

# COMMENTARY

## Transforming HBCUs for Student Success

By Adriel A. Hilton, Ph.D.

One might ask: "Why transform educational institutions that have withstood the test of time?" "Why, excuse the cliché, fix something that ain't broke" or if it is indeed broke, how broken is it?"

Transformation is about change, staying current, keeping up with the times. Change is about our Historically Black College and University (HBCU) faculty and staff being able to recognize the needs of today's students, about their being able to retain our students, and ultimately graduating confident, well-prepared students ready to meet the challenges they will face on the global stage. Because life does not stand still – it moves fast and is ever evolving. It's obvious life has changed significantly since the 1890s.

Remember, the 1890s is the era that marked enactment of the Second Morrill Act, that ultimately led to the creation of the 16 original historically black land-grant colleges. Today, the official number of HBCUs has increased to 105. In 1897, the first Boston Marathon was run with a total of 15 runners. In 2013, thousands competed in the 117th Boston Marathon from across the globe and ended with two bombs exploding near the finish line, killing three and injuring many, many others in a terrorist attack associated with radical Islam.

In the 1890s, Edison showed the first strip motion picture film and patented the radio. Last year, using a 3-D printer and cell cultures, American scientists at Cornell University were growing a living ear. From the 1890s to the year 2008, all U.S. Presidents were white males. In 2008, Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President, becoming the first African-American president in the history of the United States. He ran against a white male and a woman.

In 1890, the census reported the U.S. population under 63 million. Today, the latest census reports the population more than 308 million – almost five times as many people. In 2000, the U.S. Census



Adriel A. Hilton

Bureau let respondents check more than one race for the first time and 6.8 million people did. By the 2010 census, nearly 9 million people reported being more than one race, a 32% increase.

The latest government projections say that in five years, minorities will make up more than half of children under 18. By the year 2020, the total U.S. white population will begin an unstoppable decline in absolute numbers, due to aging baby boomers. This will cause a minority-majority shift in the overall population. Of course, this is just a fraction of changes since the 1890s. Life is ever evolving; life moves fast; change is inevitable.

As a result, our HBCUs cannot sit back resting on their laurels, hoping to rely on past achievements. Instead, we need to constantly move forward, continuing to work on advancing our status and reputation. It is imperative we always be aware of what's going on in the world and then make the necessary tweaks to our grand old educational institutions to ensure student success.