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Joseph Califano

12 *The following is excerpted from an address given by HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr., at the 111th Convocation of Howard University, September 22, 1978.*

Unfinished Business

By Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

Thirteen years ago President Lyndon Johnson came to this campus [Howard University] to speak to the graduates of 1965. He spoke less than a year after pressing through the Congress the most sweeping civil rights act since Reconstruction. He spoke only a few weeks before signing another, perhaps more far-reaching measure: The Voting Rights Act of 1965.

These laws and others were, we know now, to unleash an unparalleled surge of opportunity and achievement for Black Americans.

Yet, even in the afterglow of passing these historic laws, Lyndon Johnson's eyes were on the distant future.

"It is not enough," he said on that day, "just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next . . . stage of the battle for civil rights."

Today, we are in the midst of that new phase. We have made progress, but the struggle continues.

In the sixties, Black Americans fought for the right to be served at lunch counters in department stores. In the seventies, they struggle for equal job opportunities in those stores. The challenge is to own those stores.

For more than a century, education has been at the center of that drive for equal rights and human dignity—particularly higher education.

For more than a century, institutions like Howard have had a special mission: To educate Black scholars and leaders.

But what of the present and the future? It is one of the ironies of our progress in

civil rights that today, many traditionally black institutions face new and serious challenges.

Opportunities at other institutions have now expanded; a wide range of choices has been opened; many traditionally white institutions are competing to recruit minority students.

Howard University, by virtue of its academic eminence and its unique relationship to the federal government, enjoys an enviable security. But many of its sister institutions across the nation face formidable challenges—at a moment when the economic difficulties of private colleges, both black and white, are severe. For many private colleges, expenses are rising; sources of financial support are dwindling; enrollments are decreasing.

These colleges have been coping with change with admirable resilience and ingenuity. It is a striking fact that, of the 120 private two- and four-year colleges nationwide that have been forced to close their doors since 1970, not one has been an accredited black college.

This Administration is firmly committed, not only to helping these traditionally black institutions survive; we are committed to helping them succeed and gain new strength as they face a new era.

Presidential Action

What does this mean in operational terms? Let me illustrate with two examples.

First, the President is directing each department and agency head throughout the federal government personally to insure that predominantly black institutions get a fair opportunity to participate in federal grant and contract programs. He is asking them to eliminate unintended barriers to full participation in federal programs, and to consider the role that these institutions can play in new programs—programs of social and technical assistance to less-developed countries, urban programs, energy and environmental programs. He is asking that each

department establish a forum for continuing consultations with representatives from the traditional black colleges and universities.

Second, in the past 20 months, in response to a lawsuit brought in 1970 by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, HEW has successfully negotiated plans in six Southern states that will further desegregate their systems of higher education; eight other states are under active investigation, or soon will be, to determine whether their systems are sufficiently integrated.

These actions, inevitably, will affect traditionally black institutions as well as white ones. Yet we are aware that Black citizens have special needs to which the black institutions have been sensitive and responsive.

So we have made a firm and fundamental resolution as we work to achieve desegregation in higher education: that the traditionally black colleges must not bear the heaviest burdens of desegregation; they must be strengthened, not weakened, in the desegregation process.

That principle can be seen at work in a desegregation settlement which we are announcing today [Sept. 22, 1978] concerning Oklahoma's system of higher education.

Last February, HEW granted provisional acceptance to a desegregation plan from Oklahoma. Our final acceptance hinged on the state's commitment to strengthen the only traditionally black institution in the Oklahoma system: Langston University.

Recently, the Oklahoma regents submitted a comprehensive proposal whose acceptance I am announcing. The plan will desegregate Langston University; it includes one hundred special scholarships to attract white students. But the plan also includes a variety of proposals to enhance Langston's educational potential: The State Regents are proposing

a unique new urban mission for Langston with new degree programs in such areas as urban studies, physical therapy, and personnel management. The Regents also propose to establish a clinical center which will offer special internships and extension courses.

At many of the nation's traditionally black public colleges, in response to our efforts, new and enlarged initiatives are underway to equalize faculty salaries, expand libraries, build new facilities, increase student scholarships and improve the curriculum.

This suggests what we mean by strengthening traditionally black institutions.

Howard's President Emeritus James Nabrit used these words in describing Howard's mission in this new era:

"... while we have a special regard for Negro youth, as was true of our Founders, we draw no lines of racial, religious or national distinction among the men and women who are moved to seek us out. Nevertheless we have an historic commitment to the education of the Negro and we shall not forsake that role."

Those words spell out a worthy goal not just for Howard, but for all the nation's traditionally black colleges in an era of swift change.

New Laws and Programs

In recent years, a second major force has been at work in our society to secure the rights and opportunities of minority citizens. I am speaking, of course, of the federal government, with its array of civil rights laws and programs.

In 1954, the Supreme Court demolished the legal basis for school segregation. Today, though the vestiges of segregation still haunt us, dual systems have been largely dismantled.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act declared that segregated public accommodations were illegal; equal access became the law of the land.

A year later, in 1965, Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act—the law Lyndon Johnson considered his greatest domestic achievement.

■ In 1965, Alabama had 11 Black elected officials; last year [1977] there were 201.

■ In 1965, Georgia had 3 Black elected officials; last year [1977] there were 225.

■ In 1965, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia did not have a single Black elected official. Last year [1977] Louisiana had 276; Mississippi, 295; North Carolina, 221; South Carolina, 182; Virginia, 82—a total exceeding 1,000.

■ Between 1969 and 1977, the total number of Black elected officials in the nation nearly quadrupled—from fewer than 1200 to more than 4300.

In addition to these efforts to secure equal opportunity, the federal government has launched programs to remedy past discrimination—particularly in education and employment.

