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### The Cheek Era at Howard (1969-89) A Remarkable Record of Achievement

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**SPECIAL REPORT**



**THE  
CHEEK ERA  
AT HOWARD  
(1969-89)**

*A Remarkable Record  
of Achievement*

## NEW SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED IN THE CHEEK ERA

- College of Allied Health Sciences (1974)
- School of Architecture and Planning (1973)
- School of Business and Public Administration (1972)
- School of Communications (1972)
- School of Continuing Education (1966)
- School of Education (1971)
- School of Human Ecology (1976)

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## SOME INDICATORS OF EXTRAORDINARY GROWTH IN THE CHEEK ERA

	1962	1989	% of Increase
Number of students	3,571	13,773	383
Number of faculty	126	1,360	107
Number of schools/colleges	11	19	73
Number of academic programs	112	183	65
Number of bachelor's degree programs	13	26	100
Number of master's degree programs	12	20	67
Number of Ph.D. programs	3	24	300
Number of Joint Degree programs	0	5	—
Number of library volumes	911,000	1,886,252	108
Number of major research institutes/centers	4	10	90
Number of computers	1	4	300
Number of buildings	6	34	467
Total operating budget (includes hospital)	\$23,900,000	\$117,000,000	389
Federal appropriations (includes hospital)	\$25,472,000	\$178,973,000	302
Endowment (book value)	\$ 3,255,200	\$ 47,147,498	145

SOURCES: Office of Planning, Analysis and Information Systems, Office of the Vice President for University Affairs, Office of the President

†Major SOURCES FOR INFORMATION ON 2004-2005: Office of Planning, Analysis and Information Systems

## THE GRADUATION RECORD 1970-1989

Total number of graduates	37,026
Number of bachelor's degrees awarded	21,762
Number of master's degrees awarded	7,960
Number of doctorates awarded (excludes Doctor of Medicine, Juris Doctor, Pharm.D. and D.O.S.)	1,428



Howard University Board of Trustees Chairman John E. Jacob presenting Cheek with a "Thank You" citation during the 1989 Charter Day Dinner in March.



By Harriet Jackson Scarupa

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**O**n a platform set up on the upper quadrangle of the main Howard University campus, James E. Cheek stood before a podium emblazoned with the Howard University seal and delivered his personal message to members of the class of 1989.

As blue and white balloons drifted overhead and flower vendors prepared to do a booming business, he looked out at the upturned faces before him and said:

"We thank you for having chosen Howard as the place to participate in the experience of education and you leave us with our fondest wish for God's richest benediction upon all of your endeavors. May God bless and crown you with success."

To many onlookers there was a particular poignancy about his remarks, as there was about the whole scene on that balmy May 13th. For it marked the last time that James E. Cheek would preside over a Howard University commencement.

On April 22, the chairman of Howard's Board of Trustees announced Cheek's decision to retire as Howard's president, effective June 30, 1989, exactly two decades and day after Cheek first took over the job.

Now, on an occasion that customarily signifies new beginnings, he bid his formal adieu to the university community. He spoke without rhetorical flourishes and fanfare, but from the heart:

"It would be appropriate on this my final commencement to have some eloquent words of farewell. I do not. I simply want to say to all of you, the members of the Board of Trustees, the members of the faculty, the students, the alumni, the staff and the supporters of this institution: Celestine, Jimmy and Janet [his wife and two children] and I ex-



6 press to all of you our deepest thanks for having afforded us the privilege over two decades of working in your midst and being a part of the Howard University mission and the Howard University family.

"We shall always have a special place in our hearts for this institution and for all of you. . . . Thank you so very much. God bless you and farewell."

With that, he joined the festive graduates and others as they linked hands, swayed, and raised their voices to sing the alma mater: "*Reared against the eastern sky/Proudly there on hilltop high/Far about the lake so blue/Stand old Howard firm and true . . .*"

The setting for Cheek's brief farewell remarks, while poignant, seems especially fitting for it highlights a compelling fact: More degrees had been awarded to Howard students under his tenure as president than had been awarded in the entire century that preceded it. It is but one marker of the extraordinary impact the 56-year-old educator has had on the university.

