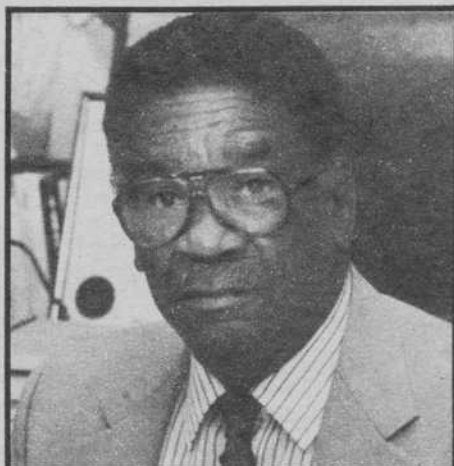


# Black Organizations and Black Institutions—Organizing To Eradicate Illiteracy

“SERVICE is the bottom line!” These were the words of Chancellor Leonard C. Barnes who heads the Southern University, Shreveport Campus of the three-campus Southern University System in Louisiana. With these remarks, this largest of the predominantly Black institutions of higher learning in the United States demonstrated again why it and its many distinguished graduates have remained in an enviable position of leadership.

The occasion was the historic meeting of regional and national leaders of well over 40 major organizations attending an Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP) orientation workshop in Shreveport on June 14, 1985. Their purpose was to learn about why and how all Black community-building organizations in every community of America can begin working together in the sure-to-be-long-term war (or assault) needed to combat the awesome predicament of illiteracy...a dreadful situation wherein almost 50 percent of all Black Americans—age 18 and above—have never been enabled either to read or to comprehend beyond the fourth grade level.



Top left to right: Leonard Barnes, Chancellor, Southern University, Shreveport; Dr. James J. Prestage, Chancellor, Southern University, Baton Rouge; Dr. Emmett Bashful, Chancellor, Southern University, New Orleans. Bottom left to right: Dr. Joyce P. Peoples, Vice Chancellor, Southern University, Shreveport; Carrie Ayers Haynes, National Vice Chairperson, AOIP; and Dr. Mildred Bradham, South Central Interorganizational Liaison Chairperson, AOIP.

## A Major Commitment

CHANCELLOR BARNES went on to say, “I know that I speak the firm sentiments and convictions of each of our campus heads and of our Southern University leadership as a whole when I commit us to leadership positions in joining you in organizing every community in Louisiana in this all-out and long-overdue war on illiteracy.” He concluded by commending the gathering at St. James United Methodist Church and by citing the work of the National

Association of University Women (NAUW). Regional officers of this dynamic organization had taken the lead in assembling these deeply-concerned professionals and others from the wide variety of organizations whose national leaderships have committed themselves to work long term under the AOIP banner.

## A Much-Needed Alliance

At first glance, this might not have

seemed unusual especially since the Assault On Illiteracy Program has more than four years behind it in terms of painful—yet steady—development and growth. Also our schools and colleges have combatted illiteracy for well over a century. However, this great significance is evident when one reflects on the fact that large numbers of Black-led organizations and institutions have hardly any history of more than eight or ten (*i.e.*, the Pan Hellenics) working together for extended periods on a common cause...and, in this AOIP cause, well over 80 such national organizations are doing what many previously had felt im-

possible.

## The Key Players

ONE of the keys to this unprecedented cooperation surely is the purpose and unusual structure of AOIP itself. However, that alone could never hold the entire answer, much of which resides in a beautiful, dauntless, daring and driving lady from Los Angeles by

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“Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps”...A Series