature and speed of solutions in world affairs. Your political process is oiled by an efficient system of lobbies.

The greatest weakness in the foreign policy of African countries is this: although the U.S.A. has one of the largest concentration of Blacks in the world, this political power has not before now been used to influence its African policy. Increasingly, there is an awareness of this possibility, but all Black intellectuals, scholars and researchers must take account of this factor in the course of their work. The politicians of the Black Caucus have become a great force to reckon with, the Black vote too has become a decisive factor. These new points must facilitate the achievement of the objectives of Black and African peoples wherever they may be.

There is no greater area of action for this lobby than the explosive situation in Southern Africa. In Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, millions of Blacks and Africans are suffering under colonialism and the most perverted form of racism—apartheid. The present American Administration has moved closer to us in finding solutions to these problems. There is still a long way to go though, and we cannot yet rest on our oars.

***Every Black American must use his influence in the political process to ensure that the United States fights on our side to bring majority rule to Southern Africa and an end to apartheid.***

Every Black American must use his influence in the political process to ensure that the United States fights on our side to bring majority rule to Southern Africa and an end to apartheid. In this regard, we must alert all Black American scholars of the danger of being used for the wrong kind of public relations work—for and on behalf of the South African government.

In Nigeria, we believe that so long as one inch of African territory is occupied, we remain in bondage, and that wherever any Black or African is oppressed, we share the indignity. This is the way it should be.

To return to the general theme of our overall development, we must sharpen our tools through a process of mental liberation. In this regard, I wish to recall what Dr. Alfred F. Hoyte of Howard's Department of Electrical Engineering once wrote: "All groups of people must learn to produce for themselves the things that will make life more comfortable." Without this, our embarrassing dependence on the fruits of other people's labour, our readiness to imitate, our easy satisfaction with crumbs, will constitute greater obstacles than any external factors which hitherto hindered our development.

I conclude with a call to action, based on valid hope and assurance of solidarity on both sides of the Atlantic, for a greater tomorrow for all Black and African peoples throughout the world. □