Under his leadership, new schools and programs have been added, existing ones expanded and improved. New buildings have transformed the very "look" of the main campus, while new campuses have transformed the university's geographical configuration. Nearly every facet of the university, from the size of the faculty and the student body to the number of books in the library system and the number of dollars in the budget, has increased significantly and, in many cases, spectacularly. The university's academic horizons have broadened to reflect its emergence as a major comprehensive research-oriented institution while still accommodating its historic concern with addressing and redressing societal inequities, especially as they affect Black people. A television

**Under Cheek's leadership, nearly every facet of the university . . . has increased significantly and, in many cases, spectacularly.**

station, radio station, hotel and academic publishing house have been added . . . And more. Much more.

At the university's annual Charter Day Dinner last March, John E. Jacob, chairman of Howard's Board of Trustees, presented Cheek with a citation that commended him for the special role he has played in the university's history. It read, in part:

"Your arrival at Howard twenty years ago marked the beginning of a fortuitous journey for you and for this University. With clear vision, intellectual prowess, and unstinting effort, you have demonstrated that Howard University may move from 'strength to strength.' . . ."

"As Chief Executive Officer of this University, you have placed Howard in the front rank of American universities and directed it to high levels of academic achievement, increased levels of financial support and unprecedented growth.

"Under your aegis, Howard University has experienced a renaissance in all of the facets of its life as an institution of higher learning. . . ."

All this is perhaps even more remarkable when one considers that in the wake of the student upheavals of the late '60s, "There were many people who thought

that Howard was doomed to take a back seat in higher education, that so much damage had been done to our reputation that we'd not be able to attract faculty, that we were going to be a kind of backwater institution," as Michael R. Winston, the university's vice president for academic affairs, expresses it.

#### **On the Heels of Turmoil**

Cheek, in fact, had arrived at Howard following the most tumultuous period in its history. A time when the campus was reeling under the twin pressures of Black power and student power.

In the wake of the urban rebellions of the late '60s, Howard students — like many other Black students across the country — embraced the cause of Black identity with ferocious intensity. And in their quest to have the campus reflect this intensity, in a very real sense, they brought the "battle" to academia. For many of them, Howard — despite its role as a champion of Black people — and Howard's eminent president, James M. Nabrit Jr. — despite his pioneering work in civil rights law — simply weren't "Black" enough. With all the fervor of youth, they accused the university of being too "white-oriented" in its academic offerings and too "ivory-towerish" in its stance toward Black oppression. Nor were these students content to sit back and have others decide on all matters relating to *their* education. They wanted a part in the decision-making process.

The result of all this was turmoil.

In 1967, Nabrit had announced his resignation, saying he would stay on only until a successor could be found. Meanwhile, the turmoil continued. During the 1968-69 academic year alone, the campus experienced five different student boycotts and building takeovers, the largest of which (May 1969) resulted in



closing the university for five days, the arrest of 21 students, including the student body president, and considerable physical damage to campus facilities.

Given the charged atmosphere on the campus, it was obvious some change must come to the university in order to assure enough tranquility for the educational process to proceed. Cheek, who had become president of Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., at a critical juncture in that institution's history and who then had launched that university on a path of upward growth, seemed a natural candidate for the presidency of Howard. His youth, and with it its attendant energy and openness to innovation, was considered an added plus.

But Cheek initially had no interest in becoming president of Howard University. He was content at Shaw, totally caught up in spurring a major expansion of the university. What's more, he relished the calm of the Shaw campus. "Every morning I picked up a paper, *The New York Times*, or something, Howard was on the front page with the students burning the school down," he exclaimed in an exclusive *New Directions* interview. [See the full text of that interview elsewhere in this issue.] "And I said to Scovel Richardson [chairman of the presidential search committee], 'Look man, you know all that you have at Howard is turbulence and what I've got down here is tranquility.'"

Obviously Richardson and others prevailed, because on July 1, 1969 Cheek was in the president's seat at Howard.

At the time, some seemed to regard him as a savior. Others didn't know quite how to regard him. As Cheek remarked in a speech to the Howard community during opening convocation ceremonies in September 1980:

"Neither you nor I, in the summer of 1969, knew exactly what to expect of

Cheek, in fact, had arrived at Howard following the most tumultuous period in its history.

each other. There existed some understandable apprehension, suspicion and uncertainty.

"Many of you — I have learned — were told that my wardrobe consisted only of *dashikis*, that I carried an African walking stick carved from ebony wood in the form of a python.

