ABSTRACT

Career Paths to the Presidency of Private Black Colleges in Texas, as Perceived by Present and Past Occupants of the Office

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The state of Texas has five historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) that remain operational. Such schools have numerous factors in common that make them unique among institutions of higher learning and also of special interest to educators and social scientists. This study focused on the presidents who are currently leading or have recently led the five Texas HBCUs. Given the extraordinary challenges posed by these institutions to the presidents, the researcher formed the hypothesis that their career paths would reflect an out-of-the-ordinary preparation in several ways.

Data were primarily collected through in-depth interviews with seven participants (five current presidents and two immediate past presidents). The researcher approached all participants with a questionnaire that raised such topics as prior education and professional experience, motives involved in seeking the HBCU presidency, and expectations brought to the position (particularly in regard to religion and race as qualifications).

The findings revealed that HBCU presidents did certainly tend to follow presidents of other small private religious institutions in such factors as having more
professional experience outside of the academy. The seven participants also differed from the presidents of similar but non-black schools, however, especially in matters related to race and religion.
Career Paths to the Presidency of Private Black Colleges in Texas, as Perceived by Present and Past Occupants of the Office

by

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A Dissertation

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Accepted by the Graduate School December 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ for being my co-pilot on this journey to my terminal degree.

I would like to thank my wife of 15 years, Patricia Record Henry, for her unwavering love, being by my side every step of the way, and being there for our son on the summers when requirements of the doctoral program took me away from them.

I would like to thank Dr. Douglas Rogers for serving as my dissertation chairman and for his expertise in guiding me through the process of writing my dissertation. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee for serving.

I would like to thank the members of cohort 11 and 16, but especially Lashondia. I will forever cherish the trip to Washington and Europe.

I would like to send out a very special thanks to Dr. Fred Tarpley and Olga Love for their continued support and encouragement. A very heartfelt, thank you to Dr. John Harris; he took my document and made it a cut above. And last, thank you to Kathy Wheeler for making my final document a completed dissertation.
DEDICATION

To Daddy

Charles Edward Henry
The man I have looked up to all my life
A father like no other
I love you
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Individuals who seek the presidency of private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) tend to be academic leaders with qualifications and skills that are quite different from those needed at other institutions. Throughout the decades of the middle and latter 20th century, their accomplishments as scholars have mattered far less than their ability to address their institutions’ financial survival and general morale (Smith, 1969). The job of president of a Black college remains as uniquely demanding today. Among other roles, the president must be administrator, teacher, public relations agent, fundraiser, motivator, parental surrogate, civil rights leader, and confessor (“Black college presidents,” p. 126). Not surprisingly, the traditional view of Black college presidents has emphasized their domineering control over events on campus and their near-identity with the institution’s image off campus (Holman, 1994). In addition to academic credentials, the selection of a Black president has usually involved consideration of family name, community status, and demonstrated ability to control the Black community (Anderson, 1988). In private Black colleges with a church affiliation, the candidate’s denominational leadership has sometimes outweighed his or her academic credentials; a significant minority of presidents has arrived “directly from religious positions” (Carbone, 1981, p. 28). Because of these unique qualities, the career path to the position of president of a private HBCU may often be different from the path that leads to the highest administrative position at state-funded educational institutions or, indeed, other private colleges.
Statement of the Problem

While other intensive studies reveal the profiles of college presidents in general, research pertinent to the career path to the presidency of private HBCUs is very limited. Relevant works invariably require some degree of interpretation to suggest a typical progression to the office. Significant studies have been completed on such aspects of the college presidency as how to select presidents (McLaughlin, 1996) and how to evaluate them (Birnbaum, 1992). A careful analysis of these studies can cumulatively create a plausible career path for college presidents as a whole; such a path, however, might be atypical for HBCU presidents, given their unique focus on both a specific race and a certain religious denomination. This study examined the pathways followed by the current presidents and two of the immediate past presidents of the five private four-year HBCUs in Texas.

Research Questions

The following two questions will guide the study. First, what do the five current presidents and two of the immediate past presidents of the five private four-year HBCUs in the state of Texas perceive to be their career paths to the campus’ highest office? A second question logically arises from a refinement of the first, given the distinctive nature of the HBCU: What influence upon their professional ambitions do the presidents and two immediate past presidents of the five Texas HBCU’s attribute to their institutions’ affiliation with Christian Protestantism and service of the African American community?

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the career paths of individuals who are serving or who have served as president of one of the five private four-year HBCUs in the state of Texas.
Academic preparation and professional experience prior to presidential appointment did not receive exclusive attention; all available profiles indicated that HBCU presidents required credentials in addition to these. Diverse qualifications, experiences, and attitudes were therefore also considered in the attempt to identify patterns or pathways among the presidential appointees. Open-ended questions provided the basis for a qualitative study of the current presidents and selected immediate past presidents of private HBCU’s in Texas.

The following objectives were pursued in this study: (Objective 1 related to the first research question stated in the previous section, and Objective 2 to the third: Objective 2 is served by both research questions.)

1. To determine if there are patterns in the academic preparation and experience prior to the presidential appointment as perceived and reported by the participants.

2. To determine if there are patterns in the career path to the presidency as perceived and reported by the participants.

3. To determine if there are patterns of non-academic experience—including activity in business, religious ministries, politics, and other such endeavors—that may have influenced the attainment of the position of president as perceived and reported by the participants.

The findings of this study are presented in a narrative based on the analysis of the data, documents, and interviews provided by the participants.

**Significance of the Study**

This study may be helpful to individuals intentionally preparing themselves for presidential positions, especially for the presidency of private HBCUs in Texas. The
study could also inform programs that prepare minority candidates for presidential positions by providing essential data and research. Additionally, this study could be of interest to social scientists researching racially related aspects of higher education.

Methodology

A review of existing research literature orients the study: that this literature was often sparse in critical areas assisted the researcher in giving a proper focus to research techniques. The primary methodology for studying the career pathway to the presidency of private four-year HBCUs in Texas was qualitative. Data-gathering was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of gathering basic demographic and personal information through a questionnaire and a current curriculum vitae submitted by each participant. The second phase of data-gathering was accomplished through personal or telephone interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis was conducted in multiple phases. Data gathered from the questionnaire and curriculum vitae were analyzed and summarized in preparation for the interviews. The interview transcriptions were analyzed according to the protocol described in Chapter 3. The findings were reported in a detailed, case-by-case manner in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 consists of a) a generalized discussion of the findings on each major question topic, b) a summary of the findings, c) a conclusion placing the findings within the context of previous research, and d) recommendations for future research.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was subject to the following limitations:

1. The study focused exclusively on the five current presidents and two of the
immediate past presidents of the private four-year HBCUs in the state of Texas; therefore, the reader was cautious about generalizing the findings of this study beyond the population studied (though it was the study’s intent that its conclusions should suggest directions for future research into the HBCU presidency).

2. Data were gathered from a single questionnaire, a single *vita*, and a single interview with each participant. Additional data sources (historical documents and/or other individuals) may provide different perspectives on the elements studied.

3. The researcher’s ethnicity and experiences were critical to the interpretation of data supplied by the participants. The researcher is a native Texan, African-American male with 14 years of experience in recruitment and student affairs at two different HBCUs in Texas.

*Definitions of Key Terms*

The following terms and definitions are used in this study:

1. *Presidential Career Path* – The academic preparation and prior experience of applicants who are appointed to the position of president of a college or university (Holman, 1994).

2. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)* – Two-year or four-year colleges or universities founded specifically for the higher education of Black Americans before the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Harris, 1990-1991).

3. *Personal Information* – Information obtained from college presidents about age, gender, race, religious preference, marital status, number of marriages, spouse’s occupation, number of children, ages of children, political affiliation, church affiliation,
father’s education, mother’s education, and number of siblings (Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler, 1988).

4. President – Any individual responsible for leading a single or multi-campus system with degree-granting authority in postsecondary education (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988).

5. Leadership – “The process of influencing the activities of an individual group effort toward goal achievement in a given situation” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982, p. 83).

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature related to the proposed study.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study is to document and describe the pathways of five individuals who currently serve as president and of two individuals who are immediate past presidents of private four-year HBCUs in Texas. A search of education databases using the topics of “college president” and “career path” as the major descriptors results in the identification of a very limited body of literature and research on the topic.

Historical Study of Career Paths

Both the office and the title of college president have witnessed a complex historical development. The role of the president involves the maintenance of multiple academic forces, methods, and conditions often handed down deliberately—and even ostentatiously—from the past. The term *president* (“one who presides over,” lit. “sitting in authority”) evolved in America as the most common title for the head of a college or university (Thwing, 1926).

Historically, the American college presidency may be traced to the election of Henry Dunster as the chief officer of Harvard College in 1640 (Prator, 1963). He was given the title of *president*, which has continued at Harvard and has become the usual title for the chief executive of American institutions of higher education. The title of *president* became the most popular choice in American usage after Dunster assumed his Harvard office, but it is not uniformly employed. In the United States, leaders of colleges
whose duties clearly render them equivalent to college presidents have been called rectors, chancellors, and provosts.

Although these positions were of vital historical importance, limited research has been conducted on the career pathways of early presidents. No such research connects the office’s history with contemporary presidential career paths or with private four-year HBCU’s in Texas: current research seems quite uninterested in the evolution of terms as an indicator of the pathway’s development. A perusal of the bibliography compiled by Eells & Hollis (1978) for the first half of the 20th century will indicate how seldom the presidential career path was researched. Four of the articles are tangentially pertinent to this study (all of them listed in the section on “Selection and Qualification”). The subject of these articles more or less corresponds to what is now generally styled the presidential career path. Only the most recent article, “Criteria Helpful in Selecting a President for a Church-Related College” (Coffey, 1953) offers straightforward recommendations.

Coffey urges that the following qualifications be considered by selection committees:

age; state of health; degree of support from family; educational level; academic degrees; professional honors; experience as a speaker, teacher, minister, and administrator; church affiliation; ability to make contacts; success at raising funds; and qualifications permitting the candidate to see issues from various perspectives. (p. 354)

Although the importance of the college presidency throughout American educational history is beyond dispute, the almost invisible placement of the office’s administrative preparation in Coffey’s long list suggests how little attention this crucial element has received for much of that history.

A close look at earlier research on the college presidency reveals an acknowledgement of the importance of training and preparation—but also testifies to the
virtual invisibility of administrative training in yesteryear’s regimen. In “The Need of Training for the College Presidency,” the author, who was president of the University of Washington and former president of the University of Wyoming, states, “When one thinks of all the difficulties of a college executive, it is a matter of surprise that no training or advice for so important a work has yet been offered” (Graves, 1902, p. 680). Graves’ protest, however, seems as centered around affective elements of the office as are the views of those he chides. The two reasons he cites for the lack of training are “conventional modesty, which tends to deter a young man from publicly extolling himself for the necessary training to become a college president,” and “the opinion of many that college administration cannot be taught, because it is so far from being an exact science” (p. 681). In other words, Graves would have prospective presidents speak up on their own behalf, and also speak out against the tendency to revere their talent as a mystery.

Current literature on the historical struggle of minority academics offers many studies about professional women. For instance, Shavlik and Touchton (1988) trace the historical emergence of female leaders in academe. In 1902, however, this was a rare topic of discussion. Lavinia Hart’s (1902) article in one of that year’s issues of *Cosmopolitan*, “Women as College Presidents,” offered portraits of four women presidents, their institutions being Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Mt. Holyoke, and Wellesley. Hart posed the question, “First what does the university require of its president? And second are women as well equipped with these qualifications as men?” (Hart, 1902, p. 72). The article considered several objections to women in the position of president, especially maternity. It concluded that “women have many of the qualifications needed
for a successful president” (Hart, 1902, p. 79). Hart’s insistence that college presidents
need not be white males is not irrelevant to the present study, of course. Yet her
emphasis on the probability that women presidents may be equally qualified with males
rather than on their having unique qualifications underscores how far the scholars of her
day were from recognizing the special needs of minority students and the special abilities
of minority administrators. Furthermore, her focus remains on the affective—what might
be called presidential gravitas—rather than on objective administrative training (Hart,
1902).

An article related to career pathways for college presidents was written for the
journal College Forum in 1938 by the president of Wesleyan University, Connecticut. In
“The College President,” James McConaughy (1938) discussed the preparation, selection,
and characteristics of college presidents who had been ministers, professors of education,
public leaders, deans, and professors. Once again, the focus was on the aspect and trust
inspired in the general public by various niches of the professional world rather than on a
specific course of preparation.

Presidential Career Paths

McConaughy’s (1938) discussion verged on tracing a career path to a particular
kind of college presidency, yet there was patent subjectivity in some of his categories
(e.g., “most picturesque college presidents” [p. 75]) which characterizes works of the
time. The contemporary study of career path, when compared to earlier writing, clearly
places a relative stress on quantification (none of the works cited in the previous section
offers a table or a graph). Although the career history of each college and university
president is unique, researchers in recent decades are confident that general tendencies in
statistical analysis tell a meaningful story. Patterns are often sought in the kinds of positions held prior to the presidency, the starting point of the career path, the prominence of college teaching and administrative experience, the importance of terminal degrees, and the presence of any factors overriding conventional qualifications (which may be abundant in the case of private colleges, especially church-sponsored schools; cf. Carbone, 1981).

An analysis of positions held prior to the appointment as president was made by Ross and Green (2000). These researchers discovered that 25% of all presidents had served in the position of president immediately before assuming the current position of chief executive officer, while only 8% had held a position outside higher education before assuming the position of president.

Ross and Green (2000) also analyzed positions held within higher education immediately prior to the presidency, isolating titles such as senior executive (22.8%), chief academic officer (20%), dean (11.7%), executive/administrative officer (7.6%), and chair/faculty (4.8%) (p. 33). Outside of higher education, the immediate prior positions of presidents included religious ministry or counseling (4.8%), private business (3.2%), K-12 administration (2.3%), local and federal government service (2%), military service (.8%), and a miscellany of others (.9%).

The Ross and Green study was the fourth report in a series inaugurated by the American Council on Education’s Center for Leadership Development: analyses were based on 2,380 responses to over 3,100 questionnaires, which were mailed to “all presidents of regionally accredited, degree-granting, U.S. higher education institutions” (p. 4). The report undertakes little by way of detailed conclusion. Its single chapter on
presidential career paths consists mostly of statistical data. A more ample and fluid view of the presidential pathway is offered by Kauffman (1974), although his research is less current. “College teaching experience is the essential milestone in the pathway to the presidency,” (p. 15) concludes Kauffman’s study of a limited presidential sample. This conclusion, while based on older data, conforms to the later analysis of Ross and Green (2000). In doctorate-granting institutions, almost 43% of presidents had spent 21 or more years as full-time faculty members; and although this figure rapidly decreases as it was traced through institutions of ever more basic academic functions, even two-year colleges in the Ross and Green study employed presidents with at least six years of full-time faculty experience about 45% of the time.

Kauffman’s study (1974) notes further, however, that few individuals moved directly from a faculty appointment to the president’s office, and these few were usually associated with smaller colleges. More often, teachers received the presidential appointment after substantial previous administrative experience as department chairpersons and deans. Again, the Ross and Green report (2000) reinforces Kauffman’s (1974) findings with more contemporary evidence. Their survey reveals that “even presidents of specialized private institutions moved directly from classroom to presidency a mere 10% of the time—the highest figure of all types of institutions studied” (Ross & Green, 2000, p. 33).

Most presidents will also possess a terminal degree. “The terminal degree is crucial in the career paths of college administrators,” according to the research of Moore (1988, p. 161). Moore observed that 50% of the presidents studied held a doctoral degree and that the Ph.D. degree was the degree held most frequently by college presidents. He
also considered the assumption that the pathway to the highest position on a college
campus involved a series of tasks with increasing responsibility in governance and
management over time, such as service as assistant dean, then associate dean, and then
dean. While this assumption seemed justified generally, Moore concluded that the earned
doctoral degree was yet more crucial in the majority of appointments to the presidency.

A study published by the American Council on Education several years before
Moore’s report confirms this conclusion from the other direction (Carbone, 1981).
Robert Carbone’s research, which surveyed 1,406 former college and university
presidents, suggested to him that “certain factors in selection override the importance of a
Ph.D. or any other doctoral degree. One factor is the prior experience of the candidate”
(p. 7). Carbone expressed surprise that so large a number of presidents came from
outside academic settings instead of moving up the academic ladder. Inasmuch as
Carbone’s subjects had necessarily completed their presidential careers before the study’s
research was undertaken, however, the author’s surprise may well have arisen when his
sense of trend was contradicted by the experience of earlier decades—which need be no
contradiction at all. In fact, Carbone concluded that his newly discovered “trend” (the
“rise” in presidents from non-academic backgrounds) “undoubtedly reflects the large
number of church-related colleges and universities in the private sector” (p. 8). In the
years following this study, the cost of a college education would increase dramatically
across the board, but especially at those very institutions where Carbone found so many
presidents who had “climbed over the ivy walls” (p. 7). Many small religious colleges
would close their doors, while public institutions would proportionally extend their reach.
The trend would prove to lead precisely toward presidents trained within acade...
groomed within campus administrations; for as Ross and Green (2000) again reveal, public baccalaureate institutions, as of 1998, employed not a single president with training as a religious professional, while over 27% of private baccalaureate schools had such presidents (p. 22). For institutions awarding the Master’s degree, the gap was even wider: “3.6 percent of presidents in public schools with religious-professional training compared to 39.6 percent of presidents in private schools” (p. 21).

The hardships endured by private colleges in recent years, and especially church-sponsored schools, may partially explain why current literature dedicated to their presidents is quite limited—and it should be stressed that HBCU presidents are a subset of this group. Yet the expectations of a private church-sponsored college’s president, which Carbone (1981) rather excitedly noted as calling for out-of-the-mainstream preparation, have quite possibly grown more demanding than ever. The statistical abundance of the Ross and Green (2000) study, unfortunately, is of limited help in validating this distinction between the preparation of presidents at religious institutions and those at secular institutions, public and private; for the predominant distinction drawn by that study is simply between public and private schools, not between religious and non-religious private schools. Wynn (1975) had devoted a rare study to church-related colleges a few years before Carbone’s, and he had indeed anticipated the latter’s emphasis on non-academic presidential training in the context of religious campuses. Exploration of this apparently unusual career path is once again hampered, however, by Wynn’s (1975) disappointing failure to reference his assertions to any particular body of research, a fair bibliography notwithstanding. This deficiency, it may be noted, highlights the need for such research on the subject as the current study undertakes.
Wynn’s (1975) attraction to the dynamic presidential candidate, at any rate, is forthright. He insists that “the basic overall criterion for the final selection of a president should be the best possible match between the qualities of the prospective candidates and the needs of the particular institution as determined at the outset of the selection process” (p. 56). This bland-seeming observation carries another suggestion of how far the small private colleges under Wynn’s scrutiny have veered from the mainstream over recent years. In virtually any given category, the Ross & Green study (2000) will indicate that presidents of public Master’s and baccalaureate institutions have more in common with one another than either group has with its private-school counterpart. In other words, the presidents of public institutions have relatively uniform duties which do not call for great adjustment from campus to campus.

John Plotts (1998) recently addressed some aspects of the neglected presidency of the church-related institution in his dissertation, *Career Paths for Presidents of Institutions Belonging to the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities* (CCCUs). His research found that the CCCU president was a married white male between the ages of 51 and 60. The president had most likely earned a Ph.D. degree in the field of education from a research institution and had served as president of his institution for fewer than 10 years. The individual frequently entered the presidency from outside higher education, a conclusion which supported Carbone (1981) and Wynn (1975). Those who entered the presidency from within higher education were most likely to have held the position of chief academic officer prior to assuming the position of president; this finding, along with the terminal degree’s prominence, concurred with what earlier research had maintained of presidents generally (Plotts, 1998). Plotts discovered, finally
(again in accord with Carbone, 1981), that CCCU presidents were more likely than others to have been lately employed beyond the academy because many had served as Protestant ministers.

Profiles of Minority Presidents

Few studies of minority college presidents exist from the long era before the Civil Rights Movement changed the nation’s consciousness; for in those years, no such presidents would have been found outside of HBCUs—and were rare even there (cf. Thompson, 1973, p. 234: “the original policy… [assumed that] white presidents were usually preferred for Black colleges”). A steady transformation in hiring practices occurred in the late sixties and throughout the seventies. After the 1970s, research on applicants seeking the college presidency began to emphasize the achievement of women and ethnic minorities. The academic studies by Shirley M. Arnold (1994), Fisher and Koch (1996), and Ross and Green (2000) are typical of this shift; they focus on women and minority groups as potential college presidents.

Arnold (1994) interviewed several Black women college presidents in a dissertation entitled, *A Descriptive Study of the Characteristics of Black Women College Presidents/Chief Executive Officers (Women Administrators, College Presidents, Chief Executive Officers)*. These presidents felt that their dual status, as Black and female, had worked for them rather than against them. They did not, however, regard their success as owing to affirmative action. Arnold (1994) concluded that their inner traits had helped their careers more than professional accomplishments: i.e., a sense of purpose, optimism, self-confidence, decisiveness, and a concern for the community. The improved financial
status of their institutions under their leadership convinced Arnold that these distinguished women had brought real dynamism to their work.

Fisher and Koch (1996) found that “in 1993, less than 5 percent of all American college presidents were African American, a slight increase since 1983” (p. 84). This study also concluded that the fortunes of women have risen in higher education; other minorities have prospered, as well, but usually at a less dramatic rate.

Ross and Green (2000) concluded that “minority presidents represented a larger share of presidents in 1998 than they did in 1986,” when minorities accounted for only 8% of college presidents (p. 13). By 1998, this figure had risen to 11%, an increase of 40%. In 1998, 6% of all presidents were African American, representing more than half of all minority presidents. Another 3% of the presidents were Hispanic, and only 1% was Asian-American or Native American.

In their interpretation of data involving minority presidents, Ross and Green (2000) concluded, “Minority presidents were most highly represented at public master’s and baccalaureate institutions, where they led 25% or more institutions in those categories” (p. 13). They were least represented at private master’s institutions; in that sector, minorities made up 2% of the presidents. Hence minority presidents were more likely to lead large institutions than small, specialized institutions. Almost half of the African American presidents and more than half of the Hispanic presidents served at institutions with headcount enrollments greater than 5000, compared with less than 30% of all Caucasian presidents being given the helm on such campuses. Ross and Green (2000) explain that Hispanic presidents enjoyed a disproportionately high representation
in these positions because they “were more likely to lead public institutions, which tend to enroll higher numbers of students than private colleges and universities” (p. 14).

Continuing their analysis of statistics for minority presidents, Ross and Green (2000) state, “Several differences between people of color and other presidents are worthy of note” (p. 15). They cite the fact that “minority presidents are more likely than Caucasian presidents to be women. Approximately one in four African American (26 percent) and Hispanic (24 percent) presidents were women, compared with 19 percent of Caucasian presidents” (p. 15). Hispanic presidents differed from non-Hispanic presidents notably in type of position held: “More than one in five Hispanic presidents (21 percent) headed a multi-campus institution or system, compared with 12 percent of Caucasian presidents and less than 8 percent of African American president” (p. 15).

Despite gains over their previous numbers, presidents of color continued to be underrepresented relative to the higher education workforce. Moreover, “minorities only accounted for 14% of faculty and senior staff in 1995” (Ross & Green, 2000, p. 13). Until colleges and universities increase the number of minority faculty and senior staff, conclude Ross and Green (2000), “progress in recruiting minority presidents will continue to be slow” (p. 13). The comparatively low percentage of minority faculty on all campuses generally, furthermore, may not be the only obstacle to their recruitment into administrative positions. Ross and Green (2000) do not comment directly upon the finding, but their data reveal that 8% more African American presidents and almost a full 20% more Hispanic presidents had held tenured positions immediately prior to the presidency than had their Caucasian counterparts. The clear implication is that tenure was considered of less importance in the Caucasian applicant, whereas the bar of
academic achievement seems to have been placed higher for minority candidates—
though the statistic may also reflect a greater frequency of tenure among minority faculty
members.

