



A Legacy Renewed

Institutions are living organisms and one of their unique attributes is that they grow and change. Through this evolutionary process, they become more adaptive to their environment and more efficient in carrying out their essential functions. If they do not evolve, then they die. Great institutions, such as Howard University, recognize this basic truth and they choose to grow. This often requires a careful examination of existing patterns and practices and a willingness to dispose of those mores that are no longer applicable to the environment and may, in fact, be inimical to the desired growth.

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For 142 years, Howard has served the United States and the world in countless meaningful ways. Its inception was forced by the conditions of the day—the need for an institution to serve the newly freed slaves and in the case of our law school, to end the racial segregation that replaced slavery at the end of the Civil War. Over time, the institution has produced a long and distinguished list of scholars, physicians, attorneys, engineers, teachers, entertainers, corporate executives and public servants, whose work has done much to advance the welfare of African Americans and the nation.

Roland B. Scott, an internationally renowned pediatrician and allergy expert, was the driving force behind the Sickle Cell Anemia Control Act of 1971, which established comprehensive research and treatment centers around the

country for a disease that disproportionately affects people of African descent. LaSalle Lefall Jr., the first African American to become president of the American Cancer Society, has waged a lifelong battle against cancer among minorities. Patricia Roberts Harris was the first African American to be an ambassador, become a dean of a law school and serve in a U.S. presidential cabinet. Vernon Jordan has been an effective civil rights advocate and a successful corporate executive. Thurgood Marshall, under the tutelage of Charles Hamilton Houston, dealt the ultimate blow to segregation. Countless other faculty members and alumni have made invaluable contributions to the struggle for justice in America.

We reap the results of their efforts today.

The election of Barack Obama, the nation's first Black president, stands as the pinnacle of African-American achievement. The trajectory of our nation did not suggest that this would have been an attainable feat for a long time to come. However, President Obama's formidable intellect, impeccable academic credentials and outstanding personal qualities, on a foundation laid by the civil rights movement, helped to make this possible. Now, this historic occurrence has become the measure of our progress as a nation and the yardstick by which our relevance and performance as a historically Black institution is judged.

Further, it has brought home the realization that Howard's impact lies as much in the future as it does in the past—a future that must be defined by more groundbreaking accomplishments in public life; the search for a cure for cancer, HIV/AIDS and diabetes; the efforts to end hunger in the world; effect solutions to the grave problem of

climate change; and broker solutions to conflicts based on differences in race and ethnicity, culture or religion.

Aggressive investment in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as the humanities, is essential to fulfilling this mission.

Research shows that at a general level, the U.S. lags significantly behind countries such as China and Japan in the number of graduates in science, engineering and mathematics—the disciplines that are central to solving many of the challenges of the 21st century. African Americans are particularly underrepresented in these high-impact fields, hence the need for institutions such as Howard to recruit aggressively, train rigorously and graduate expeditiously in these areas. Our students in the humanities, meanwhile, are the future communicators, deep thinkers and philosophers who will be central to intercultural understanding in an international world.

Current changes at the University, including a revision of our mission statement, are being made with all of this in mind. While we will always celebrate the glory of our past, we recognize that our continued relevance lies in our ability to offer solutions to the challenges of today and tomorrow. To this end, our commitment to grow and change demands no less than a focus on high-achieving students and those with obvious potential; an institutional ethos consistent with excellence in research and teaching at all levels, and rapid adaptation to the challenges and opportunities in an increasingly technological and international society. Howard is choosing to grow. ■



By President Sidney A. Ribeau, Ph.D.