"I — on the other hand — was told by word of mouth, in letters and in telegrams, that the students at Howard were unreasonable and uncontrollably destructive and that the faculty on the whole was uncooperative, intractable, reactionary, and stubborn.

"We discovered, upon my arrival and during the first subsequent weeks, that these caricatures were false and baseless."

What members of the Howard community and others quickly discovered in Howard's new young president was not so much radicalism (whether symbolized by an "African walking stick carved from ebony wood in the form of a python" or anything else), but pragmatism. At Cheek's first press conference on July 8, 1969, he stated, "We will not promote change for the sake of change, but where change is necessary we will regard it as a necessity. The students' demand for 'rel-

evance' and the faculty's demand for 'excellence' are not contradictory and mutually exclusive. Both with different rhetoric seek the same ends."

Change was needed not only to calm the tense atmosphere on the campus, but because of a relatively new problem of long-range significance. The struggles waged during the civil rights movement had opened the doors of many of the nation's most prestigious predominantly white academic institutions to significant numbers of Black students and faculty.

Ironically, Howard, the spiritual home of many of those who helped push open these doors, found itself in danger of losing some of its most promising students and most gifted faculty members to these same institutions. To prevent such a "brain drain," it became obvious the university would have to institute changes that would make it competitive with well-financed predominantly white academic institutions. At the same time, Howard could not lose its historic role as one of the nation's major instruments for the uplift of Black people. Hence Cheek's campaign to transform Howard into a "university of the first rank," one that would make "being Black synonymous with being excellent," as he fervently expressed it.

### Charting the Course

Even though infused with the brashness of youth, Cheek did not simply step onto the Howard campus and begin precipitously making changes. Changes grew out of an intensive examination and evaluation of almost every aspect of the university's life, carried out by members of the administration, the faculty and the student body.

At the end of that process, Cheek wrote:

"Along the way, we learned a great deal about ourselves. We were disap-



8 pointed by disclosures of our weaknesses; frustrated by a recognition of our limitations.

"But, more importantly, we were sustained by the solidity of our strengths, excited about the possibilities for our future. We took the position that we could overcome our deficiencies and capitalize on our distinctions."

Consider what that meant in just one area, that of health affairs. Observes Russell L. Miller Jr., vice president of health affairs and former dean of the College of Medicine: "There was an opportunity to do some planning and some 'what ifs?' and to look at things very critically. The plan that came out was a faculty plan that was a blueprint for development. There was a period of negotiation between Dr. [Carlton P.] Alexis [then-vice president for health affairs, one of the new vice presidencies created by Cheek] and the faculty committees and a period of negotiation between Dr. Alexis and Dr. Cheek in order to arrive at something that would be mutually acceptable to the faculty and the central administration."

What was "unique and important" about the whole process, Miller says, "was that 95 percent of the things in that plan have been accomplished." For this success, he adds, "those three components should get credit: the faculty, for coming up with something that could be followed and that was reasonable and had some vision; Dr. Alexis, for starting the process, having the faculty appointed, giving it a mandate and then serving as the facilitator, if you will, between the faculty and the administration; and Dr. Cheek for seeing the vision that the faculty had come up with and getting the resources to implement it."

And so, throughout the university, a new shape for Howard began to take form, one that rested firmly on the foun-

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## MAJOR BUILDINGS \*CONSTRUCTED OR ACQUIRED IN THE CHEEK ERA

- \*Animal Resources Facility (Beltsville campus)
  - \*Arnour J. Blackburn University Center
  - \*School of Business Building
  - Allen Mercer Daniel Law Library (west campus)
  - \*Chemical Engineering Building
  - Old School of Divinity Building
  - Holy Cross Hall (west campus)
  - Houston Hall (west campus)
  - The Howard Inn
  - \*Howard Plaza Towers (apartment complex)
  - \*Howard University Cancer Center
  - \*Howard University Hospital
  - \*Howard University Hospital Magnetic Resonance Imaging Building
  - \*Howard University Hospital Parking Garage
  - Howard University Hospital Renal Dialysis Center
  - Benjamin E. Mays Hall (east campus)
  - \*Seeley G. Mudd Building (for preclinical medical education)
  - Notre Dame Hall (west campus)
  - Park Square (apartment building)
  - Physical Facilities Management Building
  - Center for Sickle Cell Disease Building
  - Sutton Plaza (apartment building)
  - \*Undergraduate Library
- 

dation built by Cheek's two illustrious predecessors, James M. Nabrit Jr. and Mordecai Wyatt Johnson. Some highlights:

■ The university was reorganized into six different divisions, each headed by a vice president, each with a clear-cut area of responsibility: academic affairs; business and fiscal affairs; development and university relations; health affairs; student affairs; and administration. (The position of vice president for administration was phased out in January 1988.)