Consider these facts, taken from the field of education alone:

■ In 1966, less than five percent of all college students were Black. Ten years later, in 1976, this figure had more than doubled—to nearly 11 percent. Today, a Black high school graduate is almost as likely to go to college as his white classmate.

■ In just seven years, the percentage of minority students in the nation's medical schools has more than tripled—from 2.4 percent in 1968-1969 to 8.1 percent last year.

■ In 1968, two of every three Black medical graduates were educated at Howard or Meharry. The enrollments at Howard and Meharry have continued to grow. But I believe it is a sign of progress that the enrollment of Black students at other medical schools has climbed even more quickly, so that Howard and

Meharry today account for only 28 percent of all Black medical-school graduates.

All this progress holds an important, hopeful lesson for the future: The efforts of this nation's government to secure equal rights can bear—and have borne—rich fruit.

But what of the future? What is the outlook for affirmative action programs, particularly in higher education?

The Bakke Case

A central question for the future concerns the Supreme Court decision in the *Bakke* case. What effect will that decision have? The narrow result of that case, of course, was to admit Allan Bakke to medical school. But far more important than the effect on one individual and one institution are the broader implications the decision is likely to have across the nation. Those implications, I am convinced, are likely to be two:

First, the decision leaves intact the power of the courts and of government agencies like HEW to order appropriate remedies when there is an official finding of illegal discrimination.

Our efforts at HEW to remedy such discrimination, therefore, will remain vigorous:

■ Within HEW, we have made a major effort to upgrade our enforcement efforts. We have dramatically increased productivity in the Office for Civil Rights, the office charged with enforcing major civil rights laws. In the past 20 months, the average number of cases completed by each investigator has risen from 4 per year to 12.5—a threefold increase.

■ We have also proposed a 100 percent increase in the budget of the Office for Civil Rights, and 900 new positions in that office—an increase of more than 80 percent.

The second major lesson of the Bakke decision is this: race may be taken into

14 *account by colleges and universities as part of their effort to promote diversity in their student bodies.*

In the three months since *Bakke*, my staff and I have talked to many university presidents and admissions officers. These officials realize that *Bakke* establishes clearly their authority to continue their affirmative action efforts. Their commitment has not slackened, and I am confident these programs will grow in number and strength.

Shortly after *Bakke* was decided, I ordered a review of all HEW programs and regulations to determine their legality in light of the Supreme Court's decision. Although the final report is not quite complete, I can announce the major conclusion we have reached: in general, the *Bakke* decision will not interfere with or restrict HEW programs of special value and concern to minority groups.

And I can specifically name several important programs for which our review is complete; programs we will continue to support and strengthen:

- The TRIO programs, which help qualified students from poor backgrounds finish high school, develop the skills and motivation they need to succeed in college. These programs will continue.

- The CLEO program, which helps needy and minority students attend law school and enter the legal profession. This program will continue.

- The Minority Grant programs in biomedical sciences, which strengthen the ability of institutions with large minority populations, institutions like Howard to train skilled minority scientists in biomedical research. These programs will continue.

- The Graduate and Professional Opportunities Program, a new effort I initiated, which awards fellowships to minority students to pursue graduate careers in academic and professional fields. This program will continue.

The *Bakke* decision will not restrict our vital efforts to help minority and low-income students go to college and train for the professions. Affirmative action is alive and well.

Determination and Courage

A third force, finally, has been at work in America to guarantee opportunity and achievement for Black Americans—and it is, in the end, the most powerful and relentless force of all: The force of human will and determination to achieve.

The word elite is not a popular one in America today. But I think it is fair to say that Howard, for 111 years, has proudly educated an elite—not an arrogant elite, but an elite devoted to service; to achievement on behalf of humankind; in Thomas Jefferson's words, "an aristocracy of merit."

The members of that aristocracy who have gone into the world, went forth armed not only with trained intellects; they were armed also with steely determination, great courage, and a formidable capacity for hard work. For all their many differences, the Howard alumni I know—from Thurgood Marshall to Andy Young—are alike in those qualities. They have achieved great things despite great obstacles—because they have had the courage to storm the heights of achievement.

Today, even though wider opportunities are opening in education and employment; even though the federal government stands beside Black citizens in their quest for opportunity, those personal qualities are still more necessary than ever.

We must remember that progress is not the same as success. And we must consider unblinkingly some unhappy facts along with the happy ones:

- In 1977, fewer than one of every 50 faculty members at medical school was Black.

- If American colleges and universities

hired every Black Ph.D. in industry, government, or elsewhere—whether active or retired, living or dead—the result would still be fewer than three Black faculty members per institution.

- Preliminary figures in a new report of the American Association of Medical Colleges reveal that for the second straight year, the number of Black applicants to medical school has stopped growing and in fact has begun to decline. The pattern at law schools is similar—last year, the number of Black students enrolled in law schools declined by nearly 4 percent, from 5,500 to 5,300.

- Between 1974 and 1977, the number of Ph.D.s earned by Black scholars in several important disciplines has declined—29 to 20 in chemistry; from 16 to 10 in mathematics, and from 15 to 11 in engineering.

Changing these melancholy figures will require not only great efforts by institutions like Howard and the federal government; it will require that you aim for the far heights of excellence and achievement in America—not the middle reaches.

I would charge you to aim, not only for a bachelors' degree, but for advanced graduate and professional training;

- Aim not only for careers in business, but for control of banks and businesses and financial institutions in America.

- Aim not only for careers in medicine, but for chairs on the nation's medical faculties and hospital boards.

- Aim not only for status as members of a Black elite, but for a seat in all the centers of national decision-making.

- Aim, not only for participation in politics, but for the Presidency of the United States.

Visionary advice? Perhaps. I can only quote a line of Browning: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for?" □