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## AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

January 20, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Congratulations on being sworn in as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. You are now only the second person in our nation's history to enjoy non-consecutive terms of office.

On behalf of the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center and the broader community of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), it is my honor to address you as you embark on your historic second term. Your first administration laid a solid foundation of support for HBCUs. Now, with renewed purpose, we are confident you can build upon this legacy to ensure these vital institutions continue to thrive, driving national progress and excellence.

When President Jimmy Carter established the White House Initiative on HBCUs in 1980, he set forth a powerful precedent, stating, "The success of HBCUs is a measure of our commitment to the American dream." You echoed this sentiment during your remarks at the 2019 National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week Conference, declaring, "Together, we will ensure that HBCUs continue to thrive and prosper and flourish for the countless generations to come."

In fact, your first term as President delivered generous support to HBCUs, including increases in federal funding and initiatives such as the Capital Financing Program and expanded Pell Grants for summer classes. These actions reflect a keen understanding of HBCUs as engines of innovation, and economic opportunity.

### **About Black Thriving in America**

The Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center, in partnership with Gallup's Center for Black Voices, annually presents a report titled – "*Black Thriving in America*", offering a comprehensive analysis of all Americans' self-reported life satisfaction and well-being. Leveraging over 80 years of Gallup's extensive survey data on education, employment, and economic conditions, the report now in its second year, represents the Payne Center's 100-year commitment to document the lived experiences of all Americans and the continuing progress of Black Americans.



The 2024 report builds on Gallup’s “Net Thriving” metric, which categorizes life experiences into suffering, struggling, and thriving. Notable improvements include a rise in Black Americans reporting near-perfect health (39%) and increased career satisfaction (56%). There is also a positive shift in neighborhood safety perceptions. On the other hand, the report underscores persistent disparities. Economic well-being remains a concern, with only 30% of Black Americans feeling financially secure compared to 40% of White Americans. The data reveal higher levels of thriving among all Americans with college degrees. HBCUs remain the cornerstone of Black American access to higher education, college degrees, and success in the workplace.

### The Impact of HBCUs

HBCUs represent just 3% of all higher-education institutions in the United States but confer nearly 20% of the bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students. Despite operating with endowments seven times smaller, on average, than their non-HBCU counterparts, these institutions consistently overperform. Recent research underscores their potential to drive economic growth and social mobility:

- **Economic Mobility:** HBCU graduates are 51% more likely to move into higher income brackets.
- **Workforce Development:** HBCUs produce 40% of Black engineers, 50% of Black lawyers, and 80% of Black judges.
- **Community Impact:** For every dollar invested, HBCUs generate \$1.44 in local economic activity.

These metrics showcase the irreplaceable role HBCUs play in fostering talent, developing leaders, and revitalizing communities. Under your leadership, these institutions can continue to unlock America’s full potential.

Given the historic role of HBCUs as catalysts for economic development and innovation, your administration has the unique opportunity to:

- **Expand Research Capacity:** Despite chronic underfunding, HBCUs have produced groundbreaking research. Targeted investments could enable these institutions to address critical challenges in artificial intelligence, sustainability, and public health.
- **Foster Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between HBCUs and industries in technology, healthcare, and manufacturing would accelerate workforce development and innovation.
- **Strengthen Federal Support:** Establishing federal grant programs and increasing Pell Grant funding would address affordability and drive student success.

As you have stated in 2019, "The fierce dedication to strengthening HBCUs is a core part of my administration’s unwavering focus on the project of national renewal." By prioritizing HBCUs, your second administration can further align education with the demands of the modern economy.

### A Vision for the Future

Finally, the Payne Center’s research highlights opportunities to improve wealth, health, and education for all Americans. HBCUs, situated at the forefront of these challenges, offer scalable solutions to:

- Close racial wealth gaps by increasing access to affordable education and reducing student debt.
- Address health disparities through community-based initiatives and research.
- Enhance civic engagement and leadership among middle-class Black Americans, a growing and influential demographic.



Your leadership can dismantle pre-existing barriers by championing innovative policies that uplift our nation by increasing access to and completion of a college education for all Americans who seek higher learning to participate in our national economy.

Mr. President, your second administration is poised to make history by solidifying the role of HBCUs as beacons of national progress. Building on the achievements of your first term, you have the leadership capacity to:

- Expand access to education and eliminate barriers to college completion.
- Enhance the research and innovation capacity of HBCUs.
- Drive economic growth through strategic investments in these institutions.

The Payne Center remains steadfast in its mission to deliver sound data, allowing policymakers, community leaders, and advocates access to rigorous quantitative metrics of American progress. As you lead America into a new era, we look forward to working together to ensure that the promise of the HBCU ecosystem is fully realized. The continued success of HBCUs is a testament to the greatness of our nation.

Sincerely,



M. C. Brown II, Ph.D.

Executive Director & Research Scientist

Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center