■ New schools were created. Some had their genesis in existing units of the university—the College of Allied Health in some certificate programs in Freedmen's

Hospital (predecessor to Howard University Hospital), the School of Education and School of Human Ecology in departments in the College of Liberal Arts—to take three examples. The School of Architecture and the School of Engineering had been joined but were now given autonomous structures and buildings, to take two other examples.

Other schools were completely new creations, among them, the School of Communications, an addition that seemed particularly close to Cheek's heart. The rationale for the school, as described in a four-year report on the university (1969-73) was this:

"Communications instruments of powerful force, the mass media, have, by design or sloth, grossly misinterpreted the experience of black people and other minority groups in this country.

"The School of Communications, founded in February 1972, is committed to reversing this dysfunctioning of the media. It seeks to carry out this commitment with two interrelated goals: to develop a communications center and communications specialists capable of influencing the direction the media must take to correct their deficiencies, and to bring to this redirection a proper perspective of the black experience."

Similar goals were evident in the complementary development of WHUR-FM, the university's commercial radio station, and WHMM-TV, its television station, the first public television station owned and operated by a predominantly Black institution.

■ Alongside new schools, numerous institutes and centers were launched to focus research on a wide range of problems, particularly as they affect Black people. Hence, such entities as the Institute for Urban Affairs and Research, the Institute for Child Development and Family Life and the Institute for Drug





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10 Abuse and Addiction. Institutes and centers also were established within individual schools and colleges to supplement and reinforce their curricula. Hence, the likes of the Center for Hotel/Motel Education, the Center for Financial Services Education and the Center for Communications Research.

■ To accommodate the academic expansion of the university, additional land was acquired both in the neighborhood surrounding the main campus and elsewhere: 22 acres in northeast Washington for a School of Divinity campus; 22 acres in northwest Washington for a campus for the School of Law; 108 acres in Beltsville, Md., which was deeded to Howard by the federal government, now houses an animal resources facility and a telescope, and in the future may become a Center for Advanced Research in the Life and Physical Sciences. In these acquisitions exist not only the possibility of further expansion of academic programs but also a potential gold mine for future revenue for the university.

■ The demand of students for a larger say in university governance found expression in such forms as the inclusion of students on the Board of Trustees and virtually all university-wide committees that advise the president on matters of policy, as well as similar committees within individual schools and colleges.

■ Meanwhile, meeting other types of student needs found expression in increased outlays for financial aid; expanded counseling and career planning and placement services; the establishment of a Center for Academic Reinforcement to help upgrade the verbal, mathematical and study skills of those whose high school preparation was weak in these areas; the enhancement of athletic activities; the total refurbishing of the stadium; and — after years of plan-

ning in the pre-Cheek years — the addition of a university center to both physically and psychologically unify the Howard community.

■ Another key student demand of the late '60s, that the curriculum be more reflective of the Black experience [today the buzzword is "Afrocentric"], was reflected in such actions as the establishment of an Afro-American Studies department within the College of Liberal Arts; the increase in the number of courses dealing with African American and African subjects [about 140 at last count]; and, more recently, the requirement that all Howard students — regardless of major or school or college — must take a course in Afro-American studies in order to graduate.

(Other markers of the university's Afrocentric outlook might include the development of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center into one of the world's largest repositories of materials relating to Black history and literature and the books published by Howard University Press [79 titles to date], many of them representing important scholarly contributions in the areas of African American and African studies.)

■ The commitment of the university to prepare students for an increasingly complex world—scientifically and technologically — led to the establishment of research programs in such areas as laser chemistry, biotechnology, large space structures, microelectronics, and artificial intelligence; the increasing availability and utilization of computers; and the acquisition of sophisticated (and very expensive) scientific equipment.

■ The commitment of the university to give its students optimal training opportunities in the health sciences and to address and redress any number of health problems, particularly those overrepre-

sented in the Black community, was reflected in the construction and expansion of Howard University Hospital; the research and educational programs of the Howard University Cancer Center (housed in a new state-of-the-art building); the work of the Center for Sickle Cell Disease; and a host of smaller research and outreach programs.

