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<sup>18</sup> *Editor's note—The following was excerpted from the Fourth Mordecai Wyatt Johnson Memorial Lecture which was delivered on January 23 on the campus of Howard University by historian John Hope Franklin.*

## Higher Education And World Community

By John Hope Franklin

Mordecai Johnson and Howard University provide the footing on which one can stand as one seeks to appreciate the role of higher education in building a world community. This was, in fact, of immense interest to Dr. Johnson during his years [1926-1960] as president of Howard University.

Institutions of higher education primarily for persons of African descent were, from the beginning, multi-racial and multi-cultural. Whether the institution had a conscious and deliberate plan, such as Hampton Institute, to provide education for [Black Americans], Indians, and Hawaiians or a less overt arrangement, such as Howard, to educate all who cared to come, Black colleges and universities early became the models for the training of persons of the most diverse racial, cultural and national backgrounds.

There was no presumption at such institutions that barriers to learning, invisible or otherwise, existed or that education was not an effective instrument

for solving the most difficult problems imaginable. These institutions, founded after the emancipation, were "centers of care," as Dr. Johnson liked to characterize them, that nurtured and developed the best in the student without regard to race, religion, previous condition of servitude, or level of social attainment.

These institutions were essentially optimistic, expressing through their curriculum, their faculty, and their students a belief that their mission was to improve the individual and, through this process, to improve the human condition.

Howard University's first foreign students were from the Orient. In 1868, Japan sent students here for training in Western medicine. In 1870, several students from China gained admission. In the following year, the first African student came to Howard. From that point on Howard would not be without that rich admixture of foreign students that was a salient factor in the student population by the middle of the 20th century. If more students came from Africa and the West Indies than from Europe or Asia or South America, perhaps it was because young people from that continent and the Caribbean colonies sought the security of a university that was committed to the view that skin color is irrelevant in evaluating intellectual performance.

Few nations of the world have matched the generosity of the United States in their support of higher education over the years. Public colleges and universities have multiplied manifold during the last century, while the number of private institutions of higher education have increased to an astonishing degree. Such could not have occurred without the great munificence of government at all levels as well as private philanthropy in its various forms.

Colleges and universities of the most traditional kind have been augmented by institutes of technology, at times more liberal than the liberal arts colleges themselves, by a remarkable variety of community colleges, by colleges of continuing education, and by colleges that take on other forms and purposes. In the two decades ending in 1980, student enrollment in colleges and universities increased by more than 300

percent. During 1979 alone, this country spent approximately \$54 billion for the support of higher education.

One would think that with the growth of higher education at such a rate and with such generous support, higher education would play an important role in solving at least *some* of the major problems that beset us. Yet, one of the great paradoxes of our time is that with all the emphasis on education, with enormous expenditure of funds for higher education, with good management—at least at the level of higher education—and with increasing numbers involved, there is no widespread confidence in the power of education to assist in solving some of the problems and dilemmas of our time.

We have been enormously successful in training human beings to perform certain feats that defy gravity and control the climate. We have provided relief to millions by eradicating certain diseases and developing surgical procedures that reduce pain and prolong life significantly. The catalog of such achievements is long indeed and their critical significance must not be minimized one whit. What is astonishing is that we simply do not seem to believe that we can commandeer these talents when we try to tackle our basic domestic problems in human relations or when we confront those problems that bedevil the world community.

In relating to the world community, we as a nation exhibit special talents when we undertake to provide services for other societies and other peoples. Earthquakes, floods, famines, pestilences, and similar disasters bring out the very best in us. The U. S. Department of State even has a Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance; numerous private agencies stand ready to place their resources at the disposal of countries and peoples in need.

Also, we are quite proficient in providing military and economic assistance to a variety of nations, although quite often in such situations a *quid pro quo* is part of the arrangement. American missionaries, moreover, have taken their religion to the so-called benighted peoples they serve. And if "civilization" was in the baggage they transported, it frequently contained some educational and medical services that helped to balance the less admirable parts of the baggage.

It is when we seek to establish educational relationships or to use education to build a common vehicle for communi-

cating with other peoples that we seem less effective.