In general, Ross and Green (2000) found that the “profile of the typical college
president is changing slowly but continues to be Caucasian (89 percent) and male
(81 percent)” (p. 5). Their research revealed that

the typical president in 1998 was 58 years of age, held a doctoral degree . . . and
had served in his current position an average of seven years. Seventy percent of
the presidents had experience as faculty members . . . and one in four served as
president prior to his current position” (p. 5).

Furthermore, 8% of the immediate prior positions of presidents were outside of higher
education, more than half of all presidents identified themselves as Protestant, and 27%
of the presidents reported they were Catholic.

The profiles found that forty percent of college and university presidents had
received their highest earned degree in education. . . . Presidents were nearly
three times as likely to have earned their highest degree in education than in the
humanities/fine arts,” the second most frequently listed field (at 13 percent).
(p. 5)

In their conclusion, Ross and Green (2000) reiterated that women and minorities
continue to increase their share of college and university presidencies. The minority
presidents accounted for 11% of all presidential posts in American higher education in
1998, an increase of 8% since 1996. Yet minorities continue to be somewhat under-
represented at the level of president in comparison to their numbers among all faculty and
senior staff at universities, which was slightly higher at 14% in 2000, the year when Ross
& Green published their study (these are apparently the most current figures for the entire
nation).
Career Paths to the Black College Presidency

The following paradox emerges from the statistics compiled in the Ross and Green (2000) study. Four-year public colleges and universities provide the best opportunities for people of color to advance to the college presidency. Ross and Green indicated that the proportion of minority presidents in public baccalaureate institutions exceeds by over three times their proportion in corresponding private institutions. Most HBCUs, however, are private institutions. Since many HBCUs have a distinctive religious mission, the heavily favored ascent of candidates for their presidency through the ranks of public institutions ensures that many of these candidates will have acquired certain credentials away from their professional experiences on campus.

Familiarity with a religious mission, furthermore, is but one of the special credentials for the Black college presidency. The environment in which HBCUs were founded was quite unlike that of predominantly white colleges and universities, according to research presented by Holman (1994) in Espoused Leadership among Presidents of Four-Year Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Black colleges and universities, Holman found, served a population that lived under distinctive legal, social, political, and economic structures. The Black college president has traditionally been compelled to be sensitive to such extraordinary features within his or her immediate community. “Given these externally-based pressures over which institutions have minimal control,” concludes Holman, “leadership assumes a critical role in terms of the survival of historically Black colleges and universities” (p. 5). The special mission of HBCUs (special, as has been noted, in social, economic, and other dimensions as well as, quite possibly, in a religious dimension) calls for special understanding. Tata’s (1980)
dissertation (1980) suggested how such understanding is often acquired. In her work, she analyzes questionnaires submitted to approximately 80 presidents of HBCUs, having taken the questionnaire of Michael R. Ferrari’s 1968 study (published in 1970) largely as her model. She found that such presidents did indeed tend to come armed with experiences outside of the academic mainstream. While they had generally been recruited from the ranks of higher education, half of them had begun their teaching careers at the pre-college level. Furthermore, they frequently had a business background, which they ranked only after college administrative experience as important to their present positions.

The contrast with the typical college president is rendered clear by Ross and Green’s (2000) finding that “few presidents indicated a desire to have had experience outside higher education” (p. 30) and that presidents of public institutions were relatively preoccupied with approaching legislators. Such desires are decidedly not pointed in the direction of most HBCUs.

The relevance of private-sector experience in fund-raising and communal collaboration is transparent in the case of HBCUs. Because at least one-third of the private Black colleges are located in low socio-economic communities, they cannot often draw upon social and cultural resources which support their academic endeavor; in “culturally poor communities,” such resources “simply do not exist” (Thompson, 1973, p. 25). Thompson observes at greater length in his chapter on economic status,

All attempts to provide high quality education for seriously disadvantaged youth . . . have all [sic] proven that the essential educational cost per disadvantaged student must be considerably higher than the normal cost per average or advantaged student if comparable achievements are to be attained. Yet . . . private Black colleges have had to operate with only token support from major
foundations, the federal government, private philanthropy, and the church.  
(p. 246)

Elsewhere, Thompson stresses that the poverty of these schools is far more extensive and 
serious than simply a shortage of current educational and general funds; it extends to such 
crucial matters as retaining competent teachers, who frequently “feel alienated from the 
main channels of thought in the non-academic world” (p. 25) when forced to reside in a 
far-from-vibrant community.

Thompson’s study (1973), which targeted ten senior-level, church-related Black 
colleges (the colleges were not identified to ensure honest and complete responses to 
questionnaires), is dated in some respects. Yet its anachronisms often underscore the 
points at issue here. For instance, Thompson observes that the trustees of HBCUs have 
only lately shifted to the notion of hiring Black presidents: “It was once assumed that 
these colleges needed white presidents as mediators with the always suspicious, often 
hostile local white communities” (p. 234) where they were situated. In such a charged 
atmosphere, reaching beyond the immediate physical setting to a broader community—a 
more white community—obviously required great dynamism in the pivotal decades of 
the late 20th century.

Similarly, none of the trustees whom Thompson (1973) interviewed in the early 
1970s “had ever recommended a female [presidential] candidate for the sample colleges” 
(p. 234). This obsolete view of gender underscores the patriarchal authority which has 
been expected of the HBCU president traditionally, and which Thompson discusses later 
under the heading of “inefficiency of subordinate administrators”; for the incompetence 
of subordinates, Thompson explains, was “the most pointed reason some presidents gave 
for exercising near autocratic control in their colleges” (p. 239). At the beginning of his
dissertation, Holman (1994) also stresses a wealth of studies alleging the HBCU
president’s tendency to wield power like a “tyrant,” an “autocrat,” a “dictator,” etc. (pp.
1-3). Sustaining campus morale and a competent curriculum in a broader community
offering few resources of any kind and whose mood is often indifferent-to-hostile is quite
clearly the job of a forceful personality. This is essentially the explanation of HBCU
“presidential tyranny” offered by Johnson (1971). The presidents of these institutions are
sometimes legendary among their constituents for having such force. As Holman (1994)
concludes, they “understand the importance of being respected rather than popular”
(p. 112).

A few significant profiles which also imply a career path to the HBCU presidency
have been published since Thompson’s (1973) work. Fred Holman’s 1994 dissertation,
Espoused Leadership among Presidents of Four-Year Historically Black Colleges and
Universities, has already been cited. Holman’s study included the private four-year
HBCUs in Texas that were accredited at that time and that are the focus of this proposed
study (though the identities of individual colleges were not revealed). What emerges
from Holman’s work was more a portrait of the HBCU president in static pose than in
fluid progress through the past toward his present position; more profile than career path,
to reiterate. In the absence of genuine studies of this ascent to the HBCU presidency,
however, certain vectors in the president’s past life and experience can be deduced. Of
the 58 presidents interviewed, all held terminal degrees, 28 held Ph.D. degrees, 25 held
Ed.D. degrees, two held J.D. degrees, and three held other types of doctoral degrees. Of
these 58 subjects, higher education was the most frequent major for the doctoral degree,
with 16 majoring in higher education, and seven majoring in educational administration.
For those serving as college president for the first time, 28 were between the ages of 41 and 49, 18 were between 50 and 59, and only two were over 60. Before assuming the current position of president, the individual’s most recent prior position had been that of president in 30 instances and of assistant to a president in three instances. The total number of years of administrative experience outside higher education was five years or fewer for 29 of the presidents, six to nine years for 13 presidents, and 10 years or more for 15 presidents. The total number of years in a presidential position was five years or fewer for 21 presidents, six to nine years for 23 presidents, and 10 years or more for 16 presidents.

In short, Holman reinforces the narrative of a figure who is slightly outside of the academic mainstream by virtue of his or her very proximity to the general public’s mainstream: a figure slightly more oriented to the “blackboard jungle” of pre-college education and to the realities of the business world. Thompson (1973) had remarked the fondness of his study’s trustees for presidents “representative of traditional middle class values” (p. 234); Ross and Green (2000) more recently documented the continued tendency of African-American presidents to major in education far more often than their Caucasian counterparts, and their data reveal a nearly 30% higher tendency for Black presidents to have spent three to 10 years employed outside higher education than white presidents [p. 52].) Tata’s study of 1980further these impressions from a socio-religious angle, observing that the typical HBCU president is a married male with children who attends a Protestant church regularly and tends to remain at one institution longer than Caucasian presidents.
Still more confirmation—perhaps the most explicit in the matter of career path—may be found in Fisher and Koch’s (1996) encyclopedic and eloquent overview of the American college presidency in its contemporary form. The authors have this to say of the HBCU chief executive:

The president . . . sometimes exhibits bimodal behavior. The Caucasian power structure (businesses, government, foundations) controls most of the resources and the HBCU president must accommodate the leaders of these groups to garner needed resources for the institution. This accommodation requires cultivation of a moderate image, development of the perception of being tightly and efficiently managed, and respect for the traditional academic verities. (p. 93)

A footnote at this textual point relates the observation of one such president to the authors that “a much larger proportion of his HBCU presidential colleagues are political Republicans than is true for the African-American population as a whole” (Fisher & Koch, 1996, p. 93), a tendency which the anonymous source attributes to courting the white status quo. Be that as it may, when safely enclosed among his constituents, the HBCU president is often seen as “the defender of the campus, its knight in shining armor” (p. 93). The strain of sustaining two such conflicting roles often makes the Black presidency very complicated, not unlike the life of “the ‘pastor’ of many African-American churches . . . a charismatic, strong, and sometimes authoritarian individual who usually inspires great loyalty” (p. 94).

Fisher and Koch (1996) do not go so far as to suggest that the ministry is part of the path to the HBCU presidency. What they propose is an analogy; the Black president, too, must exhibit such dynamic leadership that he or she may well seem to the immediate community to possess something of the inspired. The precise paths that professional men and women follow to these challenging executive positions remain as fragments or implications in the research literature. In particular, there is no explicit research to date
about the career paths of individuals who have become presidents of the five private HBCUs in Texas.

Summary

Eells and Hollis (1978) have summarized major work from 1900-1960, including relevant articles for the present study. Another seminal work on the college presidency, *The American College President* (Ross & Green, 2000), provided a partially qualitative overview with some limited data pertinent to career paths (much of which must be accompanied by inference beyond what the authors supply). Research related to minority candidates has offered statistical analyses of previous positions held by current presidents: useful information for a study of career paths, but requiring frequent interpretation. One dissertation (Holman, 1994) was devoted to the espoused leadership styles of 85 HBCU presidents. The general profile of Holman’s subjects remains, at present, the closest to that of this proposed study’s subjects. Once again, however, the proposal differs from existing research in seeking to make explicit what is merely implicit; for Holman has created an apparently static profile of figures whose past progression through professional experiences must be largely inferred. Neither his own nor any other published study directly examines the career path to the HCBU presidency.

Chapter Three will explore the methodology and, specifically, the qualitative analysis to be employed in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

Introduction

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), qualitative research focuses on multi-methodology, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This focus means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena as they arise from the dynamic tensions of real life. Qualitative methods have been embraced by this study as the best means of accommodating the distinctive, often unique character of the HBCU campus and its officers.

Interviews were the method of data-collection most important to the study. In-depth personal interviews have provided vital details in describing the pathway to the presidency at the five private HBCUs in Texas. The questions for each interview were based on information collected previously from professional vitae and instructional fact sheets (while being guided, of course, by the study’s two general research questions; see p. 3). All interviews were tape-recorded in the fashion typical of collecting oral histories for analysis. Yow (1994) identified oral history with qualitative methodology, stressing the oral record’s affinity with the basic principle of grounded theory. In its full sense, grounded theory refers to kinds of observations and behavior besides the interview. The theory allows the researcher to “employ creativity and intuition in interpreting the whole context of an interview or observation” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7). The study
arranged interviews so as to favor this inductive process. Informants were interviewed in a setting of their choice by an interviewer familiar with the HBCU environment.

The methodology applied in this study focuses on ethnic-specific realities, with the use of descriptive analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the career paths of individuals who have served as president at one of the five private four-year HBCUs in Texas.

Sample Population

To participate in the study, an individual must have served as president at one of the five private four-year HBCUs in Texas: Huston-Tillotson (United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ), Jarvis Christian College (Christian Church, Disciples of Christ), Paul Quinn College (African Methodist Episcopal Church), Texas College (Christian Methodist Episcopal), and Wiley College (United Methodist Church). Immediate past presidents were also considered for participation. The total population for the study was 10 individuals (five presidents and five immediate past presidents). Actual participation in the study was limited to seven (five current and two immediate past presidents). Three of the immediate past presidents proved to be inaccessible for various reasons.

The five private four-year HBCUs emerged as the most practical schools for this study because of the researcher’s experiences in working at two of the five colleges and his familiarity, as a Texan, with the state’s distinct economic features, its culture, its racial climate, and other factors that might influence the evolution of a presidential career in the region.
Method of Research/Research Design

The quantitative methods, which have dominated recent research into the career path to the college presidency, justify generalizing conclusions which cannot adequately take into account the peculiar nature of the HBCU setting. The comparison of statistical data facilitated by quantitative research “gives a broad, generalizable set of findings. By contrast, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (Patton, 1987, p. 9). These latter methods allow “the researcher . . . [to look] at settings and people holistically,” whereby they “are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1994, p. 8). Such sensitivity to setting was important in a study of a population whose idiosyncrasies quickly dissolve when it is mingled with the mainstream. Since “the goal of qualitative research is to examine how things look from different vantage points” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1994, p. 9), this approach was clearly to be preferred in the present study, which explored the path to the college presidency of institutions in highly unusual economic, social, and cultural circumstances.

A case study method is recommended when there is no exploitation and the focus of the study is a chronological perspective and/or observational research of an event (Yin 2003). Yin recommends the case study method if the research questions posed, the degree of control over behavioral events, and the extent to which studied events are contemporary rather than historical all indicate its appropriateness. The questions asked of the five HBCU presidents and two immediate past presidents are often of the “how” and “why” variety, and hence “more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies . . . ” (p. 6). Also, there are many “what” questions of the kind that justify an
An exploratory case study intended “to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry” (p. 6). Furthermore, the study inquired into the informants’ past and ongoing careers, and hence did not exercise control over any of the studied behaviors. “Histories are the preferred strategy when there is virtually no access or control,” observed Yin—but soon elaborated, “Histories can, of course, be done about contemporary events; in this situation, the strategy begins to overlap with that of the case study” (p. 7). The study indeed focused on the contemporary insofar as: a) the five sitting presidents continued to have relevant experiences, and b) the study aimed at uncovering a career path to the presidency of the five Texas HBCUs in today’s world, not yesterday’s. Finally, Yin noted that the case study’s interviewer enjoys “the advantage over the collector of histories that he or she has a wider variety of evidence” (p. 8). The interviewer of this study was free in just such a manner to arrange amenable settings with each informant, to include elements of those settings in his data, to view any evidence which the informant may wish to call to his attention, and so forth.

The study’s total population was contacted to ascertain the willingness of its members to participate. Members of the actual population were requested to submit a curriculum vitae and an institutional fact sheet. The vitae were especially useful for collecting the professional data of the participants. Supplemental data were obtained by recorded telephone interviews and electronic mail. A preliminary list of questions related to constituent elements of the career pathway to the presidency of the study’s five HBCUs was constructed from trends and tendencies identified in previous research. The researcher arranged a face-to-face interview with each respondent who agreed to participate in the study’s interview phase: two respondents preferred to conduct their
interviews by telephone. All participants, prior to the interviews, were assured of confidentiality and asked to read and sign an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by an experienced professional who assisted the researcher. The interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient to each respondent, and were guided by the research questions. The interview questions (Appendix B) posed by the researcher were open-ended to avoid leading the respondent. Typically, follow-up questions were used to elicit in-depth answers. After these interviews, further exchanges by telephone and electronic mail were sometimes employed to develop or clarify certain statements.

When all data were collected; a complete transcription, combining face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and exchanges by mail, were prepared for each respondent. Significant facts and recurrent themes were then identified in each transcription, and the whole was rewritten in narrative form, with frequent direct citations from the interview included and the researcher’s commentary added to stress emerging patterns (see Chapter Four).

Data Collection

The collection of data involved the use of both primary and secondary sources. This study employed face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and electronic mail. These primary sources were combined with the professional vita and institutional fact sheet submitted by each president, all of which were considered in the light of available secondary sources.

The researcher created a data-collection instrument. The researcher’s questions were designed to collect information pertinent to career pathways of the selected HBCUs.
The researcher was the sole interviewer and the primary data-gathering instrument. The researcher recognized that the interview methodology is conditioned by his special skills, limitations, and biases, and that not all researchers are skilled in observation and interviewing (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The interviews were guided by the following research questions:

1. On what basis did you choose the colleges you attended? Looking back, do you think any of these institutions played a significant role—either facilitative or obstructive—in your becoming the president of an HBCU? If “yes”, please explain how you think the institution(s) in question prepared you for your position as president. If you think your progress to the presidency somehow overcame disadvantages in your undergraduate or graduate education, please explain these disadvantages. If you think your college selections had little effect upon your eventual appointment to the presidency, is this because your other qualifications eclipsed the importance of your educational past or because you believe that past to be generally of secondary relevance to the HBCU president’s job?

2. At what point in your life did you decide that you wanted to be the president of an HBCU? Was this decision the result of a desire simply to be a president, or were you especially eager to serve as president at an HBCU? If the latter, please explain why the HBCU held a special attraction for you. If, instead, your interest in the presidency was not tailored to any particular institutional type, please describe what you recall as attracting you to the office originally; and explain further if you serving at an HBCU has tended to help in fulfilling your expectations of the office or, in some way, has thwarted them.
3. If you had to single out one individual for influencing your decision to become a college president, who would it be? What was the nature of this person’s special influence?

4. If you had to single out one personal quality for playing a prominent role in your decision to seek a college presidency, what quality would it be? Similarly, please relate a single experience that stands out in your mind more than any other as having affected your decision to pursue a college presidency.

5. Most small private colleges have a religious affiliation. Did the religious dimension of the HBCU which you now lead or have led as president affected in any way your decision to seek its presidency? If so, how? Did religion have any impact upon your initial choices to seek leadership roles in education? If so, what was its effect? Looking back upon years of such leadership, would you say in general that religious life is important to your institution’s mission or that, on the contrary, it distracts from the crucial labor of preparing minority students for a highly competitive world?

6. As the president or former president of an HBCU, would you say that your race or ethnicity had a significant impact on your decision to seek the presidency of such a school? If so, please describe the influence. If not, have you decided in retrospect that race or ethnicity may have been a more important aspect of your application than you realized? From an opposing angle, do you think that an institution like yours should consider race or ethnicity in reviewing candidates for critical administrative positions? If you could hand-pick your replacement as president, would you take such factors into consideration? Please explain.
7. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me at this time?

The interviews were exploratory in nature, seeking to understand deeply the personal and professional backgrounds of the presidents. It was anticipated that the probing questions, with frequent prompts for follow-up comments, would elicit a variety of useful revelations from the informants. The interviewer posed further questions as suggested by the flow of the conversation when the informant dwelt on a particular issue, as recommended by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) and Yin (2003).

*Data Analysis*

Although qualitative researchers begin their studies with minimal commitment to *a priori* assumptions and theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), it is impossible to analyze data meaningfully without first creating certain categories to guide the work of triage. Even coding categories, Taylor & Bogdan (1998) observe, prove most useful if “a story line [is developed] to guide theorizing and analysis” (p. 151). The story line, in turn, will necessarily reflect the assumptions with which the researcher has approached the study. Yin (2003) remarked upon the inevitability that “[theoretical] propositions would have shaped your data collection plan and therefore would have given priorities to the relevant analytic strategies” (p. 112). Yet assumptions and theory, once again, are exactly what the qualitative researcher wishes to minimize.

The researcher may be reliably guided by theoretical propositions, however, if they have been formed in response to previous research and if their basis is logical. “The logic model,” explains Yin (2003, p. 127), “deliberately stipulates a complex chain of events over time.” The proposed study of five Texas HBCUs is predicated on a chain of
events with a degree of complexity; it has been constructed around research-based conclusions which at least imply certain links of such a chain. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is ample evidence to suggest that the presidents of small private religious-affiliated baccalaureate institutions are unusual in several ways. For instance, their academic preparation is often less important to them and to those who hire them than it is in the case of presidents leading public institutions or large secular private institutions. Their experience in the business world or with religious ministries often appears to gain in importance as purely academic factors decline. In their personal lives, they also (ironically) seem more mainstream in tastes, habits, and beliefs than the broad spectrum of college presidents.

Such propositions influenced the researcher’s creation of a story line for the career path to the presidency of the study’s five HBCUs. The assumed sequence of events would run as follows. A hard-working, highly motivated student would advance to college, and would eventually proceed successfully through a Master’s or even a doctoral program. The student’s undergraduate work might well have taken place, at least in part, on an HBCU campus (an assumption undocumented by any study known to the researcher, but reasonable according to his own considerable experience of such schools and their presidents). In that event, the student’s first interest in the HBCU mission could easily have been stirred even before his or her first academic employment. Perhaps this institution’s president was a significant and inspiring influence upon the future college president.

In keeping with available research, the researcher further assumed that this student would very likely have attended graduate school until obtaining a terminal degree
(probably in Education or Administration), and that he or she would also have acquired
some non-academic experience unusual in presidents-to-be of mainstream, predominantly
white, institutions (such as operating a private-sector business or serving a church in a
ministerial capacity). The president-to-be would probably have worked both as a teacher
and as a subordinate administrator for several years after graduate school or between
graduate degrees (in addition to non-academic experiences). The thought of serving as an
HBCU president could reasonably be expected to have ripened in the future president
while watching other academic leaders in action. A further assumption has been made—
based both on existing research and on the researcher’s own experience—that the
eventual president’s religious background and race was not irrelevant in the decision to
seek the highest office at an HBCU. The story line accommodates a special, perhaps
“spiritual” sense of devotion to the underprivileged and to the African American
community as a key motive at several critical career junctures rather than rigidly
attaching it to one certain decision or one certain context. For instance, such devotion
might have figured in the respondent’s choice of an undergraduate school or of an early
teaching position as well as in the actual application for an HBCU presidency.

The interviews (guided by a questionnaire which the story line had informed)
were exploratory in nature, seeking to understand deeply the personal and professional
backgrounds of the presidents. If some bedrock of assumptions is necessary in preparing
an interview, flexibility in applying these assumptions is equally so. It was anticipated
that the probing questions, with frequent prompts for follow-up comments, would elicit a
variety of useful revelations from the informants. The researcher, in the role of
interviewer, posed further questions as suggested by the flow of the conversation
whenever the informant dwelt on a particular issue, as recommended by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) and Yin (2003).

Because the study’s primary method of data collection—the wide-ranging interview—was designed to elicit generous comments from the participants in the fashion just described rather than to limit them to brief answers, the resulting transcripts often contained information that proved difficult to collate. Questions were interpreted differently by different respondents. Some respondents were very reluctant to say much on certain subjects or considered those subjects distant from their personal experience; others spoke at such length about the same topics that they sometimes gave the interview a new focus. Occasionally what appeared to be a resonant agreement among the participants was actually based on very different motives in individual cases, and the researcher felt compelled to create a question retrospectively so as to highlight these diverging motives.

Categories of responses were employed in an attempt to generalize usefully, and obscure responses were very carefully coded to fit one category or another in each group of questions. If the question in hand explicitly called for an affirmative or negative answer, then the categories were simply “yes” or “no.” For problematic responses, the researcher would create a reasonable test of the material to determine if it could be linked to clearer comments expressed elsewhere by the same respondent. Broadly speaking, the test was one of context: did the comment at issue, given the respondent’s reason for being vague (often merely a matter of wandering off the topic) and his or her expressed views on similar topics elsewhere, logically amount to a “pro” or “contra” position?
All data were reviewed for the purpose of orienting as many elements of each response as possible to the categories. Such facilitative aids as note cards, transcripts with visibly highlighted passages, and keyword searches by computer were used to locate and record data relevant to a coding exercise. Participants’ responses to the interview questions were recorded as complete quotations in the study whenever their expression of a particular view was especially clear and cogent. Responses were occasionally summarized (with or without brief citations) when their central idea was very diffusely stated. Because of quantification through categories, all of these recorded responses could later be analyzed for emerging themes. The results of such analysis appear as findings in Chapter Five.