■ Membership was sought and obtained in the Association of Research Libraries. Related to this: recognizing that Founders Library, while an architectural gem, was inadequate to serve the needs of an increasingly complex academic institution, an additional library [the Undergraduate Library] was planned and constructed. Not only did this mean more space for a burgeoning book collection but also easier access to research materials, thanks to a computerized information retrieval system.

■ To better meet the university's future needs, several important construction projects were put on the drawing boards, among them: a comprehensive sciences building, new School of Law building, health sciences library, and new dormitories.

Gradually, in its evolution, Howard found itself moving closer and closer to a new status: that of being a comprehensive research-oriented university.

"In the early '60s there was much discussion of Howard's future role," recalls Winston, who earned his B.A. in history from the university in 1962. "There was talk, for example, that Howard should become an institution focusing primarily on training international students from developing countries because it was already recognized that we had played an unusual role in that area. Then, too, some people who were not associated with Howard argued that the university in its first 100 years had contributed sig-





nificantly to the defeat of statutory segregation but that in the next 100 years it needed to get away from a racially focused mission and 'join the mainstream.'

"In all of that discussion there was no mention of Howard as a major research university as the next logical step in its evolution and I think it was Dr. Cheek's contribution to see that as a clear possibility, that Howard as a research-oriented university would have an impact on society that would be even greater than Howard had had in its earlier periods."

As for the motivation that led him to see this "clear possibility," Cheek explains: "It was my view that this country should have at least one [Black] university . . . that was a university in the true sense of the word, one that was a first-rate comprehensive research-oriented university, not just an institution with the name 'university.' And I saw here all of the potential for Howard becoming that and it was my view that if this were going to be simply an overgrown liberal arts college with a collection of professional schools, there wasn't very much future for it, that it was not going to have very much impact on the country or the world . . ."

He also explains: "I took the position that while this is a traditionally Black or predominantly Black institution we can't adequately or truly assess Howard's place in American higher education in terms of its resources by comparing it with other historically Black colleges and universities. . . . We have to be looked at in relation to other comparable research-oriented universities."

Specifically, he compared Howard to 11 predominantly white private universities similar to Howard in size, curriculum and scope. The result of the comparison, a study that Cheek called "The Lingering Legacy of Neglect and Deprivation," showed that Howard ranked last in every



12 single category [e.g. faculty compensation, federal government grants and contracts, total endowment] except the size of its student population.

That study, Cheek says, "became my bible. I carried it everywhere I went — to the executive branch of the federal government, to the Congress, to foundations and corporations." (See exclusive interview elsewhere in this issue.)

Again and again, Cheek pointed to the import of that study as he sought to build a strong case for increased levels of support for Howard. And build one he did.

### Builder and Fund-raiser

When one looks at the Howard of today there are, indeed, few who would deny that the shadow of James E. Cheek looms large. Ask a cross section of members of the Howard community to assess Cheek's tenure and you get such (abbreviated) responses as these:

From John Jacob, president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League, who holds a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in social work from the university and has been a Howard trustee since 1971: "When one looks at the last 20 years of growth and development of Howard under the leadership of Jim Cheek one can only be astounded by the massiveness of that growth and development."

From Taft H. Broome Jr., associate professor of civil engineering, who serves as chairman of the University Senate: "James Cheek has definitely been the greatest builder and fund-raiser that the university has ever had and James Cheek may be considered one of the greatest builders and fund-raisers of any institution in the country."

From Robert Turner, vice president of the Howard University Student Associa-





tion (HUSA) during the past academic year, who graduated last May with a degree in marketing from the School of Business, one of the new schools created by Cheek: "The university is like a Fortune 500 company and in this day and age if you're not growing and expanding, then you're going to die or be taken over. So in this regard Dr. Cheek used an expansion strategy for the university in all areas and that has insured its success."

Turner's financial imagery reflects his training at Howard's business school, of course. But it is also appropriate. As Jacob points out, with a budget of close to a half billion dollars, some 12,000 students, some 8,000 employees and an array of non-academic involvements, Howard has become "a massive multi-faceted business operation."

