



NATIONAL MUSEUM
of AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORY & CULTURE

★ Smithsonian



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A LOOK INSIDE HBCU MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, AND ARCHIVES



The Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) welcomed presidents and cultural leaders from ten Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to a landmark HBCU Leadership Summit, December 2018.

The first of its kind for the Smithsonian Institution, the Summit brought together top administrators who wield considerable decision-making and financial power within their institutions. This select group was called upon to:

- Explore issues facing Historically Black Colleges and Universities and their affiliated cultural institutions
- Characterize strategic paths forward for these centers
- Identify methods to strengthen long-term sustainability of these centers

This report provides a summary of the Summit, which was designed to identify action items for sustaining HBCU museums, archives, and libraries. With the mission of each school in mind, participants uncovered ways to support each other as administrators and academic leaders.



A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE HBCU CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Strategic conversations like the Summit are revealing new approaches to furnishing support. The Summit concluded with an understanding of the risks of not addressing the needs of its HBCU cultural institutions.

The creation of opportunities that enhance the long-term sustainability of HBCU institutions is an imperative.

- Once a cultural institution has its core operations in place it can confidently move forward with programs and initiatives.
- To serve constituents well and make full use of their rich collections, cultural institutions must be adequately staffed.

- Keeping staff current in digital preservation and other skills boosts the institution's efficacy.
- Investment in the HBCU cultural sector conveys trust and value.

Appreciating that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, the spirit of the Summit conveners and participants speaks to the possibility of a collaboration that can address the short- and long-term needs of HBCUs' cultural institutions. The resolve to create an entity to drive communication and agenda is in place.



Charles White, *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*, 1943, Hampton University



University Museum Gallery, Sculptures from the students of Carroll Harris Simms, 1950s to 1980s, Texas Southern University



FULFILLING A PROMISE

In its founding legislation, the National Museum of African American History and Culture committed to work with HBCUs by leveraging the museum's national leadership role to create long-term benefits for HBCU museums, libraries, and archives.

HBCUs serve as beacons for leadership and scholarship in a wide range of academic and artistic disciplines and continue in their lesser-appreciated roles as repositories of history, fine art, archived materials, and material culture. At the time of this writing there are 101 HBCUs in the United States; over 60% of those institutions formally house a cultural heritage site, museum, African American archive, and/or art gallery. These campus cultural institutions contain a wealth

of knowledge and information relevant to the fabric of the founding of our nation.

From 2014–2016, OSP collaborated with a select group of HBCUs on pilot partnerships, providing the schools with archival aides and interns. In 2015, OSP hosted a Listening Session with museum directors about the internship experiences. That conversation exposed a disconnect: Directors of cultural institutions have not had the ear of their college presidents and provosts, and the health of the libraries, museums, and archives has suffered. Collections are stagnating, museums are understaffed and underfunded, archives are in dire need of digitization, and students and scholars are underutilizing these assets.

SUMMIT THEMES

POWER OF COLLABORATION

Working together, HBCUs' peer networking and collective learning can strengthen individual institutions. There is a desire to formalize the HBCU cultural-sector network. Further exploration of a collaborative initiative will provide opportunities for institutions to engage, understanding the varying circumstances of each HBCU.

IMPROVED ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

Advocacy is a way to articulate value, to better communicate needs as connected to the university's mission and goals, and to inform about impact on the broader community.

- A robust "business case" for cultural organizations, advocating for their value 1) within the larger organization; 2) for external funding from a variety of sources; and 3) to the public
- A concise case statement for senior administrators of cultural institutions to use with their president's cabinet, across the university, and with potential funders and partners
- A shared lexicon between cultural institutions and university administrative offices
- A raised, worldwide profile of HBCUs and their cultural institutions

TRAINING AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

- Opportunities for training around three key areas of need: Collections care, preservation, and conservation
- Skill-building to support fundraising goals: Proposal writing, donor cultivation, and research

JOB CREATION: INTERNSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Emerging museum professionals need leading-edge training and institutional support:

- Formal training and supervision for robust paid-internship experiences
- Supplemental career development offerings for participating interns and fellows
- Long-term appointments structured around identified needs
- A track leading toward job creation, encumbering salary into the institutional budget
- Competitive salaries

EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS

Showcasing HBCUs' collections and archives could codify a substantial, new, accessible body of knowledge. A joint endeavor could lead to joint-funding opportunities. Shared project ideas include:

- Digital access to HBCU collections
- Traveling exhibition about HBCUs
- Joint publication(s)

“We have the ability to tackle
whole-systems problems
with whole-systems solutions.”

—DR. JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE
DIRECTOR EMERITUS, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART
AND NMAAHC SCHOLARLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



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