

Making Difficult Choices

Choosing between traditionally black and white universities

Story by Serena Custis

LaToya Coley had a decision to make. Should she attend North Carolina State University (NCSU) or North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University (NCA&T)? Both schools have reputable engineering programs, the field that she wanted to pursue. However, LaToya chose to attend NCSU, a predominantly White institution as opposed to NCA&T, a historically Black institution.

"I wanted to go somewhere with a variety of competition," she said. "Corporate America is not predominantly Black. LaToya was not alone in her decision.

In recent years an increasing number of black students are attending predominantly White colleges and universities. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Black population has increased by 0.6% since 1990.

Why are Black students choosing these schools over historically Black colleges? Several UNC students said that more money, more resources, and renowned reputations were major factors in making the decision to choose Carolina. Myishia Smith, a freshman at UNC, said she chose Chapel Hill because it's all about getting the best education. "I'm not saying a historically Black college couldn't give a good education. But it's like my mother says, it's a white man's world so go get the white man's education."

UNC has attracted the majority of its black students by its reputation as one of the highest-ranking universities in the nation. Many students said they feel like they would have a better chance at getting a job if they graduated from UNC than if they graduated from a historically Black college. Rashonda Steadman, a UNC Pharmacy major, knew early on that she wanted to enter a medical profession. "In comparison to Carolina, the facilities at Black schools are not as good, says Rashonda.

It is no secret that predominantly White institutions have more money than historically Black colleges. But does more money equal a better education? Richard Jackson, also a UNC student, says "Yes." He points out that Morris Brown College, Clark University, Spellman, and Morehouse College in Georgia all share one library. This is just one example of the limited resources at historically Black colleges. He says that more resources are available at predominantly White institutions which, in turn, equals a better education and better opportunities. Shandelyn Porter, a

Communications major at UNC agrees. She said, "Money allows universities to provide students with more access to advanced technology, modern facilities, and diverse programs. Students who attend universities with money have an advantage over others that do not have the opportunity to experience these privileges. These students are exposed to more things and are better prepared to enter the work force."

Even with all the perks that come with attending a White university, students say there are several drawbacks to being a minority on campus. It is not uncommon to see one Black student in a room of 400 students. Leah Pegues, a UNC sophomore, recalls a day of classes when she was the only black student in the lecture hall. "I looked around and was like 'Oh, my God!' And what made it worse was the fact that I was right in the middle!" she said. Eric Edge, another UNC sophomore, said he is sometimes uncomfortable being a minority on campus. "Sometimes I feel like white people think I'm here just because I'm a minority. We're at the same school, taking the same courses and we still have to work twice as hard to gain respect."

Most of the students interviewed said that the advantages of attending a White university outweighed the disadvantages. But what are the benefits of attending a historically Black college or university? Josephus Thompson, a junior at NCA&T, says there are several. "Black schools are smaller and teacher-student relationships are more abundant. The classes are smaller which makes learning easier," he said. "Money is also an important issue. Until we begin to support our own businesses, we will never have any economic power.

See Making Choices on pg. 36



Illustration by Sabrina Tillman