Consider the whopping 869.8 percent increase in the university's total operating budget under Cheek's leadership and what it signifies. "I think that increase is a tribute to Dr. Cheek's vision for the university. He had one large vision for the university and I would like to think a part of that was a financial vision. That is, that in order to carry out an expansion in academic programs, we needed to infuse the university with a large measure of financial support from various sectors — federal support, alumni support, corporate support," says Melvin W. Jones, the university's vice president for business and fiscal affairs.

The latter is especially noteworthy. Explains Roger D. Estep, the university's vice president for development and university relations: "Under Dr. Cheek — for the first time — the university set about waging an aggressive campaign to seek support for the university's programs from the private sector. As of the end of April, that campaign has raised \$98.7 million."



Among major gifts received by the university in recent years have been \$4.7 million from the estate of publisher/physician/business executive C.B. Powell and his wife, Lena Powell; \$2 million from publishing magnate Walter H. Annenberg; \$1 million from financier Reginald Lewis; and \$325,000 from Bill and Camille Cosby. The university also has received funds from scores of less well-known individuals, as well as from a wide variety of major corporations, corporate foundations and private foundations, among them: E.I. du Pont de Nemours, Exxon, Gannett and General Motors; the Ford, General Electric, Robert Wood Johnson, Mellon and Rockefeller foundations; the Lilly Endowment; and the Alexander and Margaret Stewart Trust.

Observes R. Chester Redhead Sr., a New York City dentist who serves as president of the Howard University Alumni Association, "I would see tapping the private sector as Dr. Cheek's major contribution."

The outreach to the private sector is important, Estep believes, because, with a strong endowment, Howard's future development will be less vulnerable to changes in the composition and interests of Congress [which since 1928 has authorized regular annual appropriations for the university.] "Private sector contributions also assure the federal government that others are concerned about Howard's welfare," he says. "So they have a symbiotic effect. Money gets money."

Consider this fact: total federal appropriations to the university increased 507.3 percent in the Cheek years.

To many, this increase is a testament to Cheek's political savvy — savvy with an intriguing twist: Cheek, a prominent Republican, was able to secure an unprecedented level of financial support for

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## MAJOR RENOVATIONS IN THE CHEEK ERA

Russell A. Dixon Building (College of Dentistry)  
William Henry Greene Memorial Stadium  
Laser Chemistry Laboratory  
Benjamin E. Mays Hall (School of Divinity, east campus)  
C.B. Powell Building (School of Communications)  
WHMM-TV Building  
WHUR-FM Building

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Howard from a Congress dominated by Democrats.

Says Alexis, who as interim president now sits in Cheek's seat: "In the Reagan years, a period of great cutbacks in domestic programs, Howard did well, but a lot of Howard's 'doing well,' as Dr. Estep can show you from the data, was the result of add-ons that came out of Democratic-controlled House committees and in the last few years, Democratic-controlled Senate committees. So Dr. Cheek must have been very crafty and artful to have been able to work both sides of the aisle to the institution's benefit. I don't think that's well appreciated."

What is appreciated, of course, has been the expansion of the university's financial base. Less obvious has been another financial legacy: the university is now deficit-free (following a period not long ago when that was not the case.) As Jones observes, "When you have a president who's leaving an institution in financially good shape, that's a credit to that president's vision."

### Vision and Performance

"Vision" and "visionary" are words that crop up often in assessments of the

Cheek years. Consider what Alexis has to say:

"A reporter from *Black Issues in Higher Education* [a national educational news magazine] said to me the other day, 'Dr. Cheek has been described as a visionary and do you agree?' I said, 'I agree, but that would be an understatement.' She, of course, was stunned. She said, 'Understatement to be a visionary?' I hope she understood my explanation for why I said that. And that is that Dr. Cheek dreams his dreams — which is the visionary piece — but then he brought them into reality. So to describe him as a 'visionary' is an enormous understatement and underdescribes what he has meant to this institution, what he has meant to Blacks in higher education, what he has meant to Black America and what he has meant to Black people wherever they are.

"He has created educational opportunities in professional fields which before his arrival on the Howard scene were only windows for Black students [something to look out on, not fully participate in.] You see vision *and* performance — not just vision — and I think that's the hallmark of what he has meant."

Similarly, Carl E. Anderson, the university's vice president for student affairs, says: "I think Dr. Cheek found what was probably a very traditional assortment of academic offerings and he asked himself the question, 'What is it that we are not doing that we need to be doing in order that our students are better equipped to deal with problems that they will find in society?' And so he set about bringing about changes that would provide the answers to that question."