It should be noted that the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) of qualitative analysis was employed throughout, which required that the analytical process constantly shift between overt statements and implied judgments as each interview was reviewed. The categories into which the researcher coded responses were in fact occasionally suggested to him only after analysis of the transcripts. As Taylor & Bogdan (1998) observe with authority, “the cardinal rule in qualitative analysis is to make the codes fit the data and not vice versa” (p. 152). Thought was also given (especially in Chapter Five) to rival explanations of the categorized responses (Yin, 2003).

Summary

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in the study of the career pathway to the presidency of a small private HBCU in Texas. The sections titled “Method of Research/Research Design” and “Data Collection” emphasize that the
research effort was qualitative and explain how that effort was conducted. The methodology discussed was chosen because it is the most appropriate data collection technique for obtaining information necessary to construct inductively a career pathway to the Texas HBCU presidency.

This study focused on the career pathway to the presidency of five private four-year HBCUs in Texas; the findings and conclusions of the study related specifically to the experiences of presidents at these institutions. Future researchers may give cautious consideration, however, to the distinct possibility that some elements of this pathway may be common to HBCU presidencies outside of Texas.
CHAPTER FOUR
Findings and Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the career paths of individuals who are serving or who have served as president of one of the five private four-year HBCUs in the state of Texas. The study was designed to focus on factors beyond mere academic preparation and professional experience prior to the presidential appointment. Previous research strongly indicates that HBCU presidents require credentials in addition to academic and administrative training—credentials sometimes similar to those possessed by presidents of other small private religious-affiliated schools, but also occasionally quite unique. Diverse qualifications, experiences, and attitudes were therefore considered in the attempt to identify patterns or pathways among the HBCU presidential appointees.

The study investigated the following two questions. First, what do the five current presidents and two of the immediate past presidents of the five private four-year HBCUs in the state of Texas perceive to be their career paths to the campus’ highest office? A second question logically arises from a refinement of the first, given the distinctive nature of the HBCU: What influence upon their professional ambitions do the presidents and two immediate past presidents of the five Texas HBCUs attribute to their institutions’ affiliation with Christian Protestantism and service of the African American community?

To answer these questions, the study collected data in several stages. Basic demographic data about the participants and their institutions were gathered from
curriculum vitae, public relations literature, and publicly published statistics. The major source of data was a personal, in-depth interview conducted by the researcher with each of the participants at a place and time of their choosing. Two respondents in fact preferred to communicate mostly in writing. The interview was based upon a questionnaire submitted to each participant several days before the actual exchange. Follow-up questions were included in the questionnaire, and the interviewer also took care to allow his subjects to speak freely on related issues whenever a particular topic moved them to do so.

The data thus collected were, as a result, somewhat disparate in quantity, detail, and emphasis, as the researcher had anticipated. They required a largely qualitative analysis. This was conducted after printed transcripts of the interviews were procured. Sometimes questions drew a perfectly straightforward answer from most participants; but when they did not, the obscure responses were cross-indexed with responses offered by the same participant elsewhere in his or her interview, and/or they were logically analyzed within their immediate context. Usually such qualitative analysis succeeded in producing a coherent position from partial indications.

By this means, the results obtained from most or all participants for most questions could be arranged in a small number of categories, typically two or three. The categories were sometimes as simple as an affirmative or negative response to a question, but they could also express subtle shifts in position. The simpler “yes/no” kind of response was openly solicited by some of the questions, while the researcher was forced to formulate some of the subtler categories of response after reviewing the data. The qualitative coding of responses into these categories described in the previous paragraph
Thus generated for the researcher a range of quantifiable results which could be compared and contrasted. The conclusions predicated on the quantified results will be offered in Chapter Five.

The results of these data-gathering procedures are presented without interpretation in the current chapter. The questionnaire consisted of seven primary questions and their constituent sub-questions. This chapter has been organized accordingly; each group of questions is addressed in a distinct section. For the most part, the findings have been summarized in tables that precede the presentation of the responses. The tables clearly display what categories were used in organizing the responses to a given question. The method employed in coding the more obscure responses is explained as they are offered into evidence.

Analysis of Data from Public-Domain Sources

Based on readily available data in the public record and on information provided by the respondents, here are brief descriptions of the five institutions and seven subjects involved in the present study.

Four of the five Texas HBCUs are located in a range covering the northeastern and north-central parts of the state. Two in fact originated in Austin, a pedigree which nevertheless keeps it within the bounds of early Texas settlements. The local communities in which these institutions rooted and grew, therefore, were already established by the mid-19th century and numbered many residents by the end of that century who well recalled the days of slavery and Reconstruction.

Paul Quinn College is located today in Dallas, Texas. The college is described in its own course catalogue as “an independent undergraduate, coeducational, residential
institution . . . affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church” (Paul Quinn College, 2000, p. 17). Paul Quinn has preserved its original liberal arts emphasis (Latin, mathematics, and music were taught during its first decade of existence as well as carpentry and sewing), and it welcomes students of all backgrounds and cultures.

Paul Quinn shares with Wiley College the distinction of being the oldest historically black college west of the Mississippi River. It was founded in 1872 by a group of circuit-riding AME preachers based in Austin (though not with its present name, a detail which makes room for Wiley’s claim to precedence). The school was moved from Austin to Waco in 1877, where it became known as Waco College. The college thrived at this location for over a century, having been chartered by the State of Texas in 1881 and renamed to commemorate Bishop William Paul Quinn, a dedicated AME missionary. Only in September of 1990 did the college transfer its campus to Dallas, with an enrollment of 1,020 students. The Dallas site had come vacant when Bishop College, another distinguished HBCU, was forced to close its doors. The move was precipitated, among other things, by a cooperative agreement with the Dallas County Community College District.

Texas College, one of the oldest private, four-year liberal-arts colleges in Texas, and among the state’s first HBCUs. It is today, and has always been, located in Tyler, a city of slightly less than 100,000 residents and roughly equidistant from Dallas and Shreveport. In 1894, the area consisted largely of poor farming communities and presented the descendents of freed slaves with few chances to improve themselves. Several ministers and laity of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church pooled their
efforts at this time to create an institution of higher learning devoted to serving African Americans. The first class of graduates received their degrees formally in 1909.

From its inception, Texas College has sought to meld together its religious and secular missions. The institution’s public relations literature pays frequent homage to the principle that a successful citizen must be socially responsible, emotionally secure, and spiritually mature as well as economically capable of earning a living ("Hobsons guide," 2002). Religious mission and historical tradition have clearly influenced the college to adopt various policies which benefit the underprivileged or the hard-pressed. For instance, Texas College is committed to open admissions: faculty members identify the current status of each student’s education and assist him or her in advancing from that point ("Hobsons guide," 2002). The college annually enrolls about 600 students.

Huston-Tillotson College was chartered in 1952 after the merger of two independent colleges, both located in Austin, Texas: Tillotson College and Samuel Huston College. The combined institution has carried forward the religious and historical traditions embedded in its two schools of origin. Tillotson College was formerly chartered by the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the American Missionary Association, an appendage of the Congregational Churches (now the United Church of Christ). When its doors first opened in 1875, Tillotson was essentially a secondary school. Samuel Huston College began to receive students a year later when the Reverend George Warren Richardson, a Methodist minister from Minnesota, leased St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church in Dallas, Texas, to educate young people of color in the area. The school was transferred to Austin about a year later. It continued to be affiliated with the United Methodist Church.
On February 28, 2005, Huston-Tillotson was officially recognized as a university. As the collaboration of different denominational backgrounds in the college’s current mission implies, Huston-Tillotson strives to serve a diverse population. It proclaims itself in public relations literature to be “a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith institution” (“Hobsons guide,” 2002, p. 46). The college also claims a special dedication to the task of producing students with an ethic of public service. Its enrollment is approximately 700.

Jarvis Christian College is located in Hawkins, Texas, about one hundred miles southeast of Dallas in a semi-rural setting. Jarvis has been affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since its earliest days, yet it claims to emphasize a global perspective and welcomes students of all cultures, ethnicities, and faiths.

The college’s origins were humble; its first students in 1913 were all children in the elementary grades. The long-term plan was to create a school which served the educational needs of local black youth. Three years before, 456 acres of land just outside of Hawkins had been donated for this express purpose by Major J. J. Jarvis. As Jarvis admitted older students, a contribution of hard labor was understood to be part of the required tuition so that the donated land might be cleared and buildings constructed. To this day, Jarvis operates a work-study program.

By the 1930s, Jarvis was one of the few accredited high schools for black youth in East Texas. In 1928, Jarvis was legally incorporated as a college, having complemented its secondary school with higher education. The college continues to transform itself in response to the times, seeking to sustain an enrollment in the mid-hundreds. Special attention has recently been given to Distance Learning programs (courses taken via the
Internet) and to such contemporary needs of potential business executives as the
acquisition of Japanese.

Wiley College is the first (or nearly the first, depending on the criteria)
historically black college west of the Mississippi River. It was founded, and remains
located, on the west side of Marshall, Texas. (The slightly older Paul Quinn College was
unnamed in its early years and was often relocated.) Isaac Wiley, a bishop in the
Methodist Episcopal Church, inaugurated the school in 1873. A decade later, in 1882,
the college was certified by the Freedmen’s Aid Society.

Wiley produced several influential figures in the days of segregation, such as
Melvin B. Tolson (connected to the Harlem Renaissance) and James L. Farmer (the first
African American of Texas origin to earn a doctor’s degree). Farmer’s son, James L.
Farmer, Jr., became a major figure in the Civil Rights Movement.

Wiley College is a four-year liberal arts institution. Approximately 96% of
students receive some amount of financial aid. Wiley currently runs an off-campus
program in Shreveport, Louisiana, which accounts for a significant minority of its
approximately 1,000 students.

It is clear from these brief descriptions that the five Texas HBCUs share several
characteristics besides their location and their traditional service of the African American
community. All are rooted in the historical struggle against segregation. All began their
part of that struggle with relatively few resources and a very small student body.
Protestant Christian denominations played a vital role in the founding of all five
institutions. A spirit of ecumenism—of combining denominational influences with a
general, even global broad-mindedness—is observable in the public documents of all,
and often in special educational programs. These characteristics, furthermore—the service of an underprivileged community, the struggle for self-definition, the modest resources (and the consequent importance of adaptability), the small enrollments, the religious affiliation, and the broadly tolerant doctrine—have continued to this day to make the five Texas HBCUs stand out from many other colleges or universities that may have one or two such qualities in common with them.

Though differences exist from school to school of the five, the significant shared factors obviously justify the assumption that a candidate seeking the presidency of a certain one would have most of the credentials needed to apply for the same office at another, and also that he or she would have very similar motives in applying to any of the five. Not surprisingly, some of the respondents have in fact held administrative office at a Texas HBCU other than the one where they now serve or have lately served as president.

The five presidents and two immediate past presidents are themselves a confirmation of the portrait painted by the research reviewed in Chapter Two. Six of the seven subjects have earned a terminal degree, and all seven worked as “academic administrators before reaching the presidential plateau” (cf., Holman, 1994, p. 160). Significant non-academic experience appeared on the *curriculum vitae* of four; such employment ranged from religious ministry and high school teaching to service in the military and in the public sector (cf., Holman, 1994; Tata, 1980). Four of the seven had also earned an undergraduate degree from an HBCU (one from a Texas HBCU). “Most had held or were holding their presidential positions for a length of time well in excess of the national average for all college presidents” (Ross & Green, 2000, p. 33). The exact
breakdown is as follows: two participants are in their 6th year of service, one has entered her 16th year of service, one completed a five-year term and another a one-year interim term since the inauguration of this study, and the two immediate past presidents served for five years and two years.

As well as conforming with the expectations created by pre-existing research, these seven professionals clearly bear a close similarity to each other. They have gone through many of the same academic and non-academic experiences, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the typical mainstream college president. All are Americans of African origin, six of the seven are male, all were born in the South, only two left the South for a significant portion of their education, and all profess their firm faith in a Protestant denomination of Christianity (one of them being, in fact, an ordained minister). All of them first came to the presidency while in their forties. They constitute a remarkably homogeneous group in many respects.

Analysis of Interviews and Other Data

Higher Educational Choices

The first matter addressed in the study’s questionnaire involved the role of formal academic preparation, as an undergraduate and then graduate student, for the HBCU presidency. The query was essentially three-tiered. It began with the fully open-ended question, “On what basis did you choose the colleges you attended?” A follow-up question next invited the respondent to judge retrospectively the effectiveness of these earlier choices: “Looking back, do you think any of these institutions played a significant role—either facilitative or obstructive—in your becoming the president of an HBCU?”
Of course, it was anticipated that both “yes” and “no” responses might be volunteered. The questionnaire therefore proceeded to provide a fork-in-the-road option: “If ‘yes’, please explain how you think the institution(s) in question prepared you for your position as president. If you think your progress to the presidency somehow overcame disadvantages in your undergraduate or graduate education (i.e., if the preceding question was answered “no”), please explain these disadvantages.”

It was also anticipated that some respondents might decline to judge their college experiences—even those in graduate school—as either very helpful or very harmful. This sentiment was accommodated with yet a third path from the main road—but the questionnaire also sought to channel it into a more detailed response. “If you think your college selections had little effect upon your eventual appointment to the presidency, is this because your other qualifications eclipsed the importance of your educational past or because you believe that past to be generally of secondary relevance to the HBCU president’s job?”

The responses were arranged quantitatively among four categories. (Undergraduate and graduate institutions are not ultimately distinguished in the tabulations, for rarely did the participants suggest any shift in motive during the successive stages of their education). The four categories were not created by the researcher before the interviews, but rather suggested retroactively by an analysis of the data. The categories are listed below (Table 1) together with the number of responses that explicitly fell into each or could be successfully coded for each. In the case of the latter, coding was often necessary in the delicate matter of the financial strains imposed by college attendance. The researcher focused on such verbal clues as references to the
importance of scholarships in identifying this category of response. There are more responses listed below than respondents in the study simply because some of the participants mentioned more than one determinant as involved in their educational choices.

Table 1

Reasons for Selecting Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Excellence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tradition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability/Scholarship Grant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to Home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelmingly dominant motive in choice of an undergraduate institution for the respondents was affordability. This blunt fact was sometimes encrypted in vague (perhaps embarrassed) sentiments, but also declared more or less overtly. For instance, Larry Earvin volunteered the following:

I chose the first college based on the scholarship that I received for my undergraduate degree. The same principle was pretty much used for my Master’s degree as well. I had looked for a place that would pay for my Master’s degree without my having to make any kind of outlet, and I was able to find it, so I attended school there.

When the words “scholarship” and “fellowship” were employed to trace further responses for possible coding under this motive, several similar motives for choice of school did in fact emerge, especially in the context of the undergraduate institution selected. Billy Hawkins was comfortable with declaring, “I attended Ferris State
University in Big Rapids, Michigan. Attended that university mainly because of being recruited on a football scholarship.” Dwight Fennel spoke with gratitude of an undergraduate professor who helped him pave his way to graduate school by securing financial aid for him: “And by way of telephone conference with the dean of students, a scholarship was placed—set aside for me to attend Iowa State upon completion of graduation.” Haywood Strickland ultimately did not attend the undergraduate school to which he had been awarded a scholarship, but financial considerations had been prominent enough to draw him physically to that campus before he decided that other concerns outweighed such material benefits. He spoke to the researcher of “a four-year scholarship to Williamsport University in Ohio . . . but on getting there, some of the things that had been displayed as appealing were not available and so within a week’s time, I determined that was not the place for me. . . .” Concerning graduate school, Strickland would add, “I won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship in history and there were four institutions that were prominent in my mind.” He eventually settled upon the University of Wisconsin, one of these four.

Boswell Person received college money from a different source, as he confirmed after the interview: the G. I. Bill. During the interview, his stated rationale for his choice of institutions was as follows: “I got out of the military. I had been going to college a little while. I was in the military, and when I got out I started community college.” This respondent’s answers were typically the most indirect throughout the interview, often in a self-effacing manner; but it became clear from follow-up exchanges by telephone that Mr. Person equated his ability to advance his education with resources opened up by his military service.
In fact, all of the seven respondents implied that financial factors had influenced their educational choices, though two responses produced nothing that could be reliably coded for this category. Dwight Fennel and Mitchell Patton both answered that their choice of an undergraduate school (as opposed to graduate school, where Fennel received the scholarship noted above) was significantly affected by a pattern of college attendance in their family. The interview’s context suggested that affordability was implicated in these decisions of earlier generations. Yet the clearer category here, for clarity’s sake, was “family tradition.” In Fennel’s case, the family association was specifically with an HBCU; in Patton’s, it was with a religious denomination frequently supportive of HBCUs. Dr. Fennel was actually very emphatic about his family’s commitment to a certain denomination within the HBCU context:

I was brought up as an Episcopalian, and St. Augustine’s College was or is an Episcopalian college. . . . The selection was based purely and solely on that relationship. Prior to that, there was some discussion about Morehouse College in that my sister, who is older than I am, had attended Spellman College. The intent, as you can see, was always to attend an HBCU. The persons who were ahead of me who entered their collegiate careers had attended St. Augustine’s College, and it was almost like a pattern.

Like Dr. Fennel, Dr. Patton had an early allegiance based upon a long family association. Yet in Patton’s case, the allegiance was to a specific college rather than to several HBCUs embraced within one denomination. In his written response to the interview questions, he discussed the cherished connection:

In 1928 my grandfather moved his family from Nacogdoches, Texas, by wagon to Tyler, Texas, to give his children an opportunity to attend Texas College. Some time later, my father graduated and became a high school math instructor and a C.M.E. Church preacher. My mother also graduated from Texas College and taught elementary education for a number of years. For me, there was no choice [in the matter of selecting a college]. I graduated in 1961 during segregation time and was employed at a minority school.
The researcher notes, however, that the Patton family’s long-standing affiliation with Texas College was cemented by practical necessity at least as much as by favors extended to alumni. As Patton observed in other conversations, racial segregation left aspiring people like Dr. Patton’s grandfather with very few educational choices in the South. Indeed, Patton reflected in his written response with disappointment upon his own education at Texas College. “Looking back on my education, my undergraduate institution played a rather inadequate role in my educational preparation. My specific disadvantages occurred in my major field of concentration.” He then proceeded to list about a dozen areas of musical instruction in which he found his undergraduate training deficient. This part of his response anticipates the next question and will be referred to there; but it is also relevant in the present circumstances by way of suggesting that his family’s tradition was based on social factors more than on academic factors.

Only Sebetha Jenkins mentioned academic excellence as a primary reason for why she chose her undergraduate institution. Yet she also noted the importance of staying close to home: “I chose Jackson State [as an undergraduate institution] because it was nearby and had a reputation of preparing the best graduates in Mississippi.” The desirability of not traveling to a far-off campus may reflect an awareness of cost, but could not be coded as such from the data. Jenkins’ responses were written and exceptionally brief, and she proved difficult to contact for follow-up purposes, so little more can be said of her answer here than that she devoted the greatest number of words to praising her alma mater’s strong academic reputation.

As was noted above, Mitchell Patton stated that he later found the instruction in his major field—music—to have been not fully adequate at Texas College. Yet Dr. Patton
immediately went on to speak warmly of the same institution for the grounding which it
gave him in his faith and religious training. Other participants in the study gave similar
praise to undergraduate institutions for providing a spiritual framework. Yet strictly in
the context of the first question’s follow-up, Patton’s response has been coded as a
perception of having been impeded in his career by his undergraduate education. No
other participant offered an open critique of his or her undergraduate work. In fact, as
Table 2 shows below, replies to this question were generally affirmative.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Impact</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liability</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dwight Fennel particularly warmed to the topic. To compress his comments into
one key citation here would be impossible. The time he spent in both undergraduate and
graduate school was obviously a delightful and rewarding part of his life (causing him to
draw out this period of the interview so long that the researcher’s tape would later run out
of space during the final exchange). Haywood Strickland also had praise for his
educational preparation:

I think basically both [undergraduate and graduate school] were facilitative in my
professional advancement, whether it was going to be a president of an HBCU or
any other entity I chose. They certainly prepared me in terms of depth and breath
of material. They prepared me in terms of being able to communicate effectively.
They also both prepared me in terms of my interactions with other persons. And
so in a real sense, the whole issue of communication and networking and
understanding what would really make you successful in any administrative position were evident.

Billy Hawkins also retained a positive impression of his schooling, both undergraduate and graduate:

I would say those institutions played a significant role. Certainly the foundation that I received at Ferris State University . . . [was significant]. Great experience at Central Michigan University, and then Michigan State University . . . was a great experience. So all three of those experiences were positive and I would say that the administrative courses and the course work that I had at Central Michigan University as well as Michigan State University laid a great foundation for me to become... . . a president.

Hawkins stressed, as well, that he had attended predominantly white universities (even as an undergraduate, thanks to a football scholarship).

In the remaining cases, little could be done beyond coding a nuance, a dismissive phrase, or even a neglect of the question which allowed a previous impression to stand intact. Sebetha Jenkins’s comment about “Jackson State . . . [having] a reputation of preparing the best graduates in Mississippi,” for instance, was not qualified by any of her subsequent remarks, and hence appeared to be a positive view of her education’s influence on her later career.

Larry Earvin was scarcely more direct: “No. I don’t think I was disadvantaged by my undergraduate or graduate education.” A “not disadvantaged” vote might be interpreted as indifference as well as a vote in the “advantageous” column—and the researcher has so coded it, due to the response’s lukewarm nature. Nevertheless, the following related assertions in Earvin’s interview should be noted. He would insist much later that the religious aspect of campus life at the HBCU is “a critical part of the student’s development.” Since his own undergraduate education occurred at an HBCU (Clark Atlanta University), and since he would remain involved with HBCUs
professionally after leaving graduate school (“My world at that time was the HBCU world,” he remarked of his career just before accepting a presidency). Earvin had reaped at least a spiritual profit from his early student years. Still another subsequent remark about the presidency—“it takes qualifications beyond just earning a degree or advanced degree or two advanced degrees”—confirms that Larry Earvin would not have felt himself crippled in seeking high office just because his earlier education may have had certain academic weaknesses.

Boswell Person phrased his view of the question’s irrelevance very bluntly. “I don’t know that the college is [any] kind of a clue,” he said of the link between his higher education and his ascent to the presidency.

*Origins of Decision to Seek HBCU Presidency*

The second group of questions taken up during the interview dealt with the respondents’ personal decision to seek the presidency of an HBCU. The beginning and most obvious question, “At what point in your life did you decide that you wanted to be the president of an HBCU?” sometimes met with a certain amount of resistance or confusion. Several participants either did not recall this moment or else dismissed it as trivial in contributing to the actual steps eventually leading them to the office. The follow-up question, “Was this decision the result of a desire simply to be a president, or were you especially eager to serve as president at an HBCU?” tended to focus such responses by giving all the respondents a concrete choice: a widely held career ambition versus a more specific sense of mission.

The respondents were once again allowed to choose between two options beyond this point:
If the latter (i.e., if you specifically desired to serve at an HBCU), please explain why the HBCU held a special attraction for you. If, instead, your interest in the presidency was not tailored to any particular institutional type, please describe what you recall as attracting you to the office originally; and explain further if you serving at an HBCU has tended to help in fulfilling your expectations of the office or, in some way, has thwarted them.

The researcher had no substantial preconceptions about when the participants might first have conceived of striving after a college presidency, so he once again framed categories of response only after analyzing the data. Table 3 presents four categories. Little by way of coding was required to determine any answer’s proper categorization, for the issue was a straightforward one.

Table 3

*Time When Presidential Ambition First Conceived*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presidential Ambition</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Surprised” by Chance While Working in Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted While Deliberately Building Strong Résumé</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by Working Under a Strong President</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired Before First Academic Job (as a student)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boswell Person insisted that he could not recall a particular moment of decision regarding the presidency:

I had no idea about the HBCU presidency. It all began as a result of working in different places and meeting people and being helped along the way. I don’t know that the schools I attended had much to do with it. I didn’t go through a higher education program. . . . I started out as a junior high school teacher and then ended up going to graduate school in education—but it was in history and instructional development, which had little or nothing to do with higher education particularly.
Person added later, “I did have two experiences at HBCUs, but not in this capacity. I don’t know at what point I decided I wanted to be a president. I think it just happened.” Still later, in a kind of jocular apology, Person observed, “Now, a lot of people . . . they plan these things. I didn’t plan a thing. Should I have planned? I don’t know . . . but I didn’t, so that’s the way that goes at this point.”

