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notes

Editorial Staff

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From the Editors Notebook

Adieu! James Edward Cheek

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This special issue of *New Directions* we dedicate to James Edward Cheek, president of Howard University from 1969 to 1989.

When Cheek retired from the Howard presidency on June 30th this year, at the age of 56, he left behind a rich legacy and an institution that will rank highly in the annals of American higher education.

As the stories and interviews in this issue will show, the impact of James Cheek on Howard University during a span of two decades is compelling.

Influence in the right places begets support, and Cheek, despite some criticisms of his self-directed style of leadership, was successful in enlarging the university's endowment; in obtaining an expansion of the annual federal appropriations to Howard; and in cultivating donors in the private sector.

Indeed, in spite of the controversies and voices of dissent that come with the territory, Cheek's many contributions to Howard University and to the general field of education — specifically in the training of African Americans and others in pursuit of knowledge — are a testament to his resolve and thrust as a university president.

At Howard, he has achieved success in many areas.

For example, 20 years ago, as you will read in the special report beginning on the opposite page, Howard had only one campus on Georgia Avenue, northwest; today it has three more, in addition to a former site for the School of Divinity. The number of schools in 1969 was 11; today it is 18. The university's operating budget two decades ago was \$43 million; today it stands at \$417 million — and climbing; the student body has increased by 33.5 percent; and the faculty by 52.7 percent.

The above represent only a few examples of the remarkable growth Howard has experienced during James Cheek's long tenure.

We say farewell to James Cheek and his family. Especially to Cheek, we express our thanks for the very existence of this magazine, and for welcoming us into his office on the afternoon of May 22 for a long and revealing interview, which appears elsewhere in this issue.

Interviewing the publisher has never been an easy assignment for any journalist, especially when the core questions dealt with controversial issues — issues so controversial that some on this campus would rather make only whispered utterances.

But speak about the issues Cheek did. He was candid and firm in his beliefs during our three-hour conversation with him. He was also gracious and very respectful of our professional responsibilities. You see, my colleague, staff writer Harriet Jackson Scarupa, and I, the editor, were in pursuit of substance and *only* the facts. And James Cheek delivered, and delivered outstandingly.

Observation: James Cheek may have been misunderstood by his detractors and he realizes it now.

Yes, as he would agree, there may have been some miscommunication, miscalculation and possibly wrong turns, but with no malice intended on the part of his administration. At least this is what came through during the interview.

Yes, he was not correct all the time or a miracle worker. Then again, who is?

We wish him well during his period of rest, reassessment of priorities, writing, thinking and contributing. □

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