Michael Winston adds another layer of interpretation to the underlying significance of Cheek's 20-year leadership of the university. He speaks not of vision, but of "conception," specifically of what



he calls "Dr. Cheek's conception of where Howard University belongs in the constellation of higher education institutions in the country." He elaborates:

"A dominant view earlier was that Howard University was the capstone of Negro education or the flagship Black institution of higher education. What Dr. Cheek projected was an institution that would be among the top research-oriented universities in the United States that was also a Black institution. And that's a very different conception because it means that Howard would have to have comparable programs and comparable resources to achieve a major research role and have an impact on public policy and the graduate and professional arena in a way that previously had not been possible."

Looking back, Winston says, "In the late '60s there was a great deal of anguished debate about whether Howard had a future, whether it was a relic of the past that had really run its course. Now I don't hear any such talk. There is debate about what the emphases should be — where the balance should be between our teaching and research missions, for instance. But I don't sense any loss of nerve about the future of the university and *that* is a tribute to Dr. Cheek."

### Problems and Protest

The tributes could go on and on, as indeed they should, as befitting Cheek's reputation as energizer, innovator and, yes, "visionary." One thing he was not, though, was a miracle worker. Any honest assessment of the Cheek years also must take note of some of the problems at Howard during his tenure. To name a few of them:

- While enrollment in some schools is up, enrollment in others is down.
- The number of research awards ob-

## In responding to the protest, Howard's administrators reiterated their commitment to address student concerns . . .

tained by faculty members is less than expected, given the size of the faculty and the university's overall research aspirations.

- Managing the heavy volume of documents and correspondence created by a student body of more than 12,000 and a staff of some 8,000 has become a difficult and often frustrating task.

- The university's financial resources, while stronger in the Cheek years than ever before in Howard's history, are still below that of comparative major comprehensive universities. Among the consequences of this: faculty and staff pay in recent years has not kept pace with that of other institutions of Howard's size and complexity, and funding for building maintenance and renovation and initiating capital expansion on a regular schedule has been inadequate.

In fact, problems caused by the condition of student housing and the slow, slow processing of financial aid were among the grievances aired in the dramatic student upheaval that rocked the campus in early March.

As anyone who reads newspapers or watches television knows, that upheaval began as a protest against the election of

Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater to Howard's Board of Trustees.

In responding to the protest, Howard's administrators reiterated their commitment to address student concerns about housing, financial aid and other campus-based issues.

Some were surprised by the public admission of Cheek and other top university officials that problems did, indeed, exist at Howard. But those who know Cheek well weren't surprised. "Well, if we are at fault, we are," says Carl Anderson. "Again, that's the way I have always found Dr. Cheek to be. I've never found him interested in sugarcoating a problem or an issue. If you read some of his speeches, you'll see where he calls it like it is."

As for why the processing of financial aid and the maintenance of student housing have become such problems, Anderson says: "When it comes to the matter of financial aid, we have acknowledged that we got caught behind the curve, if you will, because of failure to move to computerize that operation as rapidly as we now realize we should have. That mistake is being rectified."

"With respect to the matter of housing, that falls in the category of deferred maintenance, which is one that envelops practically every campus in the country. Schools need an enormous amount of money to correct these deficiencies."

Things should look up in this regard with the Board of Trustees' decision to allocate \$61 million for improvements in existing dormitories (repairs already have begun); the opening this year of the 797-unit Howard Plaza Towers apartment complex; and plans being made for the construction of two additional dormitories.



President Cheek (fourth from left) with members of his first administrative team (left to right): James B. Clarke, treasurer of the university; G. Frederick Stanton, secretary of the university; Carlton P. Alexis, vice president for health affairs; Carl E. Anderson, vice president for student affairs; Theophilus McKinney, vice president for academic affairs; Owen D. Nichols, executive assistant to President Cheek (later to become vice president for administration and secretary of the university).

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### The Longevity Factor

During his 20-year tenure as president of Howard University, Cheek certainly was not immune from criticism. The fact is that he is not the first Howard University president to have his share of critics as well as his share of admirers. Luckily, he seems to have a thick skin. As he puts it, "I'm not interested in whether I'm 'popular' or whether I'm high in the polls or low in the polls. That's irrelevant to me. Those things are ephemeral, transitory. The easiest thing to do is to cater to what the current fad is or what a transitory wish may be when it comes to students."