Sebetha Jenkins occupies the far end of the spectrum from Boswell Person in many respects. She remained intensely focused on academics after exiting high school, and on preparing an academic career after leaving undergraduate for graduate school. Yet she resembles Person more than any of the other respondents in how suddenly she found herself vying for an HBCU presidency. “I was tapped for the job at Jarvis Christian College,” she wrote. “I was contacted. I had never envisioned being a college president. Nonetheless, I was serving my third stint as an assistant when I was contacted by officials and the search committee from Jarvis.” Jenkins’ “I was tapped” and Person’s “it just happened” are expressions of surprise when an opportunity they had made no effort to seek out opened up before them.

Haywood Strickland’s response was somewhat similar to the foregoing two, but ultimately reflects a different state of mind. Strickland did not convey that he felt any surprise when approached about a college presidency, but neither had he set out to chart a course which would one day take him there. Though he was rather abruptly contacted by an HBCU search committee, just as Jenkins and Person, he had held many significant administrative positions already by that time and was not taken aback.

I never decided I wanted to be the president of an HBCU. I did not set out to be a president of any college. I set out initially as I said to be a professor of history and that’s what I aspired to. A number of other administrative opportunities opened up to me, including directing federal programs at an undergraduate
school, going to work for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, working for the United Negro College Fund, and those prepared me again for presidency and I was called by a person that invited me to be president of an HBCU. So I did not set out—that was not one of the goals in my life. It never appeared on my résumé that I wanted to be a president of an HBCU.

Billy Hawkins also did not seek out a presidential position by actively applying to suitable openings, but rather was contacted due to the number and relevance of his experiences as an administrator. Yet Hawkins had frequently thought about being a president, and had consciously devoted himself to building a presidential résumé.

In terms of making a decision to be a college president, I think that probably came during the time I was serving as dean of education at Ferris State University. Started to kind of take a look at that level. Then once I’d become a vice president, Vice President of Academic Affairs at St. Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, Virginia . . . [I was] still thinking about it maybe down the road, and then . . . [I was] Vice President/Provost at Mississippi Valley State University. Still I didn’t pursue the presidency. I was pursued for the presidency . . . which has made it even better [in] that some folks saw some skills in me and saw that I was ready to become a president. So I didn’t really go after it and pursue becoming a president. That was something that was kind of out there in front of me that maybe one day that I would look at, a presidency.

Dwight Fennel was so strongly impressed as a young administrator by his college’s president that the seeds of seeking that high office were sown early in his academic career. Fennel explained,

[I] served with Prezell Robinson, who was my president as a student and later my collegial president . . . [Later] he became an ambassador to the United Nations during that seven-year period, and somewhere along that line he put me in charge at the institution as the president of record during that year working with the administrative team. I just loved it.

Larry Earvin first conceived the ambition of being a president even earlier—as an undergraduate. He answered succinctly about the moment of decision, “When I was an undergraduate student and I got a chance to work with the president of Clark College.” He did not name the chief executive who inspired him.
Mitchell Patton’s response had a certain ambiguity. Patton wrote,

After graduating from North Texas State University, I decided that some day I would return and offer my assistance in helping to make this [Texas College] an institution from which graduates will be able to compete with other college graduates. Becoming president of an HBCU had no significance to me.

The final remark, as Patton would later clarify in a follow-up conversation, is intended to mean that he wished to be a leader at Texas College, and nowhere else.

The researcher’s story line had not anticipated that approximately half of the respondents would have been contacted by HBCUs about a presidential opening rather than actively applying for such an opening. The follow-up question, “Was this decision [to seek a presidency] the result of a desire simply to be a president, or were you especially eager to serve as president at an HBCU?” was wholly irrelevant to the two respondents who were “tapped” by HBCUs while working in administration, since it was the college that did the seeking out in their case. One of these two participants, however—Sebetha Jenkins—later expressed such a special interest in Jarvis Christian College as an HBCU that her comments should be stressed to register a distinct attraction to that class of institution rather than to the office of president generally. “I knew it was an opportunity for me to help someone in a most significant way,” Jenkins wrote of accepting the Jarvis presidency. “I also knew at that point that I wanted to be the president of those young scholars. In fact, I had never really considered the interview a serious one until I met the scholars and saw all the potential.” This final remark virtually declares that Jenkins had little original intent of accepting an offer, if one were made; her mind was changed only when, during her campus visit, she saw the HBCU in full context.
Of the three participants who conceived the notion of being a college president as a result of working with or studying under a strong executive, Larry Earvin clearly had an HBCU in mind all along. His remark, “My world at that time was the HBCU world,” has already been cited. Earvin continued, “I had not even considered the possibility of my being . . . a president [of a mainstream institution]. . . . It was in the context of the HBCU that I had that desire.”

Dwight Fennel reached the same point, but far more gradually. Though he had mused about being a president some day, the course of his administrative career suddenly dropped him into that very position at an HBCU where he was already serving as vice president.

Having been at a majority institution, I wanted to experience an HBCU to work in. So after completing the doctorate, I had three job offers . . . two at majorities [predominantly white institutions], the other at my alma mater [St. Augustine’s College]. And it was without question I was going back to my alma mater. And I went there as a history instructor. Within . . . the fourth year, I became a tenured faculty member. Also within the fourth year, I was invited to become an administrator, Dean of Students. The Dean of Students turned into a position of Vice President for Academic Affairs, and I stayed there seven years as Academic Affairs VP. . . . It was then I started thinking about the presidency. Served with Prezell Robinson, who was my president as a student and later my collegiate president. . . . He became an ambassador to the United Nations during that seven-year period, and somewhere along the line he put me in charge at the institution as the president of record during that year, working with the administrative team. I just loved it. I thought it was great, but I wasn’t really experiencing what it was like to be a president. I didn’t know that. As I think about it, it probably raised more ambition and interest. . . .

Though Fennel acknowledged that being interim president slightly distorted his view of how enjoyable the office was, this lesson of sober experience could not have altered his initial resolve to be an HBCU president, for he would not yet have had such experiences as a younger man.
Mitchell Patton had suffered through some of the same sobering lessons—and he described their content more precisely than did Fennel. “Serving as president was one [of the most], if not the most demoralizing experience I’ve had,” wrote Patton. “The board felt that this was their school, and no agency or anyone could impose sanctions on their school.” Yet, once again, this sad reflection comes after the fact: as a younger man, Patton was indeed interested only in being president of an HBCU—specifically of Texas College, as he declared in a previous citation: “I decided that some day I would return and offer my assistance in helping to make this [Texas College] an institution from which graduates will be able to compete with other college graduates.”

Haywood Strickland was one of two respondents who was not actively seeking a presidential position when contacted by an HBCU yet was consciously building his résumé in that direction. Strickland answered that his sights were set upon an HBCU, even though he had not expected his goal to be so near:

If I were going to be a president, then I wanted to be president of an HBCU only because of what my undergraduate experience was. The fact that Stillman [College] did so much for me . . . it empowered me in a significant way to move on both in education and in my professional experiences. And so that led me to the fact that if a president became available, then that would be the one I’d choose. I wanted to give back to the historical black college some of what it had tried to give to me.

Billy Hawkins was the other the participant who applied himself consciously to building a presidential résumé but was contacted by an HBCU before he could actively begin making application. Hawkins was an administrator at Ferris State University (a mainstream institution) when contacted by Texas College; he had long been considering the presidential office as a career step. Would he have preferred to apply to HBCUs once he felt that the time was right, or was his interest in any sort of presidency?
... one of my mentors encouraged me to look at HBCUs and even said to me that I should not give all of my talents to historically white institution—that I really should look at HBCUs. This individual thought that I had something to give to HBCUs. ... I love the mission of HBCUs. I think what they stand for in our African American community is very positive, and I think my mentor is right that I’m giving back ... to the community in working at an HBCU which I really love.

The mentor in question had exchanged these thoughts with Hawkins before Texas College probed his interest, so it is reasonable to conclude that Hawkins was particularly, if not exclusively, interested in seeking the highest office at such an institution. Hawkins stressed just after these comments that he felt uniquely rewarded. “You don’t have all the money in the world,” he joked about his position, but added, “I’m a doer—student-oriented—so I feel that this has been my calling to serve as president at an HBCU.”

Of the five participants who had given significant forethought to being a college president before the opportunity actually arrived, then, every one may be judged to have had service at an HBCU particularly in mind.

The final question in this group began, “If the latter (i.e., if you specifically desired to serve at an HBCU), please explain why the HBCU held a special attraction for you.” This beginning option turned out to be the only one applicable to any of the participants. No respondents who had previously answered that reaching the office was itself more important than where it was reached.

In fact, Billy Hawkins’s concluding comments about why his thoughts were tending toward an HBCU—cited just above—expressed a response to this question often repeated by other participants in one form or another. The rewards of leading an intensely “student-centered” institution caused candidates like Hawkins to sense a “calling” to the job or a special opportunity to serve others through the job.
So for Mitchell Patton, his frustration with Texas College’s board did not affect his dedication to the school’s religious mission. He had praised the college’s spiritual impact on him as an undergraduate, and he later asserted that “religion was the dominant reason” behind his accepting the presidency, “along with my leadership role in the church.” It is clear that Patton viewed his presidential work as an extension of his ministerial work; for he had said, as well, that simply being president “had no significance for me.”

Sebetha Jenkins responded similarly. She had not taken her interview on the campus of Jarvis Christian College very seriously until she began to interact with the students, to whom she referred often as “scholars.” The opportunity to participate very directly in the formation of their minds transformed her attitude toward the opening at Jarvis. “I enjoy the thrills of molding the minds and hopes of young brothers and sisters,” she wrote.

Larry Earvin offered perhaps the most eloquent statement of this rationale for serving at the HBCU:

The mission of the HBCU—being able to reach out to the students who wouldn’t have opportunities otherwise: students who are at the margin of society that wouldn’t have an opportunity for higher education. At the time when I was going to school, HBCUs got the cream of the crop. As I continued to progress, I was seeing a change in that the quality of the students going to HBCUs was not quite the same as what had been the case when I was an undergraduate. So that made the case even more compelling to work at an institution that I know has the capacity to provide a solid preparation for undergraduate students.

Haywood Strickland had previously declared that he had sought out an HBCU presidency because of what Stillman College had done for him as an undergraduate. In the same citation, he had continued, “It [Stillman] empowered me in a significant way to
move on both in education and in my professional experiences.” The profit he received from his HBCU education was one he wished to pass along to the next generation.

As Dwight Fennel had described his increasing interest in HBCUs—an interest which guided him to one such campus as a young history professor—he drifted into a lengthy discussion of how one such institution had saved him from a dismal present and a bleak future. The following retrospective was offered by way of illustrating the sort of situation which he viewed his HBCU’s students as escaping:

As a matter of fact, when I was counseled in high school by a white high school counselor, I was not even encouraged to go to college. My counselor told me I should go to the military. She thought I could be a good serviceman. Never said anything about a good leader, but a good serviceman. So that was the environment that I lived in. And even in high school . . . I worked on Miami Beach at night. I used to wash dishes at some of the hotels Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. It was a segregated environment in that, if police officials would catch you on the beach—we had to go to work at five [p.m.], get off at three [a.m.]—but if they caught you, they’d put you in jail. So we would have to hide under bridges and things of that sort until we could get a ride home or get picked up. And so I always thought that, gosh, maybe this thing about college would just get me out of Miami. I enjoyed playing in the band because it was a sense of freedom.

Fennel followed this passage by remarking, “So I grew up in an environment where I saw a number of people go to college but very few people finish.” The prospect of such low expectations and rare successes clearly affected him, and he was eager to change it. Indeed, he would later say of the HBCU presidency’s special mission, “It’s almost like being a pastor.”

Only Boswell Person had nothing even implicit to offer as a reason for why he was serving as an HBCU president, in particular. Person was not very responsive to this part of the interview, however, and the conclusion is not warranted that the “service” motive noted of the other participants was absent in him. On the contrary, he would later
describe the great pleasure he took in helping out financially a deserving but impoverished student: “Certainly if they [the students] are first generation, none of their immediate family had been [to college], and I found that it was just almost euphoric to help a person or help persons in that kind of situation.” Such a declaration comes short of clearly suggesting a motive for seeking the presidency at an HBCU—but Person was certainly moved by the impoverished condition of many HBCU students, whether or not such feelings influenced his seeking the presidency.

Other than Person’s response, then, there was a clear tendency for participants to answer the question, “Why president of an HBCU?” by emphasizing service to the HBCU’s target audience or performance of a high duty or mission rather than simply climbing up the next rung of a professional career.

*Most Influential Figure in Career*

The third group of questions was the most brief. “If you had to single out one individual for influencing your decision to become a college president, who would it be? What was the nature of this person’s special influence?” A few responses were also quite brief, including the claim of one respondent that nobody at all was a major influence on his presidential career. The researcher had anticipated that many would volunteer a president under whose leadership they had pursued meaningful experiences as a student or a young professional, and this often turned out to be the case. Still other respondents, however, went very far back into their past to retrieve a figure who had changed their lives.

Besides a mentoring administrative colleague or superior, then, the researcher created two categories after analyzing the data: a figure from the days of childhood or
adolescence (always a teacher or family member) and an instructor or other mentoring adult from the respondent’s college days. Coding responses for one of these three categories was relatively straightforward. The only real complication was that respondents sometimes offered one kind of answer in direct reply to the question, and then mentioned another person later in the interview who was clearly a major influence, as well. Such additions to the list were sometimes made explicitly, with respondents announcing that they wished to mention one more influence. As a result, Table 4, which presents both the categories and the number of responses under each, tallies to 10 answers.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Influence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood teacher or family member</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Instructor or Mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Colleague or Superior</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Influence of Significance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mitchell Patton, Immediate Past President of Texas College, answered the question about influence in his written response very simply: “No one.” Boswell Person, whose answers were typically very terse, seemed to be following suit with Patton when he first responded to this question:

I don’t have anyone who influenced me to become president. As I said earlier, it just unfolded for me. It was not predetermined or anything like that. I just started working and ended up ultimately getting a chance to be president twice, and this is the third time.
This answer accorded fully with his earlier declaration that the presidential office “just happened” to come along in his life. Later on, however, he confided an impressive list of names belonging to mentors who clearly helped to shape his path:

I first had a deanship in California with a fellow named Warren Sorenson, who may in some way have had some impact on my at least thinking about it [the presidency]. I don’t know that it was a real conscious effort. And then secondly I served as dean under a fellow by the name of Abel Sikes who may have had some influence, particularly in terms of his integrity... and then later under another president in Texas. But the people who influenced me in any direction were my early school teachers more than anything else. Now was that in the direction of president? I can’t say. I don’t know... but certainly in a direction to try to do better if that makes for some influence in this direction. That’s fine, but as I said earlier, there was no blueprint. I had no blueprint whatever in terms of seeking the presidency.

Person’s answer in afterthought ended up being among the more expansive offered by the seven participants. Since such elaboration was very rare in his interview, the researcher weighted the unusual enthusiasm behind this second response as meaningful, and coded as important influences both the presidents under whom he served as an administrator and the teachers he knew in childhood. Patton assented to this interpretation of the noted figures as significant when questioned later by e-mail.

Dwight Fennel’s answer verged upon Person’s in that he first named an administrator in higher education, and then thought to include someone who provided a much more personal kind of support. He did not hesitate to credit Prezell Robinson, under whom he had worked at Florida Atlantic University, as his major influence in developing into a college president. His key formative experience, he said, was “serving in an administration in the office of Vice President for Academic Affairs [and] being around... Prezell Robinson, who was considered to be the dean of presidents at the time.” Like Person, however, Fennel had an afterthought concerning his career’s
complexity. He thereupon included his wife in the list of influences, recognizing the unique nurturing she had brought to his professional development:

Probably my relationship with my wife in terms of valuing her opinion [was a major influence]. Not looking at the educators or the presidents and things of that sort, but valuing . . . she knows me. They don’t. They know who my credentials say that I am. She knows my abilities. She knows my strengths, my weaknesses. In a presidency, when you accept a presidency, it’s almost like being a pastor: you’re “it” on a given day. You’re “it” seven days a week, 24 hours a day, good and bad. And so it’s knowing that you’ve got the support of family, because I have experienced the hard times. . . .

Billy Hawkins, too, offered first an administrator whom he encountered as a rising professional, then quite a different sort of figure from his youth. The academic was Dr. Don Coles:

I would say that he’s been a president for close to 18 years, and I’ve kind of watched his career path and we’ve worked together at one point in time when he was vice president in New York, when we both were working in the state university system in New York.

For the other influence, he reached back into his high school years:

Dr. Michael Neal . . . was my mentor back when I was in high school and all the way through today. . . . [He is] a national motivational speaker, probably one of the finest leaders in the country and probably one of the top educators ever to come through the K-12 system as an administrative teacher and superintendent.

There were no other respondents who mentioned figures of this intimacy in their lives. On the other hand, all of the remaining three named as a major influence some high-ranking administrator who assisted them after they were already launched in their profession. Larry Earvin repeated one name often in his interview: “The first institution [I attended as an undergraduate] was an HBCU, and I was impressed by the leadership of the president at that time, Vivian Henderson.” Sebetha Jenkins referred to the help she received in very specific circumstances surrounding her accepting the position at Jarvis Christian College: “The one person who assisted me most in preparation for the
interview, negotiating a contract, and accepting the position was Dr. William Muse, former President of The University of Akron.” Haywood Strickland did not single out one particular figure, but plainly had in mind assistance of this same sort.

I knew a lot of other college presidents. I’ve been around them all my career. Many of them were outstanding persons and I have often said . . . if I were going to be a president, here are some traits I might borrow from these individuals. And so in that sense I had a wider kind of undergirding than many people becoming a president, because I was affiliated [with] and talking to a wide gamut of presidents from my experiences with accreditation agencies, from my experiences with the U.S. Department of Education, from my experiences with the United Negro College Fund—and so those kinds of things made me more available and more knowledgeable about the things it would take to really make a college run.

Concerning the nature of the significant figure’s influence (the follow-up question), this was fairly obvious in most cases. Table 5 has categorized the types of influence into four, with the number of responses exceeding the number of respondents, once again, due to the question’s having drawn more than one answer in some cases.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Influence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped with Application for Specific Opening</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided Moral Support</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated in Academic Context</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided Instructive Professional Example</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sebetha Jenkins’ mentor, William Muse, had helped her to navigate particular difficulties in her application for a particular presidential opening.
The remaining influences were more general in nature. Dwight Fennel’s wife was unconnected with academe or, indeed, with his formal educational experience; her support was in the sphere of moral support, giving him confidence in difficult or confusing situations.

Boswell Person’s “early school teachers” may have lent such support, but it appeared in an early academic setting. He recognized that what they imparted to him went beyond mere book-learning: “Now was that [the mentoring of school teachers] in the direction of president? I can’t say. I don’t know . . . but certainly in a direction to try to do better if that makes for some influence in this direction.” In a word, he drew motivation from his earlier instructors.

Billy Hawkins’s Michael Neal was also “a national motivational speaker.” For the purposes of categorizing responses, Dr. Neal resembles Larry Earvin’s Vivian Henderson. Earvin was an undergraduate when Dr. Henderson entered his life, and hence nearer to a high school student in his development than to a professional administrator. Though Henderson would indeed inspire him to become an HBCU president as the years passed, this was precisely because Earvin would never forget how Henderson had motivated him at a critical stage in his youth.

All of the remaining figures—Fennel’s Prezell Robinson, Hawkins’s Don Coles, the presidents under whom Person served as an administrator, and the many college presidents whom Haywood Strickland came to know in his professional capacity—are mentoring or modeling relationships.
Significant Qualities and Formative Experiences

The fourth group of questions sought to focus the study’s participants upon the “essence” of their successful ascent to the HBCU presidency by drawing from them: a) a statement of the most important quality needed in someone aspiring to their office, and b) a particular experience which was especially valuable in shaping their career path. “If you had to single out one personal quality for playing a prominent role in your decision to seek a college presidency, what quality would it be? Similarly, please relate a single experience that stands out in your mind more than any other as having affected your decision to pursue a college presidency.”

Whether because the question was vague or because the respondents preferred dealing either in abstractions or practical examples—not both at once—the fourth question met with a diverse and partial response. Those participants who volunteered an ideal presidential quality tended to do so in the context of a sitting president rather than a presidential candidate. This presumption was probably of little consequence, for it could be argued that a presidential search committee would naturally look for already presidential qualities in an applicant—that, indeed, to expect a gap between the applicant’s and the appointee’s qualities would be rather cynical. Still other respondents wished to answer by means of illustration, an approach which sometimes veered into the requested example of an influential personal experience and made coding extremely difficult.

The researcher had not preconceived any categories of likely response regarding the most important presidential quality and could find no objective criterion, in any event, for narrowing the wide spectrum of data gathered. He has therefore simply presented the
responses in Table 6 under categories of the respondents’ own wording. Two respondents offered no clear answer at all to the question, one proposed two essential qualities, and among the others no immediately apparent and clearly verifiable agreement was present.

Table 6

Single Most Important Quality in a President

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Most Important Quality</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Mold Youth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of Experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic Initiative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Excellence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Communicate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sebetha Jenkins melded the two questions of this group into one. Her entire answer to this section has already been cited elsewhere: she wrote that she enjoyed “the thrills of molding the minds and hopes of young brothers and sisters,” and she described the uplifting experience of meeting the student body at Jarvis Christian College during her interview. The meeting left her keenly aware that here “was an opportunity for me to help someone in a most significant way.” The first sentence of this answer does not plainly state a single quality in the form of an abstract noun; it proclaims Jenkins’s pleasure in guiding inquisitive, open minds. That this is indeed intended to describe a
quality, however, is strongly implied both by the respondent’s clear numbering of her written answers and by the fact that the “minds and hopes” remark is not actually part of the narrative involving the visit to Jarvis’s campus; for Jenkins was not molding minds on that occasion, but only observing. The campus visit awakened her to the “opportunity” (her own word) to play a central role in the development of these minds.

Mitchell Patton’s written answers were also clearly numbered. He offered no elaboration to this question, but simply wrote, “Persistence,” in the space for the college president’s most needed quality.

Larry Earvin’s most important presidential quality reflected the mistrust of ivory-tower insulation which often appeared in his interview:

I guess it would be experience in a variety of areas of operation in higher education. I think to be an effective president you don’t need to have come up [through the academic ranks]; you need to have experienced fundraising and teaching and research and student affairs so that you can be important in all of those areas of operation.

The contrast here is between climbing a career ladder exclusively within a campus context versus participating in the broader world (for instance, as a business executive). Earvin’s most desired quality emphasizes breadth of exposure to various facts and affairs over an innate quality of character or personality.

Billy Hawkins described the most important presidential quality by referring to his own practice within the highest executive office.

I think the first question is in terms of . . . playing a prominent role. I’ve always been a doer . . . and I’ve always been one to accept a challenge. This presidency at Texas College was certainly a challenge . . . with the student enrollment and all the financial problems the institution had. I’ve always been a driven person, [one] to take on challenges and . . . win in the end.
These words were Hawkins’s direct and explicit response to the question, deprived though they are of generality. The researcher determined that the “doing” state of mind corresponds to what would commonly be called “energy” or “initiative”—or perhaps to both words together, better still: “energetic initiative.”

Finally, Dr. Strickland’s choice of the most important quality for a president to possess was presented as follows:

I think the personal quality that you need more than anything else is a commitment to excellence. If you take a college no matter where you find it in terms of economic [health] or status . . . in the higher education community, your commitment ought to be to make it the very best it can be. And you do not come to a presidency if you’re not committed to spending the time, effort, and energy to ensure that it will be the very best institution that it could be.

Upon reflection, Dr. Strickland wanted to extend this answer.

Let me say a second quality I think you need to have if you’re going to seek a presidency is the ability to communicate and have strong interpersonal relations. You’ve got to be able to understand and know the persons you’re affected by—both your alumni, your students, your board or whatever your affiliation is, whether it’s state or whether it’s church.

