

Founding the United Negro College Fund

On February 12, 1943 the Pittsburgh Courier ran an article by Dr. Frederick D. Patterson of Tuskegee Institute highlighting the drop in enrollment of Black Colleges and their severe financial crisis created by the diversion of government funds to the war effort. He suggested that a federation be established for a select group of private Black Colleges and Universities that was operating with limited finances. This historical concept was the first time that collective fund-raising techniques, a la United Way, were applied to higher education.

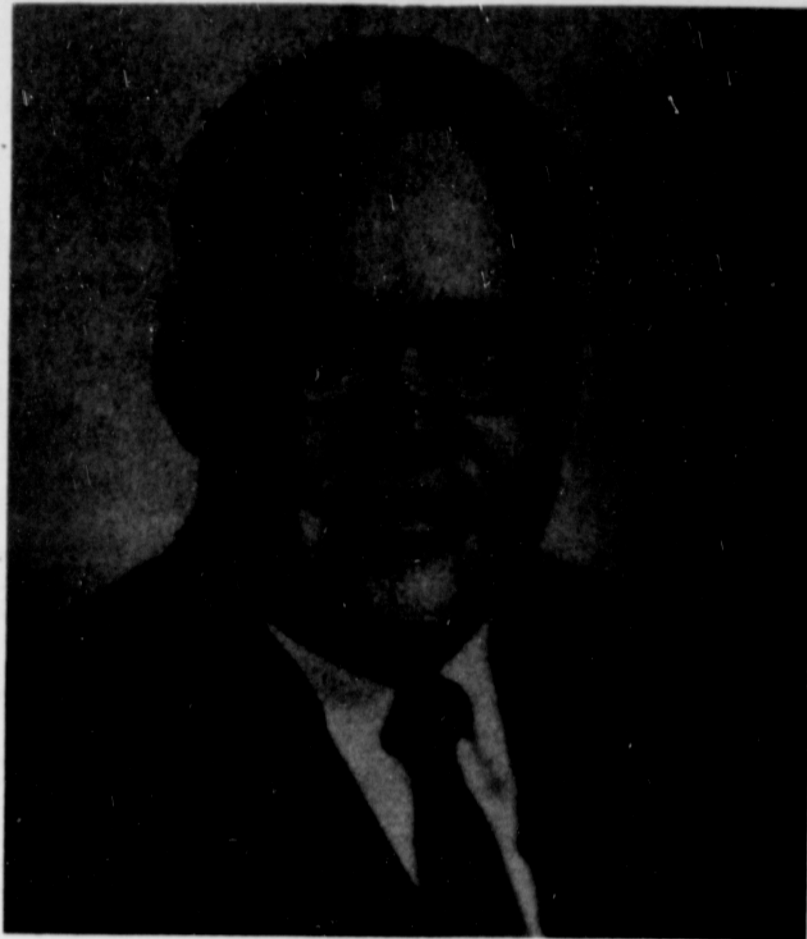
As a result of Dr. Patterson's article, invitations under his name were sent to Black private institutions and eighteen presidents convened at Tuskegee in April, 1943. They discussed the fact that the rising costs of education, including the new attention to curricula and services, were deemed costly threats to the private status of the convening schools. In addition, the competition for limited funding sources and relatively low pay that the average alumnus enjoyed, made it mandatory that this new approach be tried.

A committee was formed to develop strategies for funding and requirements for joining the federation. Dr. Dent of Dillard University, Miss Florence Reed of Spelman, Dr. Thomas Jones of Fisk, Dr. Rufus Clement of Atlanta, Dr.

Before 1840, fewer than 15 Blacks were high school graduates. By the 1850's, there were 28 college graduates.

Benjamin Mays of Morehouse and Dr. Patterson decided that the member institutions must be four year accredited institutions with its basic support coming from private sources. In addition, the majority of its students must be Black. They also agreed that in order to publicize the work of Black colleges and develop a group of donors who would make annual pledges required the expertise of a fund-raising organization. The firm selected then made the determinations that in order to raise the \$1 million that the committee had set as its goal, it would cost \$100,000.

Where would that come from? Dr. Patterson approached the Rosenwald and Rockefeller Foundations and they agreed to contribute half the fee, while the colleges, now numbering 27 with an enrollment of 14 thousand students,



Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, President of Tuskegee Institute and founder of the United Negro College Fund.

(Photo: Courtesy UNCF Archives)

would submit the balance. This was prorated among the schools and was based upon each's ability to pay. One school's share was \$300 which it had to borrow in order to join the federation!

The design of the program was fairly simple; college presidents and volunteers were the major backbone with local paid personnel when more help was needed. Three months of the year there would be an intensive campaign. That first year, \$755,000 was raised from 11,276 contributors and divided between the 27 member schools who gave aid to forty percent of their students — twice the national average.

Since its inception, the United Negro College Fund has increased to forty-two member colleges whose presidents are still involved in the fund-raising. No longer a "nickel and dime" operation, it raised almost \$30 million in 1983. UNCF also has its own modern building which houses the headquarters on the East River in New York City. The organization is now totally responsible for its own fund-raising on a monthly basis.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised in the forty plus years that UNCF has been in existence, and impressive contributions have been made by organizations including a \$4 million in-kind contribution from the 3M Corp. None, however, can match the \$5 million contribution made by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in 1951, the largest single contribution ever made to the fund. Based on today's money, it would be equal to one half of last year's entire revenue.


United Negro College Fund (UNCF) also administers over \$2 million for student and financial aid programs that are geared to exceptional students on an annual basis. Faculty members also are eligible to compete for fellowships and grants for research on advanced degrees, and 160 members have accepted the awards in the seven years they have been available.

Four decades have passed since the article that began the "Federation" was written. Some of the finest Black minds have been educated at institutions that are supported by the UNCF: W.E.B. Dubois, Andrew Young, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ernest Morial, Vice Admiral Samuel Gravely, Maynard Jackson, General Daniel James, Jr., Otis M. Smith, David Dinkins, and Benjamin Daniel Brown, to name but a few. They clearly illustrate how much poorer as a race we would be without an organization that steadfastly asserts that, "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste."



United Negro College Fund Founders: Seated from left, John E. Rockefeller Jr.; Frederick D. Patterson, President Tuskegee Inst.; Walter Hovin, Pres. Lord and Taylor; Standing from left, the following Black College Presidents, Rufus Clement, Atlanta U.; Ralph

Bridgman, Hampton Inst.; Mary McCleod Bethune Bethune Cookman College; David Jones, Bennet College; Florence Read, Spelman College; Alber W. Dent, Dillard University; Mordecai Johnson Howard U. (Photo: Courtesy UNCF Archives)




Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955)

One of the greatest women America has produced, Mary McLeod Bethune rose from a position as field hand picking cotton in South Carolina where she was born to one as advisor, confidante and friend of Pres. and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. She served as Roosevelt's director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration and was a familiar sight at the White House where she always pleaded for justice for Blacks. Almost single-handedly she built Bethune-Cookman College in Florida, an institution whose graduates number in the thousands.

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