The world community today is not the same one that existed at the end of World War II. For one thing, the United States that strode across the world stage in 1945 like some mighty colossus became, by 1981, a mere shadow of her former self. Here I refer not to any loss of leadership in military weaponry or industrial productivity which may well have happened. Rather, I refer to a change in the status of the United States as it is perceived by others. Indeed, others have begun to view the United States as occupying a minority position in many ways on many issues such as race, religion, or political and economic ideology. At least three-fourths of the nations of the world—including virtually all of the underdeveloped countries—are not impressed by America's economic power, its democratic practices, or even its crusade for human rights.

One cannot observe this significant shift in the position of the United States without realizing that any move to do anything about it calls first for a reassessment and reappraisal of its posture and approach. This involves, among other things, taking another look at other nations, especially the developing nations, and recognizing them as equal members in the family of sovereign nations. In so doing, one must make certain that the psychology and even the language of this nation's diplomacy takes cognizance of these new relationships, as the United States seeks to hold its own and even to strengthen its position in the world community.

Each segment of American society can play a role in this undertaking. But one segment, more than most, should have a special responsibility in this regard. I speak, of course, of our colleges and universities. First, they possess a remarkable concentration of trained experts who are teaching and studying every conceivable aspect of the relations of nations that make up the world community. Secondly, the colleges and universities possess documents, publications and communications facilities that illuminate the problems the world community faces—materials that can be effectively and successfully used by the experts. Finally, our institutions of higher education have curricular offerings, extra-curricular activities and organizations, and programs of study and travel abroad that should make them

especially sensitive to the world and its problems.

But many of our universities have historically reflected some of the salient if unattractive features of American life; some have been segregationist, discriminatory, quota-ridden, super-nationalistic, and even xenophobic. These are hardly qualities that prepare one to look objectively at peoples of different cultures, races, religions, politics, economic systems, and values in general. Nor do such qualities prepare an institution to do anything constructive anywhere in today's world.

In his estimable *Howard University, The First Hundred Years*, Professor Rayford W. Logan recognizes the importance of the international component in Howard's history by devoting considerable space to what he calls the university's "International Activities."

The very presence of foreign students and faculty in an atmosphere that assumed their common humanity and their equality raised significantly the consciousness about international matters on the part of those who had never ventured beyond the shores of this country. Small wonder that in due course the curriculum reflected a heightened interest in the world community, with courses in the languages, literature, politics and ways of life of faraway places. Howard University in 1960 instituted what was perhaps the first course in this country on "The Philosophy and Methods of Non-Violence." Courses on Africa, for years a part of the regular fare, increased in numbers and variety. Students as individuals and as [groups] began to travel to Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, developing contacts, learning as they traveled and making [new] friends in the process. And members of the faculty of this university have been more active than most in teaching and doing research abroad.

It is important that a university make it clear that it is a part of the world community, that the discovery and diffusion of knowledge knows no national boundaries, and that it maintain open communication with those who teach and those who learn wherever they may be.

Scholars themselves constitute a world community, and except for certain areas

of inquiry having to do with the history and literature of a nation, no nation can make any exclusive claim to any area of knowledge. Very often Nobel prizes are shared by scholars of two or three countries; and the cases of international collaboration where no prizes are awarded could be multiplied indefinitely. What is needed then is a greater amount of collaboration in the areas that are seeking a solution to the problems of the world through peaceful means.

It would be tragic indeed if our institutions of higher education isolated themselves from some part of the world because the politics were unsavory or the government was tyrannical. Those are precisely the situations where seekers of truth—teachers and students alike—need to maintain their contacts, underscore their common interests with their counterparts and renew their commitment to justice and equity.

This year, the United States will spend more than \$200 billion to maintain its position of respectability, if not superiority, in the arms race. Even as we stockpile this great mass of deadly weapons, we know that the minimal use of them will mean the utter destruction of the entire world. And yet, our government of whatever party at whatever time during these 35 years of the nuclear age has not been willing to put even a modest fraction of the amount expended for arms into programs to seek a world community through the instruments of peace.

Programs to strengthen international education, cultural and educational exchange, international visitors, international scientific collaboration, book programs among nations, even cultural exhibits, are among the more expendable items in our national budget.

It would seem logical that if we are spending billions to acquire arms that we cannot and must not use, we should be willing to spend at least one-tenth that amount on programs designed to render unnecessary the use of arms that will destroy us all. □