Boswell Person declined to give a response. “Well again, that’s a difficult question for me because none of this was planned,” he protested. “It just happened.” Yet alone of all the participants, Person had chosen to focus on the qualities of a presidential candidate; and, since he had never been a candidate, he declined to answer.

Dwight Fennel neglected to mention the most important presidential quality in the course of an answer but became preoccupied with the most important experience.

The follow-up question about a significant formative experience along the presidential pathway was also bypassed by several participants. Having spoken at some length about the most important presidential quality, Haywood Strickland declined to volunteer a particular personal experience as being important in shaping his career path to
the HBCU presidency. Mitchell Patton’s written response skipped this part of the question; and Dwight Fennel, while not evading the question, stated that he could not answer it with any specificity. He responded, “Probably no one [experience], because from the time I really wanted to be a president, when I was at St. Augustine’s, to the time I actually became one, I probably had more concern about did I really want to do it.”

Four responses, therefore, remained. The researcher was able to categorize them after analysis into one of two groups, as shown below in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important Formative Experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observing/rewarding Eagerness and Potential in Students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing Executive Triumphs/failures</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sebetha Jenkins had merged both parts of the fourth question, more or less, in recommending the “thrill of molding minds and hopes” as an emotion highly desirable in college presidents and in describing one such thrill in her experience. Her attitude toward a job opening was transformed “when I met the young scholars at Jarvis . . . I had never really considered the interview a serious one until I met the scholars and saw all the potentials.”

Though Boswell Person had explained why he thought the question’s first part to be irrelevant to him, he did recall what he considered to be an important formative experience in his evolving attitude toward the presidency. “I think perhaps being able to
assist or help those who perhaps had not had an opportunity in education,” he said in

explanation of what made the HBCU presidency special. He went on:

Give you an example: first presidency I had, I worked with young people who for
the most part were . . . first-generation students, some of whom had never been in
a college. Certainly if they’re first generation, none of their immediate family had
been, and I found that it was just almost euphoric to help a person or help persons
in that kind of situation. One person who particularly comes to mind is a young
fellow who lived with his grandmother [and] who didn’t have tuition, and had
come [to me] and asked, is there any way he could attend school? And I in turn
told the bursar to defer his tuition, and if he didn’t pay, I would pay.

This response and Jenkins’ both obviously portrayed incidents of observing and

rewarding eager students with strong potential, and they were so coded.

Larry Earvin’s choice of most important experience emphasized a varied exposure
to management skills. What he presented, in fact, was actually a kind of experience
generalized from many particular encounters:

Just watching how chief executives—CEO’s—have responded to issues,
particularly crisis issues or issues of communication with their faculties, and just
thinking that I would be more open and be able to do hopefully a better job at it
[was instructive].

Similarly, Billy Hawkins, after some reflection, at last contented himself with
citing a great many professional encounters condensed into a certain type.

I really can’t think of any single experience per se other than the great experiences
that I’ve had as Vice President for Academic Affairs. . . . I would say my
experience at St. Paul’s College as Vice President of Academic Affairs and my
experience as provost. . . . That . . . private institution and my experience at a
state-supported historically black college at Mississippi Valley State University
would be the two that I would say . . . helped me to make the decision; and
working with the president that I worked at these two institutions—as close as I
worked with them . . . probably inspired me to pursue the college presidency.

The answers of Earvin and Hawkins were both coded as observations of executive

triumphs and failures that left a deep impression upon them as they considered future
career moves.
Religion and the HBCU Career Path

The researcher had anticipated that religion and race would be very revealing categories in his discussions with the study’s seven participants. All HBCUs within the researcher’s experience, and certainly the five in Texas, are affiliated with Protestant Christian denominations, and have also been—of course—traditionally attended by African Americans. Questions about these two critical and defining areas were left for the end of the interview so that the respondents would have time to relax, become comfortable with the interviewer, and prime their memories by discussing other subjects. Not surprisingly, the answers in these final two designated categories tended to be the most expansive and insightful.

The fifth group of questions on the questionnaire begins, “Most small private colleges have a religious affiliation. Did the religious dimension of the HBCU, which you now lead or have led as president, affect in any way your decision to seek its presidency? If so, how?” The topic would be broadened after this discussion of the current presidential appointment to include earlier decisions in the respondent’s professional training. “Did religion have any impact upon your initial choices to seek leadership roles in education? If so, what was its effect?” Finally, the most speculative question would ask the respondent to move outside of his or her particular experiences and comment upon the efficacy of the religious presence on the HBCU campus. “Looking back upon years of such leadership, would you say in general that religious life is important to your institution’s mission or that, on the contrary, it distracts from the crucial labor of preparing minority students for a highly competitive world?”
The first of the preceding questions, “Did the religious dimension of the HBCU which you now lead or have led as president affect in any way your decision to seek its presidency?” essentially called for an affirmative or negative answer. The follow-up question concerning how religion affected the decision to seek an HBCU presidency (or in what way it did not affect that decision, by implication) was naturally answered as the respondents explained their “yes” or “no” replies. The researcher therefore analyzed both of these questions together. The task had been approached with certain assumptions. In particular, aware of the HBCU’s extraordinary demands upon a chief administrator, the researcher had anticipated that two or three respondents might connect the opportunity to serve society with a religious mission. Instead, most of the responses, both positive and negative, assumed that the question was probing fidelity to a certain denomination. Three categories of answer resulted: an affirmation that the school’s specific denomination had influenced hiring, a denial that it had done so, and—as anticipated—an affirmation that the HBCU mission appealed to the respondent’s religious principles. (Logic dictates that a fourth category should exist, but no participant answered that he or she had no religious principles corresponding to the HBCU mission.) Table 8 presents these categories and the number of responses within them.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion as Influence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes-Hired for Denominational Reasons</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-Not Hired for Denominational Reasons</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes-Called to Serve as Educator</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mitchell Patton’s written response very directly acknowledged the importance of denomination in his hiring. “I followed about five or six CME Methodist presidents, which said to me what the search committee was looking for. Religion was the dominant reason [for my being hired] along with my leadership role in the church.” An ordained Christian Methodist Episcopal minister, Patton was observing the apparent fact that he represented the kind of candidate traditionally successful in seeking Texas College’s presidency. He was not asserting that he would not have applied to a college with a different denominational affiliation—only that he was a “good fit” in this instance.

There were four respondents who also understood the question as asking whether or not denomination was a deciding factor in their employment as president—but who answered in the negative. Sebetha Jenkins wrote, “Jarvis is in covenant with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but that relationship did not influence my decision to be a president.” To Jenkins, strict allegiance to one denomination and acceptance of an HBCU presidency were unrelated issues.

Larry Earvin responded very similarly:

Oddly enough, no. Even though the institution where I worked prior to coming here was a United Methodist institution. I am United Methodist, and the institution where I serve as president is also affiliated with the United Methodist Church. That was not a determining factor.

Boswell Person apparently had the same relationship—denomination and selection to preside over a college of that denomination—in mind. It is impossible to affirm this on the basis of his first answer: “It didn’t have anything to do with it at all.” Once Person was invited to discuss the role of religion throughout his career, however, he became expansive enough to allow this blunt denial to be coded for context:
I don’t think so. I don’t know for sure but I don’t think so. I spent some time in graduate school at a professional seminary, but I don’t think that had much to do with ultimately what happened to me. Could have, but I didn’t plan it for sure.

By mentioning his time in a seminary, Person revealed that this period was part of his public record and would have been known to prospective employers. His statement above, then, simply asserts that he believed his seminary time to have been of little or no significance to his HBCU employers.

Dwight Fennel became involved in discussing other aspects of the question and returned to the opening query only in afterthought. His answer was therefore somewhat less focused than several others, but had a very similar logical thrust.

The school that I was at wasn’t a religiously affiliated school. It was African Methodist Episcopal College or AME. A small institution. It was less than a thousand students. When I went into office, we had 500 students. When I left office we had 996. That year our goal was to get 1,000 students and we fell a few students short of that.

It may seem contradictory that Fennel should have proceeded to declare the school’s religious affiliation just after announcing that it had none; but AME schools are considered interdenominational, as their name proclaims, and hence not narrowly affiliated. Fennel would in fact emphasize the AME Church’s ecumenical tradition in his longer, more detailed discussion of religious issues; for he was clearly upset that the trustees had not, in his view, honored the institution’s healthy commitment to widespread religious tolerance, and his stress of the student body’s growth was leading up to the claim that his tolerance had nourished that growth.

The researcher has therefore coded Fennel’s response to resemble that of Jenkins, Earvin, and Person, i.e., that he was not hired for denominational reasons.
The remaining two participants took the discussion more in the direction of a religious calling. Haywood Strickland began by reviewing denominational issues, but he quickly moved on to emphasizing his sense of personal mission in the HBCU’s highest office:

Let me just say that I’m a Presbyterian and the college I attended as an undergraduate was Presbyterian, and so if it [being hired as president] was denominational obviously I would have gone more for a Presbyterian college—but it’s not denomination. I certainly think that the concept of a church-related college was important to me. If I were going to be a president, I wanted to be a president of one that was church-related because . . . it gave me the opportunity to infuse in the students that we serve the concept of the head and the spirit—that both the mental capacity to deal with issues and the intellectual and the spiritual or internal ability to deal with those issues were important to me. And so if I were going to seek a presidency, I would have sought one that had this religious or church-related underpinning towards the educational process.

Billy Hawkins bestowed upon religion a similar role in affecting his decision to serve as president.

. . . I would say certainly—being a Christian as I am, certainly it was appealing to know that I would be working at an institution that has that religious affiliation, and given the fact . . . that most small private HBCUs have some connection to religions . . . certainly that was appealing to me. . . . From a private standpoint, you have more control in terms of whether you’re able to have [something] like what we have as mandatory chapel at Texas College, and that we are able to worship and to be able to show our religious beliefs as a Christian institution.

Both Hawkins and Strickland viewed the real issue as going beyond the expectations of a search committee or a board. They viewed their institutions’ religious affiliation as an opportunity to fulfill their higher ambitions as educators.

The next question also contained a follow-up invitation to elaborate, and this pair was likewise analyzed as a unit due to the very close logical connection of its parts. The two questions were, “Did religion have any impact upon your initial choices to seek leadership roles in education? If so, what was its effect?”
To several of the respondents, these questions merged with the previous pair to become the single issue of whether or not they had pursued professional associations with a school of a certain religious denomination. Table 9 therefore shows categories of response very similar to those used in Table 8. These categories again involve varieties of affirmation and negation: yes, denomination influenced career choices; no, denomination did not influence career choices; yes, a sense of religious mission influenced career choices; and an unexplained negative (significantly, not a “no” based on indifference to a sense of religious mission). The high number of abstentions is due to the tendency in these exchanges for responses to confuse the distinctions between related questions, so that coding for specific answers sometimes became impossible.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion as Influence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes-Chose to Work in One Denomination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-Work Choices Not Related to Denomination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes-Called to Serve as Educator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (Reason Not Given)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, it was necessary above to cite Boswell Person’s answer to this pair of questions before his previous negative could be coded. Person’s reference to his seminary days, followed by his assertion that they probably had no impact upon his career, simply extended the position which was ascribed to him about the Paul Quinn
presidency. He did not believe that religion, as an item on his résumé or a facet of his public life, had anything to do with the jobs he had received in academe or his decision to seek them.

The two written responses, like Person’s, were previously cited by way of clarifying brief initial answers. Both Sebetha Jenkins and Mitchell Patton indicated by numbering that they intended their paragraphs to cover the entire range of questions in the fifth group. Nevertheless, since Sebetha Jenkins supplied no direct reference to any other leadership position except the presidency of Jarvis Christian College in this section of her document, the researcher has tabulated her answer as a non-response; for the question’s phrase, “your initial choices to seek leadership roles in education,” aims beyond the current HBCU position. Mitchell Patton, on the other hand, plainly indicated by his document’s numbering system (which was more detailed than Jenkins’) that he meant to refer to the present question in the already cited sentence, “Religion was the dominant reason along with my leadership role in the church.” As was stated, he is an ordained minister, and it would indeed be surprising if religion had little impact on his professional choices. Patton’s complete paragraph made it very clear that service within the CME Church was the particular motive of the affected choices.

Of the verbal interviewees, only Billy Hawkins chose to dedicate a short discussion rather than a few words to the effect of religion on his other career decisions:

Religion was very, very prominent and dominant in my family, and so certainly I understood religion growing up as a child. In terms of seeking my role in education, I believe that God lead me to education and ... that I was a natural for it, and I haven’t regretted one day in 30 years in being in education. So I believe that God led me to that path, to the path of education.
This answer was a continuation of Hawkins’s first one, as well. It elaborated his view of education as a calling, thus coding his response as a forceful affirmation.

If several respondents had answered briefly, Larry Earvin found a way to be much the briefest. “No,” he said flatly when asked if religion had affected his career decisions. It is tempting to code this reply, too, as a continuation of Earvin’s very full explanation of his earlier negative, which simply reflected a relative unconcern for denomination in one of his major career choices. Given the absolutely minimal nature of his response, however, the researcher refrained from inferring his broader meaning.

Dwight Fennel and Haywood Strickland gave no answer at all to this question. The researcher detected in their responses no sign of evading the issue, but merely an eagerness to discuss the final question of the fifth group, where both would have much to say.

The last question in this series asked that respondents discuss the role of religion on their HBCU campus: “Looking back upon years of such leadership [as you have provided], would you say in general that religious life is important to your institution’s mission or that, on the contrary, it distracts from the crucial labor of preparing minority students for a highly competitive world?”

The researcher anticipated both that the question would draw a predominantly affirmative answer and that respondents would offer ample explanations for their answers. Both expectations were fulfilled. Indeed, only one respondent expressed reservations about the role religion had played on his campus—and he proceeded to offer reasons why religion when separated from a rigidly denominational structure (the source of his objections) was a positive influence.
The researcher therefore has chosen to categorize his findings in Table 10, not as affirmative and negative answers (for there was no significant body of opinion in the negative), but as alternative reasons for why religion benefits the HBCU campus. Four such categories emerged from the analysis of data. Responses totaled well over seven because several participants subscribed to more than one reason for viewing religion as a beneficial force on campus.

Table 10

*Nature of Religion’s Benefit to Campus Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Religion’s Benefit</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Strong Moral Value</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Sense of Higher Purpose</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring a More Tolerant Attitude</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Historical Mission</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the respondents were at their most eloquent here and volunteered more information than elsewhere in this section. Billy Hawkins, for instance, had much to say on the subject of religion and his HBCU campus:

This institution was founded by a group of Methodist ministers . . . so that has been a part of the culture of this institution for almost 112 years. . . . It has been good for this institution, more specifically for the young people who have attended this institution over 111 years, and still today religion plays a major part in this institution. . . . At the end of the day, I believe because this is a Christian institution, it [faith] is implanted into the minds of our young people and more so reinforced in chapel. . . . Therefore, those youngsters that have come to us from many different walks of life can leave here no matter what their religious backgrounds or religious emphasis may be . . . understand[ing] that there is a God. Being a religious institution . . . helps us to convey to them right and wrong, and it helps us to help them to mature into young adults and become productive citizens—more so than other institutions—when they go out into the labor market
because of the preparation of these minority students . . . It has helped them to become great citizens and to compete in a competitive world [while] having good morals and values, which we try very hard to get across to our young people here at Texas College.

In mentioning the importance of teaching students that “there is a God” and of “convey[ing] to them right and wrong,” Hawkins fused the sense of higher purpose with the sense of moral value (as would other respondents). In emphasizing the Methodist origins of Texas College, he acknowledged a duty to continue that historical mission. His lengthy response might almost have been coded for yet another category, for the reference to “the many different walks of life” from which students come to the College implies a tolerant attitude toward diverse faith traditions.

Larry Earvin spoke in completely compatible terms of how helpful his campus’s religious emphasis was in imparting productive social and moral values to the students:

It’s critical to the mission of the institution; and I think, given what has happened in higher education since the 60’s, when I was an undergraduate and we were trying to get rid of all religion requirements, we see now that need to emphasize our ties with church and spiritual formation as a part of the training the students receive in college. So it certainly doesn’t distract from it, and I think we’re coming to a point not only where college administrators and some faculty are asking for a stronger identity with spiritual formation, but we’re also getting it from students. I had a discussion with a young woman today: we talked about why chapel was mandatory. So that’s a critical part of students’ development.

Haywood Strickland sounded the same note in his strong endorsement of Wiley College’s religious mission:

Let me just emphatically say to you this church-relatedness is important to my college’s mission and that is important to the students that we serve. Again, if you look at the issues that have been affecting the world, the globe if you will—not the United States but throughout—it is a sense of a lack of . . . I don’t want to use “spirituality,” but a lack of caring and nurturing, understanding of what it takes to make this world a better place in which to live. And so the students that we graduate from Wiley or other institutions like this we hope have a greater concept of what it means to be responsible both to the environment and to the people who populate the world. So I think the concept of this religious life—
spirituality, commitment to social and other kind of ethical approaches—is very important to our students in a highly competitive world.

Strickland drew away from the word “spirituality” for some reason, and chose instead to urge the importance of “caring and nurturing.” His position could readily be coded as a concern for promoting moral values, but his language also verged on championing the cause of greater tolerance. In fact, his ensuing remarks stated the case for religious tolerance quite openly:

I don’t want to indicate that Christianity is the only religion important in this process. I think all religions could be important in this process as long as they teach the value of human life and the value of each individual’s responsibility in making this world again a better place in which to live.

Dwight Fennel would eventually use expressions very similar to these in his extensive discussion of the issue. First, however, he clarified an opinion shared by none of the other respondents—that religion had not been a productive influence on his campus. About the functioning of campus life at Paul Quinn College, he reflected:

The religious dimension didn’t necessarily hinder it, but it didn’t help it at all. The AME Church was a predominant church in this region, with over 300 churches. We didn’t receive the type of fiscal support that could have carried the institution. We received on average a hundred thousand dollars a year from the AME Church, which is not even one half of a payroll. . . . It seems that over time the religious dimension for the purpose of educating blacks had become thwarted in terms of current society needs, and so I dare say that the whole dimension—not just within the college setting but the role of religious institution in support of its people—changed, at least for our institution. It was not a predominant AME population. It was more of a mixed population, ecumenical in nature, and we tried to do some things of a religious order that were not denominationally related but were Christian-related . . . . If I had to say, I would say [religion impacted the campus] more negatively: it didn’t help me in terms of the resourceful needs that I had. And part of my leaving the presidency was a result of their [the AME Church’s] wanting to have more religious control but at the same time [give] less support fiscal support in terms of stabilizing the institution.

Read closely, this statement is actually another presidential endorsement of the benefits of religious ecumenism on the HBCU campus. Fennel was not really criticizing religious
influence in abstract at all: he was criticizing the particular kind of influence which his
institution’s trustees chose to exert through their narrow understanding of the AME
mission. His objection, in other words, was not to the religious perspective, but what was
done at Paul Quinn in the name of that perspective. When he declared, “we tried to do
some things of a religious order that were not denominationally related but were
Christian-related,” he revealed his own active support of the religious influence—broadly
interpreted—on campus. He did not state the particular nature of the “things” he tried to
do, but his entire position is unquestionably one of asserting tolerance over narrow-
mindedness.

If the trustees had hoped that Fennel’s successor would hold different views on
this subject, they in fact were treated to a continuation of the ecumenical approach.
Boswell Person, usually very reticent in his interview, was exceptionally outspoken on
the matter of what Fennel had called ecumenism. About the campus religious life, he
said:

I think it is critical, whether it’s in a Christian university or religious school or not. I think having some sense of it [life’s meaning] being beyond one’s self is
absolutely essential. Fundamental. I don’t know how one can get along without
that kind of sense of what’s outside of me doing all the things that I cannot do by myself.

Not only did Person embrace religious faiths even beyond Christianity; he also resumed
Billy Hawkins’s theme of how urgent is the “understanding that there is a God” to young
students. His response was a resonant example of category attributing religion’s benefits
to “fostering a sense of higher purpose.”

Sebetha Jenkins’ written comment was a one-sentence answer, yet it plainly
affirmed the importance of religion as an underpinning for morality. “I believe that,
given the influential worldly distractions [of today], a Christian college is vitally important to the development of good people."

As for the Reverend Patton’s response, it was ironically the only one to express concern neither over society’s weakening moral fiber nor over denominational rigidity. Patton’s only comments were about Texas College’s historical mission as a CME institution: “Religion was one of the reasons this college was founded. At the time this college was founded, minority youth could not attend majority schools.” Patton’s final remark alludes to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church’s historical mission to serve the oppressed population of African Americans composing its body of faithful. The undertaking was certainly of high moral value; Patton’s response has been coded as an endorsement of continuing a historical mission, however, since his words directly call for such an assessment.

*Race and the HBCU Career Path*

The final series of formal questions in each interview addressed various aspects of race as a factor in seeking the HBCU presidency. The first question asked, “As the president or former president of an HBCU, would you say that your race or ethnicity had a significant impact on your decision to seek the presidency of such a school?” The follow-up questions continued, “If so, please describe the influence. If not, have you decided in retrospect that race or ethnicity may have been a more important aspect of your application than you realized?” The researcher’s intent here was to determine whether the respondent was to some extent motivated in his or her career choices by an ambition to serve the African American community, and also whether the search committee or trustees involved may have expected applicants to be African American.
The last two questions moved from probing the respondents’ perception of professional realities to probing the moral substance of those realities. “From an opposing angle, do you think that an institution like yours should consider race or ethnicity in reviewing candidates for critical administrative positions? If you could hand-pick your replacement as president, would you take such factors into consideration? Please explain.” The invitation to hand-pick a successor was intended to serve as a more concrete way of bringing personal value judgments into the discussion. It was vaguely similar in nature to an earlier question about the most important quality (in the respondent’s view) for an HBCU presidential candidate to possess. In the context of race, however, it became a different question, as was also intended and as most participants understood.

To begin with, the response on whether or not racial issues partially motivated the respondent to seek an HBCU presidency was regrettably ill-focused. The researcher had anticipated that many participants would declare a racial identification with the HBCU social mission as a positive, even magnetic influence in drawing them to a presidency. In fact, most of the participants chose to focus their response on the motives of those who had employed them or declined to employ them (a matter addressed by the ensuing question) rather than on their own motives in seeking high office at an HBCU.

In his search for a meaningful manner to categorize such diffuse data, the researcher started from one solid fact: most responses were affirmative on the general issue of whether or not race had influenced hiring procedures. Only Sebatha Jenkins denied the proposition that racial factors had figured in her hiring. “I do not believe that my race impacted the Board’s decision to hire me,” she wrote plainly. Boswell Person
did not issue a denial, but considered the question irrelevant in his case. “Well, no,” he answered to the suggestion of a racial factor in hiring. “As I said, I hadn’t planned it [seeking an HBCU presidency] at all, so I guess the answer would be no.”

The researcher was left, then, with a series of affirmative answers—and not merely five answers, for some respondents identified more than one way in which race influenced their hiring. Most of Table 11, therefore, is dedicated to categorizing these answers and tabulating the number of times they were offered. Furthermore, because the respondents themselves seemed uninterested in distinguishing between their motives and those of their institution’s search committee, Table 11 also draws no such distinction. It seems entirely possible that some respondents could not distinguish their motives from their employers’, so close was the identification of the two in their answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Race’s Influence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chances Limited by Bigotry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherence to Historical Mission</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes-Called to Serve as Educator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Sympathy with Campus Population</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Value as Role Model</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Influence/Reply Declined</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Billy Hawkins had the following to say about the consideration of race:

Did it play a factor in me making a decision [to seek a presidency]? My training prepared me to work in a historically white institution or a historically black
institution. Certainly I made a decision to come to the historically black institution. I feel that, you know, society is just now becoming—starting to become comfortable with African Americans leading predominantly white institutions, and so we’re beginning to see African Americans lead predominantly white institutions and do it well. And you know, we have to be better than others, being African Americans working at historically white institutions.

