

# BLACK ALUMNI— REACHING BACK!

Black college alumni are coming to the conclusion that simply *reaching out* to those around us is not enough today. They have reached the conclusion that, based on the desperate situation of today's world, we have to begin immediately to *reach back!* Their reasoning follows.

Increased—but still proportionately far too insufficient—attention has been placed on enabling the 20% who are considered our gifted black youth to go to college. Yet the gravest kind of heretofore unmet dilemma is reflected in the fact that almost 50% of our nation's black youth have not been enabled to either read or comprehend past the 4th grade level.

Technically speaking, these "unemployables" are classified as "functional illiterates"—and unless something extra special is done to turn this terrifying predicament around, these otherwise hopeless young adults are destined to lead lives of demeaning forms of welfare, drugs, crime and the sorts of alienation that often lead from inner turmoil to outer violence.

Thanks to many college-trained professionals like those in the Council of National Alumni Associations, Inc. and many other national community-building organizations who are "reaching back" to pull along the dropouts, push-outs and others, that needlessly costly dilemma is beginning to get the attention it deserves.

According to Thomas W. Dortch, president of CNAA, "some fifteen-twenty years after the striking gains of the civil rights era, and over a century since slavery, the broad masses of Black America find ourselves with more of us having gone to school, but far fewer of us prepared for the simple rudiments of unskilled labor—much less the demands of a college education and careers in business, technical trades and the professional arena."



Maynard Jackson, former mayor of Atlanta; Rev. Joseph Lowery, president of SCLC; Rev. Jesse Jackson, president of Operation PUSH; Calvin Smyre, secretary of the National Association of Black State Legislators; Thomas Dortch, president of CNAA; and others, all graduates of black colleges, flank Georgia Governor George Busbee as they approach platform for National Black College Day activities, held on the grounds of the state capitol of Georgia.

Few of us foresaw today's devastating predicaments of massive illiteracy and unemployment among our most precious resource—our youth. Today, therefore, few of our vast numbers of organizations have yet revealed the vision and courage to clearly assess our people's predicament and set new directions and new focuses for the years and decades to come.

The Council of National Alumni Associations, Inc. (CNAA) is one organization with such extraordinary vision and courage. Founded in 1946 by 27 of the black colleges as charter organizations, the Council was established with the express purposes of providing valuable services to black colleges (especially fund-raising) and directly addressing the needs of black college alumni (jobs networking and communications).

The CNAA, itself, details as its objec-

tives the following:

- Identify and locate black alumni
- Build chapter and regional alumni associations
- Establish stronger endowment programs
- Recruit qualified students
- Support athletic programs
- Strengthen financial assistance programs
- Provide support services to academic programs
- Formulate successful fund-raising programs

- Participate in state and federal legislative processes

## BLACK COLLEGES FULFILL A UNIQUE ROLE

Black colleges and universities have historically provided the wellspring from which this nation's African-American professionals and business people have come. Despite over two decades of desegregation efforts within institutions of higher education and the accompanying admission of thousands of black youth into white colleges and universities, we still find the vast majority of the African-American community's professionals and achieving citizens coming from the black schools.

Black colleges often have been forced to take many young people who are least prepared by our primary and secondary schools. Fortunately, these black-led colleges have also had the unique ingredients of empathic identification and the kind of determination to help black youth overcome that those outside the black experience cannot easily (if at all) provide.

Thus, it is no accident that these black colleges and universities can boast the following points of achievement:

—Howard University and Meharry College have "produced" 85% of all the black doctors in the United States;

—Tuskegee University has graduated 95% of all Black America's veterinarians;

—Florida A&M University's School of Business has been acclaimed as one of the leading institutions of its kind in the United States, with a recent feature article detailing its many virtues in *Fortune* magazine, the American business sector's most distinguished journal;

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## "Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"—A Series