The fact is, too, that part of the territory of being a university president in this nation, if not in the world, is being

subjected to stress, condemnation and, at times, abuse. Perhaps that is one reason few hold the job for long.

If the first remarkable thing about the Cheek presidency is its record of achievement, the second may well be its longevity. Cheek's tenure at Howard was four times the tenure of the average college president. (At Howard, only Mordecai Wyatt Johnson served longer, 34 years.)

Asked to explain this longevity, John Jacob says this: "I think, first and foremost, Jim came to Howard at a very early age. He came to Howard when he was 36 years old and so he had the advantage of growing with the student body.

"But secondly, I think it is fair to say that he was extraordinary visionary and

... with a student.







... on the Larry King Show.

because he had such a great vision and because Howard has such a rich history and tradition I think he had a love affair that just sustained him through 20 years of service."

Few of those close to Cheek were surprised by his decision to retire. As Alexis says, "He has labored in the vineyard for a terribly long time and he says he's weary. Is it any wonder?"

Indeed, Cheek had been under serious consideration to become U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon but asked that his name be withheld from consideration for that or any other top government post — for the time being — so that he could have a period of much-needed rest.

His immediate plans, he says, are to organize his papers for transference to Howard's Moorland-Springarn Research Center and to work on his memoirs.

And after that? It may well be that the man whose leadership transformed Howard University will take on another public role. "I'm certain that we've not heard the last of James Cheek as it applies to Blacks in America and Blacks wherever they are," Alexis says. "I don't think the final chapter has been written."

Meanwhile, the Board of Trustees has begun the process of selecting a new president for Howard University. Jacob describes that process this way:

"A search committee has been established, chaired by Dr. James Tucker, a member of the Board of Trustees. The committee consists of chairs of all of the board's standing committees, as well as the undergraduate trustee and the faculty trustee from the graduate and professional schools. That committee has developed a plan of action and presented it to the full board for approval and now has begun conducting a nationwide search to identify the best person available to come in and succeed Dr. Cheek."

## MAJOR RESEARCH CENTERS/INSTITUTES ESTABLISHED IN THE CHEEK ERA

- Center for Family Planning
- Center for Sickle Cell Disease
- Center for the Study of Handicapped Children and Youth
- Howard University Cancer Center
- Institute for Child Development and Family Life
- Institute for Drug Abuse and Addiction
- Institute for Urban Affairs and Research
- Materials Science Research Center of Excellence
- Moorland-Springarn Research Center (originating in the Moorland Collection donated to the university in 1914)
- [Established and later disbanded: Institute for the Arts and Humanities; Institute for the Study of Educational Policy]

## THREE OTHER KEY ADDITIONS

- Howard University Press
- WHMM-TV (Channel 32) public television station
- WHJR-FM (96.3) commercial radio station

As for the timetable, Jacob says, "We certainly hope to have a new president in place by the 1990-91 academic year."

When you ask a cross section of members of the Howard community what type of person should follow in Cheek's footsteps, you get such varied replies as these: someone who can combine "knowledge of academics with an understanding of how to run a multifaceted massive business operation;" someone who is a "great scholar who can surround himself with great developers and great fund-raisers;" someone who is "student-oriented;" someone who is "committed to the idea of Howard as a major re-

search-oriented university;" someone who is "as visionary in his outlook for Howard as Dr. Cheek has been."

What it all adds up to is that the trustees have a tough job ahead of them. Howard's strength and stature today, as well as its popularity (applications are way up), have made the presidency of Howard University a coveted post. That this is so is perhaps the ultimate tribute to James E. Cheek.

Many would agree with Carlton Alexis, the man who now (temporarily at least) holds Cheek's job when he says: "Whoever follows Dr. Cheek has a superb base to build upon, and I hope that that person by virtue of being a new person will not discard or disregard all the good that still exists in this institution."

"The 21st century will bring new challenges, new opportunities, new difficulties, new protests and I wish for whoever follows Dr. Cheek good health and good vision and a good supporting staff."

And many would agree with John Jacob, who will be the man to announce Howard's next president, when he says this:

"Howard is a living being. Dr. Cheek has written some significant pages in the Howard history, has positioned Howard in a very positive, aggressive position to move into the 21st century. He has left a legacy and an institution that his successor will be able to take further and beyond." □