Hawkins’ response was broken and grappling, reflecting the complexity of the issues under discussion. What can be asserted of his position is that he perceived his chances to lead a white institution at the time he accepted Texas College’s offer to have been very slim (cf., “society is just now becoming—starting to become comfortable with African Americans leading predominantly white institutions . . .”). This answer was coded to affirm that employment opportunities for black presidential candidates were limited by bigotry. Hawkins’ response transparently bears far less upon the HBCU’s attitude toward his race (let alone his own racial attitudes in seeking an HBCU presidency) than upon the closing of mainstream doors to promotion.

Hawkins continued in a somewhat different vein, however.

I would say that clearly, as far as the board selecting me, my race had a major impact. This is a historically black institution, so I would say that certainly my race played a factor. . . . And so I would say that certainly . . . my race has played a factor in being able to move the institution from a faculty, staff, and students’ standpoint.

The emphasis here was on the race-specific history of Texas College. Though Hawkins offers little elaboration of the point, there is sufficient material in this continuation of his response to code a further answer in the category of “adherence to historical mission.”

Texas College, Hawkins believed, was virtually bound to choose an African American president by reason of its history. By adding to his formulation the “faculty, staff, and students’ standpoint,” Hawkins verged on yet a third category of response: “unique sympathy” or the HBCU president’s need to be able to identify with the struggles
endured by the rest of the campus’ population. The phrase is exceptionally obscure; however, and will not permit confident coding.

Hawkins’ predecessor at Texas College, Mitchell Patton, also took an historical approach to the question. Concerning whether or not race was a factor in his being hired, Patton wrote,

Yes. Reviewing candidates with other ethnicities would imply that the CME Church, after more than 100 or so years, can no longer provide for its institutions. Then all CME colleges would no longer be called Methodist colleges. This is unheard-of.

Patton’s point of view, once again, was that of the college governing body, not of the candidate—though he implies complete, even vigorous agreement with the position’s underlying assumptions. “This would be unheard-of,” he protested when entertaining the thought of a color-blind HBCU presidential search committee. To remember the complex history of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which evolved as essentially an African American church with special commitments to that community, would not be the obligation of a presidential applicant, clearly. Yet Patton, as a CME congregant and minister, could not imagine this obligation’s being neglected as trivial.

Larry Earvin most clearly evoked the anticipated motive of a “higher calling”—but in language that showed no illusions about the sacrifices having to be made. Earvin answered the question about racial considerations in his earlier career choices with a strong affirmative. “Absolutely. I can’t imagine someone who is not a member of the HBCU target population being driven to one of these positions.” Here, at least, was an answer clearly made from the candidate’s orientation. Earvin was remarking that, due to the exceptional difficulties of leading an HBCU, a sensible volunteer would necessarily have to feel some sense of duty or mission to the African American community founded
in racial identification. Earvin had prefaced this response by explaining, “The mission of
the HBCU [is] . . . to reach out to the students who wouldn’t have opportunities
otherwise, students who are at the margin of society and wouldn’t have an opportunity
for higher education.” Under the circumstances, his response is readily coded as
affirming race’s influence in HBCU hiring practices on the ground that black candidates
enjoy a unique sympathy with the campus’ majority population.

Haywood Strickland raised many of the points discussed by other participants,
and also mentioned an important new one.

Obviously I think my race was important to the persons who determined that they
wanted me to lead the college because they have seen someone who had
understanding of a historically black college, who had experience of being in a
historically black college, and who was African American—who serves as a role
model for the students we serve. And so in that sense I think that race was
important in the selection of me as a president of the college.

The notion of being a role model was perhaps in Billy Hawkins’ mind when he urged the
importance of a leader who could share “a student’s standpoint”; but Strickland was the
only respondent to express this idea plainly, and to award it an influence in the hiring of a
black president. Otherwise, his answer is another defense of the HBCU’s historical
mission as a ground for having a race criterion in hiring practices.

Dwight Fennel, like Hawkins, was forced to grope about for terms that satisfied
him on a topic he obviously found to be many-sided.

I think there are a couple of things here. I think that the major impact was not one
of race but one of treatment—my experiences growing up as a black man in this
society and my experiences in having been educated in both majority and
minority institutions. I’ve been at private independent. I’ve been at graduate
level independent. I’ve been at majority public both of the grad levels, and I dare
say that there is a difference in treatment. It’s an obvious difference in treatment.
Now, can you call that racism or do you call it a part of the education? I leave
that up to those individuals how they go.
At the very least, the researcher drew from this response a declaration that educational opportunities are not equal in America, and that the line of inequality runs along a racial divide. It is impossible to code such a declaration as a verdict on how HBCU search committees work any more than as a commentary on Fennel’s personal career choices. What the response does most definitely accomplish, however, is to align Fennel with those respondents who insisted that race cannot be dismissed from a high-ranking educator’s calculations.

Larry Earvin’s response appeared to contain an inner contradiction. Directing his attention to the guidelines of the search committee at Huston-Tillotson College, he rated the primary objective thus:

I think [the committee was] looking for someone to do the job. I don’t know that—I don’t even think there was an applicant who was not African American. I think if there had been a well-credentialed Asian who had demonstrated they could work in this environment and understood the issues and had a track record of success, that person would have been selected.

Is this or is it not a statement of agreement with Sebetha Jenkins that the HBCU seeks the most qualified person for president, without regard to race? It would seem so but for Earvin’s abrupt declaration, “I don’t even think there was an applicant who was not African American.” He could only be saying, then, that race per se was not a criterion of the search—but that those who met all necessary criteria were necessarily African American. Such a complex assertion is more like the judgment of Mitchell Person, who could not imagine Texas College hiring from outside the CME denomination—and had never known anyone deeply involved in the CME Church who was not African American. It is not religious denomination which represents the intervening factor in Earvin’s case, but rather the skills of someone who “could work in this environment and
understood the issues.” As Haywood Strickland had remarked, only a person racially tied to the HBCU’s “target population” could work in its environment with a complete grasp of its complicated issues.

Larry Earvin’s answer has therefore been coded as affirmative; race did affect the hiring process at his institution, not directly, but through the indirect acquisition of skills and experiences essential in an HBCU president. Earvin did not use any such words as “unique sympathy,” but his phrase, “they could work in this environment and understood the issues,” justifies coding his affirmative under this category.

The next question, “Do you think that an institution like yours should consider race or ethnicity in reviewing candidates for critical administrative positions?” sometimes produced answers which appeared at odds with the previous question’s responses. There had been strong support for the notion that the HBCU board or committee involved in one’s hiring had taken race into account at some level and for some reason. Many respondents now countered with the observation that race should not be a consideration in such circumstances. The details of these answers, however, reveal an awareness of those complex relationships remarked by Mitchell Patton and Larry Earvin above: that is, the respondents, while not wanting to weight racial or ethnic identity as a hiring criterion, tended to agree that certain important criteria for the HBCU presidency could realistically be satisfied only by an African American.

The strategy for categorizing these responses decided upon by the researcher was to divide them clearly into two sets: affirmative and negative. Even this division may create an illusion of simplicity, however, for two respondents frequently gave hesitant or vacillating answers. Tables 12 and 13 categorize the reasons offered, first for the
affirmative answers, then for the negative. Because Billy Hawkins’ response was coded for two categories; a total of eight answers resulted.

Billy Hawkins voiced a slightly vacillating affirmative to the notion that HBCU boards ought to weigh race in selecting presidents. He attempted to explain the fine distinction between not making race a factor in hiring at all and ensuring that the hired

| Table 12 |
|-----------------|----------------|
| **Reason for Race as Valid Criterion in Presidential Selection** |
| Reason for Race as Valid Criterion | Number |
| Race Linked to Historical Mission | 2 |
| Candidates Must Understand Contemporary HBCU Students | 1 |
| Racial Identity Always Part of Application | 1 |

| Table 13 |
|-----------------|----------------|
| **Reason for Race as Invalid Criterion for Presidential Selection** |
| Reason for Race as Invalid Criterion | Number |
| Best Qualified Should be Hired | 3 |
| Race Soon to be Invalid | 1 |

president knew the HBCU environment inside-out. His defense of leaning toward an African American president for institutions like his was consistent with his earlier remarks about such a president’s need to understand his or her school’s history and demographic character.
I would say yes. I think that I have no problem with other ethnicities holding administrative positions and critical positions . . . but it’s important that . . . other ethnicities understand the mission of the institution. I have no problem [with the idea of non-African hires] and so certainly . . . race needs to be reviewed and looked at, but if other ethnicities do not understand the culture of our predominant African American youngsters, then that could be potentially a problem when other ethnicities are in leadership roles at these institution. If they clearly understand . . . the fabric of the institution, our students, their culture, [and] where they come from, then I don’t have any problem with other ethnicities holding down critical administrative positions.

Besides coding this response as emphasizing the importance of the HBCU’s historical mission, the researcher also finds that Hawkins expresses the idea (prominent in the previous question’s results) that presidential candidates must understand the contemporary HBCU’s student body. Indeed, the contemporary note in Hawkins’s phrase, “understand the culture of our predominant African American youngsters,” is probably stronger than the historical note sounded by the phrase, “the mission of the institution.”

Larry Earvin was comparatively forthright in affirming the need to consider race in presidential hiring decisions, though he acknowledged the uncomfortable side of the subject in the opening words of this reply:

Whether we admit it or not or whether any institution admits it or not, race and ethnicity is always considered. There is not a time when you interview a person that you don’t notice that he’s either, black, white, Asian, Hispanic . . . it’s always a consideration. It may not be a formal part of the process, but the nature of our society means that it’s always a part of the process.

Mitchell Patton’s brief written remarks about the importance of maintaining fidelity to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church were easy to code as a defense of taking a presidential candidate’s race into account—not as race, but as a circumstantial factor accompanying a deep familiarity with the CME tradition. To the extent that the CME Church was a historical response to the miseries of racial segregation, Patton felt
that someone without racial roots leading back to those miseries could not fully understand the Church or its offspring institutions.

The analysis of findings now shifts from Table 12 to Table 13—that is, from affirmative answers concerning whether or not race ought to impact HBCU hiring decisions to negative answers. Sebetha Jenkins and Haywood Strickland were the only participants to assert without hesitation that race or ethnicity had no justifiable role to play in the review of presidential or other academic candidates. “Presidents must be selected on the basis of competencies, not on the basis of racial identity,” wrote Jenkins firmly. Strickland echoed this view. Asked whether he thought that a candidate’s race should be considered in presidential hiring decisions, he replied:

I do not. You know, I think that our colleges need to find the very best persons that they can and often they may be of another race. They may be of another ethnic affiliation. They may be from another country. So we need to make sure the people we do put in administrative positions can add value to the college in terms of administrative activities but also in terms of how it relates to our students and how it prepares them for the world of work for graduate school or for life in general.

Boswell Person was less sure, though he tended to embrace Strickland’s reasoning in principle. Person grew extraordinarily communicative here. He had faintly hinted earlier that his race might have been a factor in previous employment (“I can’t say previously; perhaps it did”). Now his discomfort with such a consideration was both instructive and typical of other respondents:

I’m not at all sure at this point. I suppose we’d look for someone whose record demonstrated integrity, trust, and the ability to work forthrightly with people across all spectrums. Someone who would have or has had a track record of being fair-minded and being receptive to diversity . . . but whether or not I’d look particularly for [an African American] . . . I don’t think so. I think there’s so many other things that we’d want to look for in a human being who would serve in the capacity as president. Temperament is so important. Building relationships, getting along with others, all those things are critical. And I
suppose any person, irrespective of his or her ethnicity, could have those kinds of qualities or characteristics and hence may make a great president. Who knows for sure?

The negative answer dominates this response, and its reasoning is plainly to be coded as “best qualified should be hired.” Yet a note of uncertainty persisted throughout Person’s answer. Though he said nothing by way of explaining his slight vacillation, he seemed to sense that, despite the primary importance of strong credentials, they might not be exclusively important in choosing an HBCU president.

Dwight Fennel had earlier called attention to certain hard facts exposed by his personal experience when affirming that different races had always fared differently at every level and in every kind of education (implying that his HBCU employment, too, probably took account of his race). He sought to build upon that sense of realism as he felt his way through the next question.

I think we’re living in, probably coming into, a race-blind society; but we’re also living in a society where economics is controlling what we do and how we do it. And so in that regard, in order to be on higher rungs of the economic ladder, you know that education is a minimal expectation. I dare say education and experience . . . and quality work will make a difference in terms of what occurs [in academic hiring]. So does race have a significant impact? No.

At this point, unfortunately, Fennel had strayed very far from the original question. The researcher was again hard put to code a position on the issue of whether or not HBCU executives ought to consider race in hiring decisions. Fennel uttered a flat “no” at last—but that was in response to his own question, “Does race have a significant impact on job performance?” Fennel’s earlier discussion wandered through the tangled area of intervening associations explored by several other respondents; that is, he seemed to say that economic factors would be likely to determine position on the ladder of success, and that race in America often has economic implications. Yet the logical conclusion to this
chain of reasoning would be that African American presidential candidates from impoverished backgrounds might have received inferior educations, and therefore would be less attractive to an HBCU search committee! Since nothing else in Fennel’s interview suggested anything of the kind, the researcher coded his remarks in Table 10 as “race soon to be invalid.”

The final sequence of questions was intended (as explained previously) to invite the respondent to put the question of race into perspective. The question was, “If you could hand-pick your replacement as president, would you take such factors into consideration?” The researcher had anticipated that several participants might have a certain discomfort with earlier questions in this section; now was their chance to reestablish priorities, taking into account the key role of race in the HBCU’s evolution.

Dwight Fennel and Mitchell Patton did not offer any direct response to this question, the former wishing to elaborate on an unrelated topic and the latter offering no explanation for having skipped the question in his written responses. Of the remaining five respondents, all took advantage of the opportunity to mention (or reiterate, in some cases) an important presidential quality having nothing to do with race. Given the nature of the unanimous nature of the responses, the researcher again decided that a mere “yes/no” breakdown (to “would you take such [racial] factors into consideration?”) would be uninformative. He categorized the answers, instead, as statements of a presidential quality or ability unrelated to—and more important than—racial considerations. The emphasized words of the foregoing sentence are intended to stress that the responses in Table 14 were gathered in the context of a discussion about race and presidential hiring. They are not a mere revisiting of the matter in Table 6. The five
responding participants, though several had conceded an influence to race in the hiring process, chose these qualities as distinctly “trumping” such influence. One respondent mentioned two qualities, giving a total of six responses and two non-replies.

Table 14

_**Presidential Quality Trumping Racial Considerations**_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President Quality</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has Best Academic/management Abilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors and Cares about Students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of HBCU History/Mission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reply</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Haywood Strickland offered perhaps the most eloquent and detailed answer in rejecting an emphasis on race in hiring. Not surprisingly, he returned to his previous theme of academic excellence:

This seems to relate back to race, and I would say no, I wouldn’t [consider the candidate’s race]. . . . You know, I think that our colleges need to find the very best persons that they can and often they may be of another race. They may be of another ethnic affiliation. They may be from another country. . . . I think I would take into consideration whether or not that person had the experiences to continue the upward mobility or the progress that we’ve made as an institution. I don’t expect them to be a mirror of me or address it [the challenge of president] in the way which I’ve addressed it. I would certainly hope they would be able to use the foundation that we’ve put at Wiley, as we hope they do at Texas College, to build on it; and so what I would look for is someone with experiences in education, experience in accreditation, experience in fundraising, experience in financial oversight, experience in working with students and alumni. And those are the attributes that I would seek for and I would advise my board to seek for in doing a replacement. I would like to have no part of trying to pick a replacement but I would encourage them to look at the broader kinds of attributes and experiences
that would ensure the college would continue to grow . . . and that really insure
the students they serve a quality education.

Though Sebetha Jenkins’ comment, “Presidents must be selected on the basis of
competencies,” has already been cited, it was plainly intended to address this part of the
question as well as earlier parts. Jenkins’ view, of course, fully accords with that
expressed by Strickland at much greater length.

Likewise for Larry Earvin, there was no mention of race in his profile of a hand-
picked replacement:

I would be looking for someone who could advance the institution forward first. I
would be looking for someone [who could] role-model for students and I would
be looking for someone who would have the best interest of the students of the
institution at heart.

The issue of whether or not a non-black president could indeed role-model (or mentor, in
terms of Table 14) and care about HBCU students in an understanding manner had been a
thorny one in the previous discussion, but Earvin now seemed to see no connection
between these qualities and ethnic identity.

If there is a very slight shift in Earvin’s answer from academic credentials and
management ability to understanding of the student body, that shift is repeated—more
noticeably—in Billy Hawkins’s answer.

I think that I would take all the factors [into consideration] that I have just
mentioned if I had to hand-pick my predecessor [sic] at this institution, and at the
end of the day I would pick someone who is student-oriented like me no matter
what their race would be. I would pick an individual that clearly, clearly cares for
young people and one that clearly, clearly understood the mission of this
institution and one that I would feel comfortable that [he or she] would
understand struggle and would understand how you go about moving an
institution forward. But more specifically I would put the young people first that
this person would have to demonstrate to me they really care about them. This
person would really have to demonstrate to me that they really understand the
plight and the missions of historically black colleges and universities.
The two prominent themes here are caring about students and being aware of the
HBCU’s historical mission—a pair of qualities perhaps related inseparably for Hawkins,
but nevertheless coded as distinct on Table 14.

After asking for reassurance that his answer did not have to emphasize or pertain
to race, Boswell Person proceeded to bestow his major stress upon interpersonal skills.

I suppose we’d look for someone whose record demonstrated integrity, trust, and
the ability to work forthrightly with people across all spectrums. Someone who
would have or has had a track record of being fair-minded and being receptive to
diversity . . . but whether or not I’d look particularly for [a black person], I don’t
think so. I think there’s so many other things that we’d want to look for in a
human being who would serve in the capacity as president. Temperament is so
important. Building relationships, getting along with others, all those things are
critical. And I suppose any person, irrespective of his or her ethnicity, could have
those kinds of qualities or characteristics and hence may make a great president.
Who knows for sure?

It is remarkable that Person came back to race at the end of his reply, if only very
tentatively. Always cautious in his affirmations, he was the only one of the respondents
to this question who expressed a slight doubt that the “best possible candidate” for an
HBCU presidency could have any racial or ethnic identity at all.

_Open-Ended Request for Comments_

The interviews were concluded with an open-ended invitation to make any
observation at all about the HBCU presidential career path or matters relating to it. Even
the study’s context of the presidential career path was in fact left unstated: “Is there any
other information that you would like to share with me at this time?” Only three
respondents volunteered further comment.
Dwight Fennel, apparently still wrestling with the difficult issues of academic quality, social justice, and the demands of a special population, emphasized that the ultimate key to the conundrum for him was religious:

What’s more important [than fulfilling a specific set of expectations] is that you’re a quality human being realizing that with the God-centered (in my opinion) foundation, any group has the opportunity to excel. Any individual. It’s through prayer . . . and I realize—even more so now—that the education I received wasn’t for me [i.e., my personal profit]. The education was a short term gratuity.

Larry Earvin also concluded his interview by retreating to a perspective where a sense of moral purpose was brought back into focus. He had this to say:

The only thing I want to add is that HBCUs are a unique group. There are other institutions that have most of the characteristics of HBCUs—[but] that are not HBCUs—that serve a majority of the population. What makes it [the HBCU] special is the mission of trying to continue to level the playing field to have African Americans educated and be able to enter society as full playing partners. Much of what I think anybody can say about being president of a small college would be very similar as you consider ones that are not resource-rich. [Such a school’s mission] would be quite compelling, whether it’s an HBCU or not.

Finally, Mitchell Patton literally included with his responses a sheet which might well be called the agenda of his presidency. It contained the items which one would expect to find whenever a small private college prepares such a list: use of computers for registration and library activities, better security, higher faculty salaries, and so on.

Several additional items, however, pointed to the unique nature of the HBCU (referred to above by Larry Earvin). The institution’s severe under-funding was indicated by items like “adequate textbooks to start classes” and “full-time alumni officer on campus all day.” The absence of simple procedures which any sufficient administrative staff might readily have created was hinted at by items like “course syllabus for all classes” and “classroom assignments” (this may mean either “assigning appropriate rooms to courses” or “assigning appropriate homework”). The presence of a student population not familiar
with the student’s basic obligations was underscored by “class attendance policy enforced” and “no babies in classes.” The concern over creating a truly communal environment peeked through in “board retreats” and “extended lunch period.”

Dr. Patton, in short, wanted to make a competitive and respectable institution out of Texas College while preserving or enhancing its special character as a place which mentored minority students from education-deprived backgrounds. His agenda was not radical; it was merely realistic.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

This study has examined the career path to the presidency of historically black colleges or universities in Texas. While not overlooking the influence of formal education and professional positions held previous to the presidency, it has given special attention to such less readily defined influences as religion and race. Its methodology has been largely qualitative, as dictated by the elusive nature of factors which seldom leave a trace on a résumé or in the copy of an advertised opening.

The present chapter contains inductive findings drawn from the previous chapter’s analysis of data, the most important source of those data being seven personal interviews. A summary follows which compresses the findings into a portrait of the typical Texas HBCU president’s career path. Then a series of recommended topics for further research arising from this study is presented. Finally a brief conclusion about the distinctive nature of the Texas HBCU president’s career choices is advanced.

Findings

This study has sought answers for the following two questions: 1) What do the five current presidents and two of the immediate past presidents of the five Texas HBCUs perceive to be their career paths to the presidency?, and 2) What influence upon their professional ambitions do the seven participants attribute to their institutions’ affiliation with Christian Protestantism and service of the African American community?
The most significant means of data collection (in terms both of the data’s quantity and quality) was a battery of seven question groups, six of which contained several series of questions (as follow-ups to the original probe). Since so much of the data gathered and analyzed were generated by this method, the comments offered below upon Chapter Four’s findings have continued to observe the order imposed by these questions. The first four groups of questions directly addressed the pathway to the HBCU presidency, while the next two overtly inquired into issues of religion and race. Naturally, there was also a degree of overlap in the answers. Respondents who had conceived the ambition of being an HBCU president while undergraduates, for instance, were often motivated by a desire to serve humanity, and especially an underprivileged community such as the one from which they had come; while respondents who had particularly strong religious convictions often noted their special desire to live the good life within the context of advancing in their chosen profession.

In reviewing each group of questions, the researcher has consciously sought to create a convergence upon a narrative pattern. A narrative based upon his own considerable experience in HBCUs and upon data available from previous research had guided him in composing the questionnaire. From the findings he obtained, the original narrative (see Chapter Three, “Data Analysis”) could be reinforced, corrected, or extended as the evidence dictated.

Higher Educational Choices

The study’s participants said very little about their academic work as undergraduates or as graduates, and nothing whatever about academic research after the terminal degree. They clearly did not regard such subjects as very relevant to their
presidential functions. Only in passing did Dwight Fennel mention being a History major as an undergraduate or Billy Hawkins refer vaguely to graduate work in the fields of Education and Administration. Quite possibly, other respondents followed the same course as Hawkins in graduate school, a course statistically common among presidents at all varieties of institution. As an end in itself, however, such study either did not greatly attract any of the respondents or, at any rate, was not significantly tied to the presidential career path in their view.

The relative silence about academic course work in these interviews may be connected to the blunt fact that the participants—at least as undergraduates—often selected schools to attend based upon affordability. The researcher was already aware (thanks to a great many personal contacts) that presidents of the five Texas HBCUs tended not to come from affluent backgrounds. Only two out of the seven respondents—Sebetha Jenkins and Mitchell Patton—offered no clear indication that financing a college education had ever been a concern to them; and Jenkins’s commenting that Jackson State was “nearby” raised the possibility that travel might have presented a problem because of its expenses. Accessibility was, therefore, a consideration.

The researcher would also note in this context that, when Patton and Fennel explained that the HBCUs they attended were family traditions of a sort, the expense of traveling to and living in a northern state was part of the backdrop sustaining this tradition. During the 1960s, when most of the study’s participants were receiving their higher education, public-school options in southern states, though gradually becoming available, were often viewed with suspicious discomfort in the African American
community. The researcher’s follow-up conversations with several interviewees confirmed this picture of restricted opportunities.

It might be added that the concern over affordability did not necessarily vanish when the transition was made from undergraduate to graduate studies. Two respondents (Larry Earvin and Dwight Fennel) expressly mentioned having received awards to pursue their graduate studies at a certain institution.

Despite having chosen at least their first colleges (if not their graduate institutions) more on the basis of financial necessity than academic preference, however, the respondents praised their undergraduate choices as having prepared them well for their future careers. This finding well deserves a closer look.

Dwight Fennel’s case is especially instructive. Fennel believed both that his undergraduate education was an asset and that its influence on his career was negligible. The solution to this paradox is surely that, while Fennel learned little about fund-raising or morale-boosting or budget-pruning in college, he did learn how to express himself. He recalled the following experience in a graduate school classroom which involved a kind of personal awakening: “. . . one day I raised my hand and was overlooked, and then started speaking out in class to respond to a question, and some white guys in the class tried to overshadow me and the white professor said, ‘Be quiet’. . . .” As noted earlier, Fennel devoted a disproportionate amount of time to such reminiscences. The occurrences changed his life; the sheer volume of words he devotes to them underscores their importance to him. He was being taught how to have his own voice.

Though the preceding story belonged to his graduate school days, Fennel spoke of having similarly uplifting, confidence-building experiences at St. Augustine’s College, an
HBCU. Other respondents were likewise socialized and nourished by their *alma mater*, even if actual course offerings did nothing very remarkable to prepare them for a college presidency. Even Mitchell Patton qualified his criticism of Texas College’s academic weaknesses (during his undergraduate work there) with praise for its success at a more general kind of nurturing. Altering his tone of disappointment, Patton wrote, “However, I think being an undergraduate and a CME minister in a leadership role were important factors.” This slightly ambiguous remark appears not to mean that he faulted his own youth and his preoccupation with matters outside of course work for his education’s flaws. The context suggests something more like this: simply partaking of the history of Texas College, and especially receiving a religious grounding there, were factors that compensated for failures in some academic programs.

Perhaps Dr. Strickland put it most memorably: “Experience really is an outgrowth of what you’re prepared to do.” More than anything else, the first college created opportunities for these talented, ambitious people to stand up and lead. Strickland had said earlier of his undergraduate experience at Stillman College (an HBCU), “It empowered me in a significant way to move on both in education and in my professional experiences.” That this “empowerment” had much to do with knowing how to communicate is further suggested by Strickland’s rating “the ability to communicate and have strong interpersonal relations” as among the most necessary in a college president. Strickland described his arrival at a new level of self-confidence more in the practical terms of career advancement than in the emotional terms of an opened inner door; yet at the time of his college experience, this confidence appears to have come as a distinctly personal acquisition.
Although Larry Earvin did not underscore the presence of such experiences in his personal education, he repeatedly valued them as a vital part of the educational process. He remarked with disappointment upon the number of administrators he had known who had problems “particularly [with] crisis issues or issues of communication with their faculties.” When reflecting upon his highest objectives as an HBCU president, he emphasized “being able to reach out to the students who wouldn’t have opportunities otherwise; students who are at the margin of society that wouldn’t have an opportunity for higher education.” The theme continues through Earvin’s testimony, then, that the greatest benefit of higher education (especially undergraduate education) to an HBCU president is its tutoring in how to speak up for oneself and how to communicate meaningfully with others.

The researcher wishes to remark in passing the fascinating tendency of Sebetha Jenkins, the only female participant in the study, to occupy positions different from the male respondents. Only Jenkins stressed the success of her undergraduate education in preparing her for her academic field and the presidency. It is possible that Dr. Jenkins had simply harvested what she had sown, for she was alone, as well, in having given academic excellence as a reason for choosing a first college. She may also have been the most verbally expressive of the participants before entering college, with the result that this ability was already developed rather than latent and thus came as no surprise to her. In any case, the intensity of her focus on academics and her striking professional confidence fully accord with what Arnold’s (1994) dissertation found to be generally characteristic among the subset of black female college presidents.
Origins of Decision to Seek HBCU Presidency

The researcher had presupposed in the hypothetical narrative created to guide the questionnaire and analyze the data that many of the study’s participants, especially those who had attended HBCUs as undergraduates, would have conceived the notion of becoming a president as they observed close-up the benefits of an HBCU education. The assumption was verified by the testimony of three respondents (though one of these actually dated his ambition to graduate school). The researcher’s expectation was that the group’s remnant would have decided upon seeking the presidency while working in administration and discovering a genuine taste for such work. Billy Hawkins and Haywood Strickland satisfied this profile. What struck the researcher as most remarkable about the initial findings was that two respondents—Sebetha Jenkins and Boswell Person—were actually taken somewhat by surprise when contacted by a board or search committee and urged to apply for a presidential opening. Even Hawkins and Strickland, who admitted that their sights had been set on high office beforehand, were contacted in this abrupt manner.

With over half of the participants being “tapped” (in Jenkins’s word) to put their name in the pool of applicants, the researcher concludes that the five Texas HBCUs—at least some of them, clearly—are not averse to pursuing actively the kind of presidential candidate they desire. The researcher found it beyond his competence to speculate about whether such active recruitment is common at mainstream institutions. It should be stressed, however, that these four “tapped” recruits were all hired; they were not simply nudged unofficially to throw their hat in the ring. If it is indeed unlikely (as the researcher suspects) that 57% of mainstream institutions’ presidents are hired after being
solicited to apply, then the Texas HBCUs must either have a very specific profile in mind or else suffer from a dearth of qualified candidates when the top position comes available.

One special credential, naturally, may be a deep knowledge of and keen interest in the HBCU’s modus operandi. Four of the respondents (Earvin, Fennel, Patton, and Strickland) had attended HBCUs as undergraduates. All of the study’s participants are African American, furthermore, which suggested that actually having lived through the experience of being a racial minority may be considered by HBCU boards as relevant, indeed essential, to understanding their campuses. (Of course, the pool of candidates may also have self-selected in the matter of race; Haywood Strickland remarked that no non-black candidate applied for the opening which he filled.)

Racial issues would surface again later. The participants never explicitly mentioned them at this phase of the interview. No one, that is, ever volunteered, “I applied at an HBCU because, due to my race, I thought I would be a favored candidate.” Yet there was indeed a great deal of sentiment expressed on behalf of serving at an HBCU to accomplish a special mission. Only the reticent Boswell Person did not declare openly at some point that the HBCU service of an underprivileged, often impoverished community did not call forth from him a sense of high duty—and Person’s closing anecdote about the young man whose expenses he paid is strong evidence that he, too, knew this motive well. That the community in question is mostly black appeared entirely irrelevant; it is needy and deserving, primarily. Sebetha Jenkins, for instance, did not recognize her “calling” until she was literally in the presence of the Jarvis Christian
College student body; she had already known, it is safe to suppose, that most of the students would be African Americans.

Before leaving the matter of credentials, the researcher wishes to highlight that many of the participants had a diversity of experience on their resumé. Dwight Fennel had occupied several positions in private-sector businesses, including a brief stint with the ill-starred Eastern Airlines. Haywood Strickland had logged years of distinguished service with such non-profit organizations as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the United Negro College Fund. Billy Hawkins and Boswell Person had taught high school, and Person had served in the military, as well. Mitchell Patton is an ordained minister.

In retrospect, the researcher would like to have directed a question strictly to such non-academic experience. His impression is that this group of college presidents and former presidents shows a richness of such experience far beyond what one would see in mainstream—and especially public institution—presidents. The fairly recent studies of Holman (1994) and Fisher and Koch (1996) had suggested that non-academic experience among HBCU presidents would reflect such diversity.

Most Influential Figure in Career

The researcher’s narrative had anticipated that most of the study’s participants would have been inspired to seek the presidency as a result of serving under a dynamic president as lower-level administrators, or perhaps even seeing such a president in action as students. This expectation was not frustrated; the responses to the questions contained rather few surprises. A few respondents could instantly name a stand-out figure (like Larry Earvin’s Vivian Henderson or Dwight Fennel’s Prezell Robinson), while others,
after a moment’s reflection, produced a list of several helpful superiors or colleagues.

The one result that proved mildly surprising was a tendency to grope entirely beyond the elite world of higher education for an influential figure. Dwight Fennel added his wife in afterthought, Boswell Person his grade-school teachers, and Billy Hawkins a high-school mentor. If the college president is viewed as essentially a CEO, then this seems an unlikely association of causes and effects; a person rises to lead a large organization because he or she understands its functioning, has experience in forming coalitions of shared interest, grasps the financial realities involved, and so forth. Most of this study’s respondents, however (if not all), view the college presidency as a noble calling with a spiritual side to it. The special influences they cited, therefore, were not simply technical instructors or savvy professionals with many contacts; they included people who provided the correct moral perspective for contemplating life and who could lift one back to that perspective after a period of feverish activity.

Even the influences chosen from the highest reaches of academe sometimes had an unusually spiritual quality about them. When Larry Earvin was discussing Vivian Henderson, he mentioned that his model educator had died an early death due to overwork. In context, Earvin seemed to find this self-sacrificial end a worthy one—by no means the sort of flaw which is commonly called “workaholism.” So for several other cases, leaders and mentors were cited at least as much for their ability to inspire and to give of themselves as for their professional efficiency at increasing enrollment or raising funds. This finding resonates clearly with Fisher and Koch’s (1996) discovery that the black college’s president tends to be viewed in his surroundings as “the defender of the campus, its knight in shining armor” (p. 93). The position acquires a kind of romance in
such circumstances, at least in comparison to the business-like persona of a more mainstream institution’s president.

Significant Qualities and Formative Experiences

The request for a single most important presidential quality produced an array of responses. The diversity was most certainly somewhat artificial however. It is very unlikely that any respondent would strongly take exception to any quality stressed by another. If it were possible to have anticipated the qualities listed on Table 6, in fact, and to have asked each respondent to arrange them in priority of importance, there may well have been some convergence. Several respondents had stressed the importance of clear communication at one time or another, and also of being deeply concerned for the students’ welfare. There were several cases, too, of respondents appearing to veer into the praise of other qualities when describing a significant formative experience.

The notion of quickly straining a single important quality for the HBCU president from this multiplicity of data, therefore, is doomed to disappointment. At a certain level of generalization, perhaps some condensing of the results can be attempted. The vague “desire to help youth” identified by Sebetha Jenkins and Boswell Person (in both cases by anecdotes, not abstractly) is, after all, almost too vague to specify, and would furthermore be applauded by any true educator. “Diversity of experience” is also doubtful as quality. A person cannot necessarily control whether or not life brings him or her diverse experiences, and to speak of exposure to certain circumstances as a quality may indeed border on giving that same name to good luck. As for Haywood Strickland’s “commitment to excellence,” it implies a focused intensity far more under the individual’s control, and hence seems a quality more fair and reasonable to seek in a
presidential candidate. Yet a degree of vagueness remains. For a college president, does a commitment to excellence mean fighting grade-inflation, or firing likable but flawed teachers, or preserving the liberal arts core curriculum? All such undertakings would require a true quality of character to be seen through. That quality might well be “determination” or “persistence” (Mitchell Patton’s choice). “Energy” and “initiative” were also often used by respondents and by the researcher to summarize their sentiments.

A vigorous determination—the ability to show initiative, the willingness to take action—could be put forward, then, as one of the particular qualities to emerge from the questioning. Another quality revolved around the importance of communicating clearly with a wide variety of people. Larry Earvin had actually bemoaned the number of leaders and administrators he had known who could not communicate, and who consequently reduced their organizations to a complex chaos. Dwight Fennel had spoken at great length of learning how to speak up as a college student. Such references often appeared at other points of the interview. The respondents may already have stressed communication so much in some cases, indeed, that they looked elsewhere for a primary presidential quality, as if communicative ability could be taken for granted as absolutely necessary.

A final distinctly identifiable quality was a sort of determination opposed to active, forceful initiative; here respondents stressed, rather, the vital importance of being able to endure, to last out difficult times. The self-sacrificial nature of such endurance particularly seemed to strike those like Mitchell Patton who tended more toward a religious perspective by training or by temperament. Reverend Patton had chosen the word “persistence” to communicate this quality, but the context suggested something
different from what the self-described “doer” Billy Hawkins had in mind. The researcher notes that academic excellence was mentioned very seldom in these discussions of most important presidential quality. Haywood Strickland’s “commitment to excellence” plainly had an academic context, and Sebetha Jenkins enjoyed referring to her potential charges as “scholars,” emphasizing that this was their primary business on the campus. Yet Larry Earvin voiced a worry about the academic decline of many HBCUs since the days of his youth; and Mitchell Patton included in his written response a detailed list of changes he had sought to make, many of which involved elementary enhancements of learning in the classroom. Patton’s efforts had not always met with success.

Certainly the HBCU president is not uninterested in academic achievement. The relative lack of emphasis on this central purpose of any college, however, reinforces the insecure—sometimes extremely tenuous—situation of the HBCU. Presidents who enjoy the luxury of state-of-the-art infrastructure, generous endowments, and a well-heeled student population can proceed to talk about maintaining or improving their academic standing; presidents whose institutions must fight to make payroll sound another note. During their interviews, Earvin, Hawkins, Jenkins, and Strickland had all particularly underscored the importance of being able to raise funds, and they had connected their ability to do so with being hired as president. Discussions of science in the 21st century or a citizenry well versed in history did not follow—not because such matters did not concern these presidents, but because survival precedes all other concerns.

The researcher’s hope that each respondent (or even most respondents) could succinctly identify a major formative experience was frustrated. Several forgot, overlooked, or dismissed as inapplicable to them this particular probe. Whatever psychic
orientation takes place as a professional educator solidifies a plan to seek a college presidency; it apparently does not notably react to single events, but rather evolves slowly and through numerous influences. The closest approach to a “defining moment” was surely Sebetha Jenkins’s moving experience, as a candidate, with the students of Jarvis Christian College. According to her account, a kind of inner awakening took place that suddenly made her very intent upon an interview. “I had never really considered . . . a serious one until I met the scholars.” No other participant admitted to having lived through this sort of epiphany.

Religion and the HBCU Career Path

The researcher had formed a narrative, on the basis of his own experience with HBCUs which had religion playing a substantial role in the presidential career path. It might seem contradictory to this narrative that the responses to the initial question in the fifth group indicated a dominant tendency for religion to play no part in the participants’ choosing to apply for an HBCU presidency. Yet the reason for such apparent indifference to the religious motive was immediately clear, and was remarked in Chapter Four’s presentation of the data; that is, most of the respondents had understood the question to be asking if they had applied to a certain HBCU out of loyalty to the denomination affiliated with it. Their negative answers were resonantly declaring that their choice had not been denominationally motivated.

The resonance here is even stronger when one considers that two of the three respondents who answered affirmatively (Billy Hawkins and Haywood Strickland) did so in a non-denominational context. They were responding more in the sense that the researcher had anticipated; they were saying, that is, that they perceived a religious or
spiritual dimension in their calling to serve the disadvantaged students at their HBCU. Only Mitchell Patton assented to the notion of a tight connection between his employment at Texas College and his membership in the CME Church, with which the College is affiliated. As an ordained minister, naturally, Patton might be expected both to suspect such a connection’s presence and to approve of it (as he did, slightly later in his responses).

When asked if religion had reflected their career choices before they began to seek the presidency, the respondents produced a partial answer (three offering none at all) and again interpreted the question with varying degrees of emphasis on denomination. The results here lead to no clear conclusion.

That all the participants, however, truly held religion in great respect and indeed based career choices upon it at some level began to grow clear with the next question. In response to a query about whether religion was a beneficial or disruptive presence on their HBCU campus, the seven produced an affirmation that was essentially unanimous. Only Dwight Fennel feared that the religious presence on his campus had done more harm than good—and he was plainly referring to the AME Church’s very limited financial support and rather intrusive doctrinal demands, not to what the others understood as a broadly religious perspective. Insofar as Fennel was charging one denomination, then, with exerting too narrow-minded an influence at Paul Quinn College, he was really seconding the vote of the others that the tolerance, patience, caring acceptance, and transcending humanity of the spiritual perspective had been extremely beneficial for their students.
What has this broad vote of approval to do with the respondents’ career choices? Certainly more than the “nothing at all,” which many had offered on the first question. Billy Hawkins stressed how much he enjoyed working at an institution where religious matters could be openly discussed and religious observance practiced without fear of punitive legal action. More generally, it simply stands to reason that if the respondents felt the strong attraction to the HBCU presidency to which they had all testified, if this attraction consisted largely of helping the underprivileged, and if the religious perspective were heartily welcomed because it grounded the struggling and the confused in basic values, then the HBCU’s traditional religious identity was part of its presidency’s original magnetism. Though this association of ideas has several links, no respondent said anything to place any of the links in doubt.

Put another way, the sentiment was universal (though more openly expressed by some than others) that a motivating factor in accepting an HBCU presidency was the good cause—the worthiness of working very hard for limited remuneration and recognition because the HBCU would help underprivileged youths find a better life. Whatever benefits the students may have harvested from religion, the kind of self-sacrificial service just described strongly implies a religious orientation in the professional who makes it. In fact, all seven subjects expressed the importance of this motive on their decision at one time or another during their interview, if not in the fifth group of questions. Billy Hawkins went so far as to declare openly that he felt moved by a providential hand in his career. Perhaps the very nature of the HBCU presidency forces its occupant into a ministerial (if not a self-sacrificial) mindset. Such was the conclusion
of Fisher and Koch (1996), who found the office’s daily operation to resemble the life of “the ‘pastor’ of many African-American churches” (p. 94).

Table 9 revealed that almost as many respondents (some of them the same people) approved of the campus’ religious life because of its tie to the HBCU’s historical mission and because of its healthy moral influence. This is not really a separate reason to endorse religion at all, but the same reason viewed from another angle. Again, if the HBCU is seen as a noble institution because of its missionary past, then part of the tradition—the very part which makes it noble—is rooted in doing good works. That same tradition without its ethic of service would have left all of the respondents cold, if their explanations are to be believed.

The researcher wishes to make the following observation in concluding this section. Private religious colleges abound on the educational scene today, yet many devote much of their effort—if they do not owe their very existence—to emphasizing doctrinal peculiarities which separate them from other religious, usually Christian denominations. The HBCU seems to be truly extraordinary in this regard. The presidents and former presidents of this study, at least, expressed eclecticism in religious matters produced by deep conviction, though perhaps reinforced by a long-standing tradition in HBCUs to welcome students from all over the world.

Race and the HBCU Career Path

The researcher had formed a very basic presupposition about how the relation between race and being selected for an HBCU presidency actually works. All HBCU presidents within his personal experience are African American, so the existence of a substantial connection seemed obvious. An embedded attitude among board members
that non-blacks need not apply seems unlikely (unless such boards and search committees are being entirely disingenuous when they advertise openings). Furthermore, black institutions often deliberately chose white presidents in the past so as to forge ties with the local community’s more prosperous elements (cf., Thompson, 1973). The researcher therefore approached the questionnaire’s sixth group of query expecting to find that qualified white prospects were simply uninterested in serving at HBCUs.

The truth may be a little more complicated. On paper, the two most transparent facts about Texas HBCUs are that they have a long-standing affiliation with a certain religious denomination (always Protestant Christian in the South) and that they were inaugurated to serve the descendants of freed slaves. The contemporary HBCU is actually at least as multicultural around the campus as most public institutions (at least in terms of its dark-skinned population). Students may be Catholic as well as Protestant, Hindu or Muslim as well as Christian. Student bodies numbering barely 500 include Iranians, Syrians, Pakistani, Indians, Kenyans, Nigerians—all of these as well as African Americans. Such has been the situation for several decades. The study’s subjects, then, were understandably reluctant in some cases to declare openly that an HBCU president should be an American of African origin, or that their own skin color figured in their being hired. In a way, such an admission could be seen as criticizing or denying what the HBCU has become since the days of rigid, legally enforced segregation; that is, an institution defined by its willingness to receive students of all backgrounds rather than by its exclusive devotion to any one group.

Nevertheless, only two of the seven respondents (and all are of African descent) denied that their race had anything to do with their appointment as an HBCU president.
One of the two, Boswell Person, entertained the possibility that race may indeed have affected his being hired for previous positions at HBCUs, despite his feeling that Paul Quinn College was an exception. Even Person’s denial that race had influenced his present employer was tentative; he seemed more receptive to the idea as he thought about it, and finally assumed a “Who knows?” attitude. To him, the proposition deserved to be dismissed rather than dwelled upon, even if it were valid. Like many energetic people, he appeared to have little patience with the notion that he was not the author of his own actions—and the interview constantly confronted him with just such moments in a career that’s progress seemed sometimes to mystify him.

Of course, one’s attitude in such matters can have profound motivational consequences. Sebetha Jenkins also insisted that her race played no part in her ascending to the presidency at Jarvis Christian College. Her presence in a small minority, once again, raises questions about the possible significance of gender. It may be that because Dr. Jenkins is a minority among college presidents in terms both of race and of gender, she was even less inclined than Mr. Person to dwell upon any hint that something besides her impressive dossier had helped her to advance. Her confidence in her own ability as a scholar and a professional came across forcefully. Yet Jenkins, it must be said, had very little experience in HBCUs before coming to Jarvis Christian. She had attended only state schools as a student, and her early professional experience also lay beyond the HBCU boundary. Her written answers to the sixth group’s battery of questions constituted one of the shorter paragraphs in her interview. She seemed, perhaps, slightly indignant that the issue of race should even be considered in the context of her presidential appointment.
Most of the respondents, however, brought both experience and candor to their answers. Larry Earvin remarked that he had seen many HBCU search committees in action, and that the factor of race always seemed to be put into play by the candidates themselves. “I don’t even think there was an applicant [for the presidential position at Huston-Tillotson] who was not African American,” he observed. He had earlier declared that he could not imagine anyone not of African descent wanting to take on the burden of leading an HBCU. These frank observations, of course, do not amount to an admission that race per se was a factor in the hiring process. On the contrary, the implication of such comments is that the applicants self-select; the blacks by putting themselves forward and the whites by staying away.

Yet as reasonable as this hypothesis is, the respondents urged other explanations when explicitly asked about the nature of race’s impact on presidential hiring decisions. The two overwhelming favorites (some advanced by the same respondents) were that a black president could more readily understand the HBCU’s target population and that the historical pedigree of the HBCU required that a certain ethnic continuity be maintained. This pair of reasons recalls the two-part defense of religious faith on the HBCU campus with whose examination the previous section ended. That is, the history of the HBCU is one of a minority united in a peaceful struggle against social injustice. To the extent that the struggle still continues, people of color will be favored over candidates who only know of the struggle second-hand. These are two sides of one coin: if the truths of the past survive into the future, then more experienced people who triumphed over the past’s obstacles are best positioned to show younger people how to triumph over altered but enduring versions of the same obstacles.
At the same time, there was much resistance to the notion that race should become a major criterion of selection, perhaps eclipsing essential varieties of competence. A delicate juggling act seemed to take place between the principled aversion to race as a criterion of selection and the practical acknowledgement that non-black candidates were highly unlikely to grasp the HBCU’s past, present, and future at a visceral level. Haywood Strickland added his dissenting vote to those of Jenkins and Person when the issue raised was whether or not hiring procedures ought to consider race, and put forth more of an argument than they had. Strickland answered emphatically,

I do not [think so]. You know, I think that our colleges need to find the very best persons that they can and often they may be of another race. They may be of another ethnic affiliation. They may be from another country.

Yet this protest turns out to be against the notion that the HBCU president must be an African American—not that he must be a non-Caucasian from outside the American mainstream. Strickland implied that the successful candidate might be a Nigerian or a Haitian, but he did not open the door to a white graduate of Ohio State or UCLA. His appearance of having endorsed the complete color-blindness of Jenkins and Person is therefore open to question.

Perhaps the resistance to race as a criterion can be summarized thus. Jenkins and Person felt that race should be entirely irrelevant when an HBCU seeks a new president; Strickland felt that anything extrinsic to the candidate’s ability to do the job should be ignored, but that race was related to this ability. Race should not be considered in and of itself a distinct qualification—but it cannot be ignored as part of the experience which goes into making a good HBCU president.
From this perspective, the gap with the remaining respondents quickly closes. None of the four ever hinted that race should be, as it were, checked off on a list of necessary presidential attributes. On the contrary, all four maintained, like Strickland, that race was indirectly but almost inevitably related to the candidate’s ability to be a role model and to understand the peculiar problems of students on an HBCU campus. Earvin, Fennel, and Hawkins all spoke of the need to have had first-hand experience of the social and economic hardships facing the HBCU target population. Mitchell Patton, an ordained CME minister, placed his emphasis on the need to understand the distinctive religious traditions of such schools. This seemed to amount to much the same thing in his written response, where he stressed the specific racial/ethnic heritage of the CME Church.

All seven respondents, in short, were ultimately most concerned that the president should be able to understand and to reach out to the typical HBCU student. A final question, asking the subjects to describe their ideal replacement in the presidency, was intended to build upon responses just made about racial issues—and it did so, in that every subject elaborated upon the primacy of good communication and none chose to stress any racial qualification per se.

It is clear that the study’s participants view being of African descent as an important piece in the complex puzzle that makes up the HBCU student body as well as the institution’s rich heritage—not as a litmus test which screens out intruders on such campuses. For some—the majority, in fact—racial considerations cannot simply be ignored; but the reason why they must be recognized is to assist young people in finding a healthy, coherent identity rather than to keep some sort of agenda alive. Those
respondents who were perhaps most visionary or most energetic were reluctant to dwell on race, with its hint of fixed horizons and a predetermined future, for this very reason. All seven had the same motive, the same goal: to lead by example, to give of themselves, and to show young people a road to hope.

Open-Ended Request for Comments

Dwight Fennel emphasized the power of religious faith to surmount worldly injustice and setback, Larry Earvin stressed that HBCUs are unique even among small private colleges, and Mitchell Patton tendered a list of cherished reforms which he had only been partially empowered to enact: such were the final reflections of those who volunteered them. The comments very aptly “book-ended” the experiences of the study’s five HBCU presidents and two past presidents. On the one hand lay an optimism which material circumstances were not adequate to justify, and on the other an array of missed material opportunities that demonstrated why the HBCU president needs such optimism to go forward.

Summary

The following composite portrait of a career path emerges from the study of the five current presidents and two immediate past presidents of the five historically black colleges and universities in the state of Texas.

This chief executive did not begin his or her education with an eye on the presidency, or even on a distinguished administrative career. The choice of an undergraduate college was often determined by factors like cost, availability of scholarships, and proximity to childhood residence and family rather than by academic
excellence or perceived advantages to a future career. The young person in question was an American of African descent, very likely born in the southern United States, had probably known a degree of economic hardship beyond the average in growing up, was raised within a Protestant Christian denomination, and was heavily influenced by church teachings and family expectations. The chances are that a spirit of community service had already been bred into this person before he or she was a college freshman. When that first experience of a college campus took place, the venue for it may well have been an HBCU.

Graduate study would also tend to be determined somewhat by the availability of scholarship money. The future president, rather than entering graduate school immediately after earning a Bachelor’s degree, might work for a year or two as a classroom teacher, serve in the military, or study for the ministry. Once a graduate program was begun, it would proceed fairly quickly, reflecting the strong motivation of the student. The field of study would be more likely to involve Education or Administration than a specialized discipline such as Chemistry or Linguistics.

Soon after attaining one or more graduate degrees, the future president would find employment as a middle level administrator on a college campus, whether a large public university or a small community college. He or she would often begin to contemplate the higher rungs of the career ladder at this point, steadily discovering an ability to work with other people. As these thoughts fermented, the individual might also recall an HBCU in his or her past (probably an alma mater) where the chief executive had been a dynamic figure in an enterprise which changed lives for the better.
The service ethic implanted from childhood by religious ideas and family/communal influences would eventually lead back to the HBCU, though perhaps not at once to the office of president. If the individual were to be hired away from other administrative employment to be president at an HBCU, he or she would often have been contacted by the institution and encouraged to apply. The journey to the presidency, in short, would tend to be thought about somewhat passively beforehand then favored by a critical combination of circumstances and influences.

One of these influences would almost certainly not be the duty to advance the narrow ends of a particular denomination, even though the presidential candidate might well be an ordained minister or have studied at a seminary. The candidate would be especially interested in an HBCU precisely because he or she perceived it as a haven of tolerance and understanding nurtured by religious ideas, not an incubator to produce more orthodox practitioners of a certain faith.

Within this attraction to tolerance of diverse backgrounds and to service of the underprivileged, race would play a paradoxical role for the aspiring president. He or she would not be seeking or entering the office with a view to advancing some distinctively black agenda; indeed, one of the zealous messages of the HBCU would be seen as triumphing over material obstacles to claim a place in the mainstream of American life. Yet the typical candidate or president would also believe that an understanding of how race has raised social and economic barriers in America is a crucial qualification for the job. The new executive would see his or her task as inspiring students to overcome such barriers, not to deny or ignore their existence.
Recommendations

The HBCU’s Mainstream Equivalent

To declare how the portrait of the HBCU president suggested by this study contrasts with that of a college president whose institution is more mainstream—yet remains a small private college—lies beyond the parameters of the findings. Only a very general conclusion can be reached when such a contrast is pursued (see below), because the president of the “counterpart institution” has not yet been adequately examined. In fact, this institution itself has been defined only occasionally, and not always consistently, for unrelated studies. It would be a college or university of the following type: small (enrollment of 2000 or less), private, coeducational, four-year (with perhaps a very limited number of Master’s programs), affiliated with a Protestant Christian denomination, little more than a century old, and located usually in the nation’s heartland rather than among the population masses along the eastern and western seaboards.

Ironically, such institutions, though like the HBCU in so many ways, often have a far smaller African American enrollment than state universities or community colleges. A contrast developed between them and the HBCU could therefore be focused on a great many factors besides the president’s career path. In fact, some of these factors—tuition costs, availability and variety of scholarships, the school’s precise religious affiliation, its position on the teaching of religious doctrine, the average income of its students and their families, its physical location in the community, and so on—should probably be studied first in order to establish what kinds of concern might affect a presidential candidate’s application.
Recommended topics of research would therefore include the following:

1. How do predominantly white four-year private coeducational colleges, small and affiliated with a Protestant Christian denomination, differ from the HBCU?

2. How are the economic, geographic, and religiously dogmatic differences between the HBCU and its predominantly white counterpart indexed to race?

3. How does the career path of the HBCU president differ from a president’s at the HBCU’s predominantly white counterpart?

Comparison with Other HBCUs

It would be desirable, as well, to see if this study’s findings were fully valid of other historically black colleges and universities, or if some of these findings were unique to Texas or to the Texas area. In the latter event, of course, one would further desire to know why the career path to the presidency might be regionally influenced. The subjects of this study pursued their education and later careers in the North as well as the South, in Florida and Georgia as well as Mississippi and Texas; but it is conceivable that conditions in Texas, which was particularly impoverished after Reconstruction and had relatively little sense of community as a “frontier” (compared to the rest of the South), created a distinctive environment for early colleges and continued to influence their later growth.

Recommended topics of research in this area might include the following:

1. Do the presidents of other HBCUs travel career paths similar to those of the studied presidents, current and past, of the five Texas HBCUs?
2. Do other HBCUs largely resemble or differ significantly from the five Texas HBCUs in this study regarding the tendency among the latter to foster religious tolerance and eclecticism on campus?

3. Do the presidents of other HBCUs share the view dominant among the Texas HBCU presidents that racial consciousness must continue to characterize these schools in some manner?

**Gender and the HBCU Presidency**

The study’s conclusions repeatedly found Dr. Sebetha Jenkins, the only female participant, occupying a rather different position from that expressed by other subjects—sometimes a position unique to herself; so common an occurrence can scarcely have been accidental. Other studies are beginning to focus on the special experiences, qualifications, and perspective of the female administrator. The time now seems ripe for further research to be done on the very small group of female presidents of HBCUs.

Of the study’s participants, Dr. Jenkins appeared from her own account to have a more academic orientation toward her selection of schools as a young student seeking higher education and to complete that education somewhat more intent upon her ultimate career objectives. Yet when the opportunity arose to seek an HBCU presidency, she represented herself as initially less interested than most of the male respondents had been in similar circumstances. The encounter which won her over to the job was a series of face-to-face meetings with the students of Jarvis Christian College. Her very personal reaction to the visit was perhaps stronger than that registered by any male respondent on a similar occasion. She also did not name as a major influence in her career anyone
whom she described as a role model, but only a colleague who assisted her with the intricacies of contract negotiation.

Worthy topics of research in this area would include the following:

1. How would a female scholar and leader see herself as adapting the HBCU atmosphere, and how she might actually fare after reaching the top position?

Traditionally, the HBCU president has been a very dominant male figure, sometimes described as autocratic. His frequent connection with the ministry has contributed to his being regarded with reverence in his community. How would a female modify this role?

2. Are the challenges that female presidents of HBCUs face similar to those confronted by female presidents of other colleges, or do significant differences exist?

3. Since females are already a minority in many branches of the professional and academic worlds, are they especially well equipped to be at the helm of a minority-centered college like the HBCU? If so, how?

*The Paradox of Tradition and Change at the HBCU*

In a broader context, as well, the topic of the HBCU and change begs further study. The relationship of this distinguished institution to today’s world is certainly paradoxical. Clearly the HBCU performed a vital function in the days of segregation, when young African Americans would have been denied access to higher education in many parts of the United States without its alternative. The situation has now changed, however. The educational needs of the African American community may be more numerous and pressing than ever before, especially among young males—but they can no longer be addressed simply by providing a campus whose students come from similar
backgrounds and face similar challenges. The legacy of racial bigotry is itself problematic, as the responses of this study’s subjects reveal: that is, to recognize the persistent disadvantages of being black in mainstream America runs the risk of creating a defeatist mindset and of denying the power of a strong moral will to emerge triumphant.

Two obvious questions for further study suggest themselves at the HBCU’s “crossroads” position. The studies might be combined; both could be said to have much urgency due to their relevance to various social and educational crises:

1. Should the HBCU of the future address this potentially demoralizing situation by exchanging its traditional liberal arts curriculum for a “high tech” variety promising a fast track to white-collar jobs, or perhaps by preparing students to compete in such specialized, lucrative job markets as sports and entertainment? Should radical change be the order of the day?

2. Should the HBCU, on the contrary, emphasize the elements of a humane tradition in arts and letters which gives the student self-knowledge and a stable sense of worth in the face of economic and social upheaval?

Religious Instruction at HBCUs

The issues of healthy change versus a renewed sense of tradition’s relevance extend deeply into the HBCU’s religious identity. The traditional HBCU has sought to negate the demoralizing effects of bigotry by imparting to its students a strong belief in a spiritual reality. A person bolstered by such belief would look to a less fallible source than this world for ultimate justice, and would also come to understand that he or she enjoys a freedom of will which no oppressive set of laws or customs can take away. Today’s HBCU, as the respondents indicated unanimously, continues to endorse such
precious insights and to champion their inclusion in the undergraduate curriculum. There is no question in the minds of these leaders that religious faith has an important place on the HBCU campus.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating discoveries of this study, however, was how reluctant the officers of the five Texas HBCUs were to link religious teaching to a narrowly denominational format often called “fundamentalist.” In mainstream America, the private four-year religious college (which is predominantly white, most often) has tended to survive by being more rather than less sectarian in recent years. To insist upon denominational distinctions seems to help it to define itself clearly to the public and to appeal powerfully to the specific audience “ready-made”, as it were, within the given denomination. Such institutions typically do not encourage Muslims, Jews, or even Catholics to express rival religious beliefs on campus (that is, when there are any students of these disfavored faiths to be found). Faculty members, generally, are not recruited from denominations which are not strictly compatible with the one the school serves. Students often take required courses in religion which advance the specific doctrine of the denomination.

Another series of research topics therefore recommends itself from this contrast:

1. How does the HBCU compare doctrinally with four-year private religious schools (especially Protestant Christian schools) of similar size?

2. Since it is immediately apparent, at least at a superficial level, that the HBCU is somewhat less “hard-line” than its predominantly white counterpart, why is this so? Does the origin of the contrast lie in religious tradition per se, or does it have a significant socio-economic component?
3. Is the more tolerant and eclectic religious atmosphere of the HBCU leading it toward or away from the inclination of mainstream America, which invariably claims, when polled, to hold religious values in high esteem? What does the answer to this question indicate about the future of the HBCU?

Conclusion

In several ways, this study reaffirmed the findings of previous research, including that which viewed the presidential office very broadly. The presidents of the five Texas HBCUs do not necessarily differ from their more mainstream counterparts. Kauffman (1974) and Ross and Green (2000) both found that presidents tend to ascend to the campus’ highest office after serving for several years as deans, chairpersons, and other types of administrators. None of the seven respondents in this study became president straight from the classroom or from some occupation unrelated to academe. Indeed, most of the seven explicitly mentioned their administrative experience as a factor in securing the job of president. Their range of experience, measured in years, appeared to conform with Holman’s (1994) findings of more than a decade ago among HBCU presidents generally.

This tendency of the Texas HBCU chief executives toward the norm may paradoxically be viewed as a surprise finding, for Plotts (1998) reported that the presidents of white-counterpart institutions (if one may so call the member schools of Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities) had a distinct tendency to come to the presidency from religious ministry. The contrast here may help to explain a further finding of the present study; that HBCU presidents, despite being very religious and convinced of faith’s vital role in campus life, do not care for denominational rigor in the
manner of its inclusion. Even the respondent who is an ordained minister (Mitchell Patton) did not leave the ministry to assume his position and expressed no desire for greater dogmatism in on-campus religious practice.

Only one respondent in the study lacked a terminal degree; the vast majority possessed one. Having the doctorate, too, is a mainstream tendency among college presidents, and indeed a crucial asset to achieving high office, according to Moore’s research (1988). Holman’s (1994) dissertation confirmed the importance of terminal degrees to HBCU presidents—and also documented that Education was much the preferred field for the doctorate. This latter finding accords with the present study, as well.

Again, it should be underscored that a gap may exist with the HBCU’s white-counterpart institutions. Carbone (1981) had maintained that non-academic experience often surpassed the importance of a doctoral degree in the presidential careers of his study, which focused on private religious colleges. The situation may well have changed somewhat on these predominantly white campuses since Carbone’s work was published. The possibility of a difference in emphasis remains plausible, however. Always sensitive to issues involving academic reputation (where they have often been vulnerable), HBCUs may well tend to insist upon a leader with a doctorate while their more mainstream counterparts enjoy a relative freedom to stress other credentials (such as religious ones).

A final similarity to existing research emerged in Sebetha Jenkins’ lonely position as the study’s only female. This reflects a nation-wide imbalance that cuts across all institutional types. Arnold (1994) had studied black female presidents (not necessarily of HBCUs) and found them very confident in their own ability—not at all disposed to
regard themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action. This portrayal appears to fit Dr. Jenkins to perfection. The present study did not inquire into any difficulties she may have encountered in the specifically HBCU world; but Thompson’s research (1973), having found the HBCU world decidedly male-dominated, did not predict smooth sailing for her type of candidate. Though Thompson’s work is among the earliest that could be said to bear significantly upon the present study, and may even be outdated in some ways; recall that Jenkins did not mention any role models in describing her career and stated, in fact, that she did not at first view the opening at Jarvis Christian College as a serious opportunity.

Of course, the seven Texas HBCU current or former presidents also differ from the mainstream in important ways; such was the beginning assumption of this study, such was the suggestion of the limited research literature, and such was the study’s actual finding. It turns out that this is an exceptionally dedicated group of chief executives. One sees as much in their early choices as young educators. Several began teaching at a pre-college level, which Tata’s (1980) dissertation identified as typical of HBCU presidents more than a quarter-century ago. In contrast, Ross and Green (2000) found that the average president of a mainstream public institution has little or no professional experience outside of higher education and desires none, except insofar as it might relate to fund-raising.

In this light, assertions like Thompson’s (1973) that HBCU presidents are “representative of traditional middle class values” (p. 234) appear needlessly provocative. It is true that the seven respondents of this study strongly desired for the young people in their charge to enter the American mainstream one day. Not one respondent declared any
sympathy at any point of the interview with what is commonly considered a left-of-center political posture on racial issues (i.e., emphasizing victimization and the duty of the white mainstream to indemnify minorities). On the contrary, all seven former or current presidents endorsed a “can do” attitude which, while not denying the severity of the segregation era or the bitter residue of bigotry today, declined to dwell upon such vague menaces. Whether or not this self-reliant, “take charge” attitude deserves to be called middle-class or “Republican” should be weighed carefully (Fisher & Koch, 1996, p. 93).

It seems doubtful that the great American middle class, or either major political party, would routinely produce individuals as willing to sacrifice for others as the seven respondents of this study.

Instead, the word which appears best to bring the politics, the professional ambitions, the views on race, and the religious beliefs of this select group has already been used: dedication. A political orientation can shift depending upon the perceived relationship between means and ends; professional “hardship” can be richly compensated by promotion, pay, and recognition. In fact, it should be stressed that, thanks to the ascendancy of the multicultural and the diverse on college campuses nationwide in recent decades, presidential candidates of African descent probably enjoy a slight advantage when competing for certain well-paid, high-profile positions. Ross and Green (2000) note that “minority presidents were most highly represented at public master’s and baccalaureate institutions” (p. 13). The five currently active professionals in this study could clearly “do better” from a worldly perspective if they wished. They began life with little privilege, often began their teaching careers with arduous and underpaid service, and have chosen even at the top of the professional ladder to take a risk upon unsteady
scaffolding. However much it may frustrate a simplistic political interpretation of their public life, the truth is that their religious convictions are joined inextricably with their racial consciousness. None of the seven subjects attempted to explain his or her institution’s commitment to African Americans without making some reference to religious faith; and religious faith, in reverse, called upon the subjects to serve the underprivileged whose share in life’s blessings had been limited by racial bigotry.

Such dedication is indeed a rarity among college and university presidents, as it is among people in other walks of life. The bare facts of academic hiring are unequivocal: experienced administrators willing to seek an HBCU presidency, with all of its peculiar headaches involving deficient funds and poorly prepared students and struggling enrollment, are very, very seldom Caucasians with a strong dossier. As the Ross and Green (2000) finding in the previous paragraph reveals, even African American presidents usually prefer to aim higher than the troubled HBCU campus. That certain men and women of this group nevertheless continue to return to the HBCU which launched their educational experience at the higher level—or that they apply for these underpaid, low-profile, stress-intensive positions even without having any personal history on such a campus—reflects an extraordinary degree of commitment.

In the final analysis, the seven respondents in this study were not drawn to such sacrifice by a proselytizing interpretation of their religious duties or by an activist approach to racial politics, but by a desire to serve humanity. Naturally enough, they have served, or are serving, that subset of humanity which they know best or with which their personal past leads them to commiserate in a powerful way. In the early years of the 21st century, however, nothing prevents the five active presidents from earning more
money and prestige elsewhere. The seven respondents in this study, and very probably those like them at other HBCUs, are among a small group of professionals who have chosen hard labor over more worldly measures of success.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Clifton W. Henry
311 LeMay Drive
Tyler, TX 75704
February 6, 2006

To: Presidents of Historically Black Colleges in Texas
Re: Invitation to Participate in Research Project

Dear College President:

My name is Clifton W. Henry. I am a doctoral candidate in the Scholars of Practice Doctoral Program at Baylor University. I also hold an administrative position at Texas College of Tyler, which gives me a special appreciation for the work you have done or are doing in your career.

As a president of a small private HBCU in Texas, you are in a critical position to understand as few others do the problems and complexities that face your unique position in higher education. Your career pathway may well be quite different from that followed by presidents of mainstream institutions. A study has been undertaken at Baylor University by one of its doctoral students and his advisor to bring to light your unique experience.

We seek to reconstruct your own career path to the highest office at a small private HBCU. Our approach is to pose “focus” interview questions which will enable you to express or explain, in whatever way you choose, your career pathway. The purpose of the research is to examine the career path to the presidency of the five private historically black colleges and universities in Texas. Emphasis will be placed on the perceptions of the presidents, with supporting evidence drawn from their education and professional experience, and from demographic information.

The expected duration of the subject’s participation is outlined below:

February, 2006. Each president and immediate past president involved in the study will be invited to participate and to submit a vita. A personal interview of no more than one hour will be scheduled with each of the five current presidents and participating immediate past presidents.

Procedures to be followed:

Vitae will be analyzed quantitatively for trends and qualitatively for significant experiences and influences.

Personal, face-to-face interviews will be recorded to allow the researcher to make transcriptions and to confirm the resulting texts’ accuracy.

The researcher foresees no risk or discomfort to the subject, nor any invasion of privacy. The vitae to be submitted are regarded as public record. The subject may request that any information given in personal or telephone interviews be deleted. The notes and tapes of the interviews will be destroyed as soon as the dissertation is accepted by the graduate school at Baylor University.

The research will benefit its readers by analyzing the patterns and unique characteristics found in the career path to the presidency of five black private colleges in Texas. It is hoped that the study will benefit the subjects who participate by providing them a basis for comparing their career path to presidents at similar
institutions, perhaps revealing to them characteristics of their career path that may not have been recognized before.

Each invited participant has a right not to be a subject in this research project. While each subject will be identified by name in the study, the interview tapes and vitae will be stored in locked cabinets during the duration of the research project and will be destroyed upon acceptance of the dissertation by the graduate school at Baylor University.

Each subject’s participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. The subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. The Internet will not be used to collect data. A written “informed consent” form with a place for the subject to sign and date the form will be given to the subject for his/her records.

The researcher has expertise in the area research as a doctoral student in educational administration at Baylor University and as an administrator at Texas College. The principal investigator of the research project is Clifton W. Henry, 311 LeMay Drive, Tyler, TX 75704, telephone 903-593-8048. The principal investigator is a doctoral student at Baylor University. The faculty advisor is Dr. Douglas Rogers, telephone 254-710-4253.

Subjects may make inquiries regarding their rights, or any other aspect of the research related to their participation as a subject, to Baylor University’s University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research. The chairman is Dr. Matthew S. Stanford, Graduate Studies and Research, Graduate School, P.O. Box 97264, Waco, TX 76798, telephone 254-710-3582.

Thank you for the important work you have done and are doing. I hope you will assist me in seeking to commemorate that work for the broader educational community and for posterity.

Sincerely,

Clifton W. Henry
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. On what basis did you choose the colleges you attended? Looking back, do you think any of these institutions played a significant role—either facilitative or obstructive—in your becoming the president of an HBCU? If “yes”, please explain how you think the institution(s) in question prepared you for your position as president. If you think your progress to the presidency somehow overcame disadvantages in your undergraduate or graduate education, please explain these disadvantages. If you think your college selections had little effect upon your eventual appointment to the presidency, is this because your other qualifications eclipsed the importance of your educational past or because you believe that past to be generally of secondary relevance to the HBCU president’s job?

2. At what point in your life did you decide that you wanted to be the president of an HBCU? Was this decision the result of a desire simply to be a president, or were you especially eager to serve as president at an HBCU? If the latter, please explain why the HBCU held a special attraction for you. If, instead, your interest in the presidency was not tailored to any particular institutional type, please describe what you recall as attracting you to the office originally; and explain further if you serving at an HBCU has tended to help in fulfilling your expectations of the office or, in some way, has thwarted them.

3. If you had to single out one individual for influencing your decision to become a college president, who would it be? What was the nature of this person’s special influence?

4. If you had to single out one personal quality for playing a prominent role in your decision to seek a college presidency, what quality would it be? Similarly, please relate a single experience that stands out in your mind more than any other as having affected your decision to pursue a college presidency.
5. Most small private colleges have a religious affiliation. Did the religious dimension of the HBCU which you now lead or have led as president affected in any way your decision to seek its presidency? If so, how? Did religion have any impact upon your initial choices to seek leadership roles in education? If so, what was its effect? Looking back upon years of such leadership, would you say in general that religious life is important to your institution’s mission or that, on the contrary, it distracts from the crucial labor of preparing minority students for a highly competitive world?

6. As the president or former president of an HBCU, would you say that your race or ethnicity had a significant impact on your decision to seek the presidency of such a school? If so, please describe the influence. If not, have you decided in retrospect that race or ethnicity may have been a more important aspect of your application than you realized? From an opposing angle, do you think that an institution like yours should consider race or ethnicity in reviewing candidates for critical administrative positions? If you could hand-pick your replacement as president, would you take such factors into consideration? Please explain.

7. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me at this time?
REFERENCES


