

A time to create black history

Around this time every year, we celebrate Black History Month by reflecting on our glorious past. This year, we should establish a new goal: Let's create some black history. And let's do so by vowing to take some bold steps to strengthen our key institutions.

Like my colleagues DeWayne Wickham of USA Today and radio personality Tom Joyner, I feel a strong statement would be made if Harvard's "Dream Team" of public intellectuals, led by Henry "Skip" Gates and Cornel West, set up shop at a historically black college rather than complain about how they were being treated at Harvard and threaten to shuttle from one Ivy League university to another.

As Joyner said in a speech last week at Knoxville College in Tennessee, "Imagine what a statement that would make if these two professors (West and Gates) brought their talent to an HBCU."

That doesn't take much imagination. Enrollment would certainly soar, students would get an opportunity to be taught by some of the most fertile minds in higher education, and the college would probably be able to attract larger donations because of the fanfare.

Think about it. Gates and West would be no less credible because they were no longer part of the Harvard scene. They will not get any fewer speaking engagements or book contracts. Their commentary on society would not be any less insightful because they've "transferred" to a black school.

Let's examine two questions that are likely to arise. First, some super star professors say privately that black schools can't "afford" them. If you're talking endowments, no one can match Harvard's resources. But that shouldn't be the issue. Gates and West earn more than \$500,000 a year from speaking engagements and book contracts. With that kind earning potential, salaries should not be the overriding factor in deciding to relocate to a black college.

Some high-profile professors say they would be required to teach too

many classes at a black institution. What's the big deal? In deciding on a career in education, I thought college professors pledged to do just that. And if there's something more important than teaching our youths, maybe our priorities are mixed up.

Gates and West are not the only professors who would attract national attention if they decided to teach at

leges, that shouldn't be reason enough to stay away. These students would benefit immensely if some of the star professors would hitch their stars to black colleges.

And this should not be limited to academia. After learning from major financial institutions, some African Americans should consider working for black banks. Seasoned journalists who have worked for some of the best daily newspapers in the country might consider buying or managing black weeklies, instantly improving the quality of these publications. And after being stuck in corporate America, some of that talent might consider opening up businesses that will cater to African Americans.

I will never forget a conversation I had with my stepfather, William H. Polk, when I first took over as editor of *Emerge* magazine in 1993. I told him about the staff we were assembling at the magazine. I mentioned that I was hiring Florestine Purnell from USA Today as my managing editor (Flo now holds that same title at the NNPA News Service); I had selected one of my former high school workshop students, Alvin Reid, who was at *Baseball Weekly*, a spin-off of USA Today, to be senior editor. Wayne Fitzpatrick, who had created covers for *U.S. News and World Report*, was hired as art director. Clarence Brown, a former production manager for *Time* magazine, was production director for *Emerge* and later, associate publisher.

"George, you're doing what white people have been doing to us all along," he told me, brimming with pride. "They've always come into our community and taken the best we had and hired them. Now, you're taking the best they have and bringing them back home."

It's time for many of us to come back home.

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BLACK HISTORY PERSPECTIVE

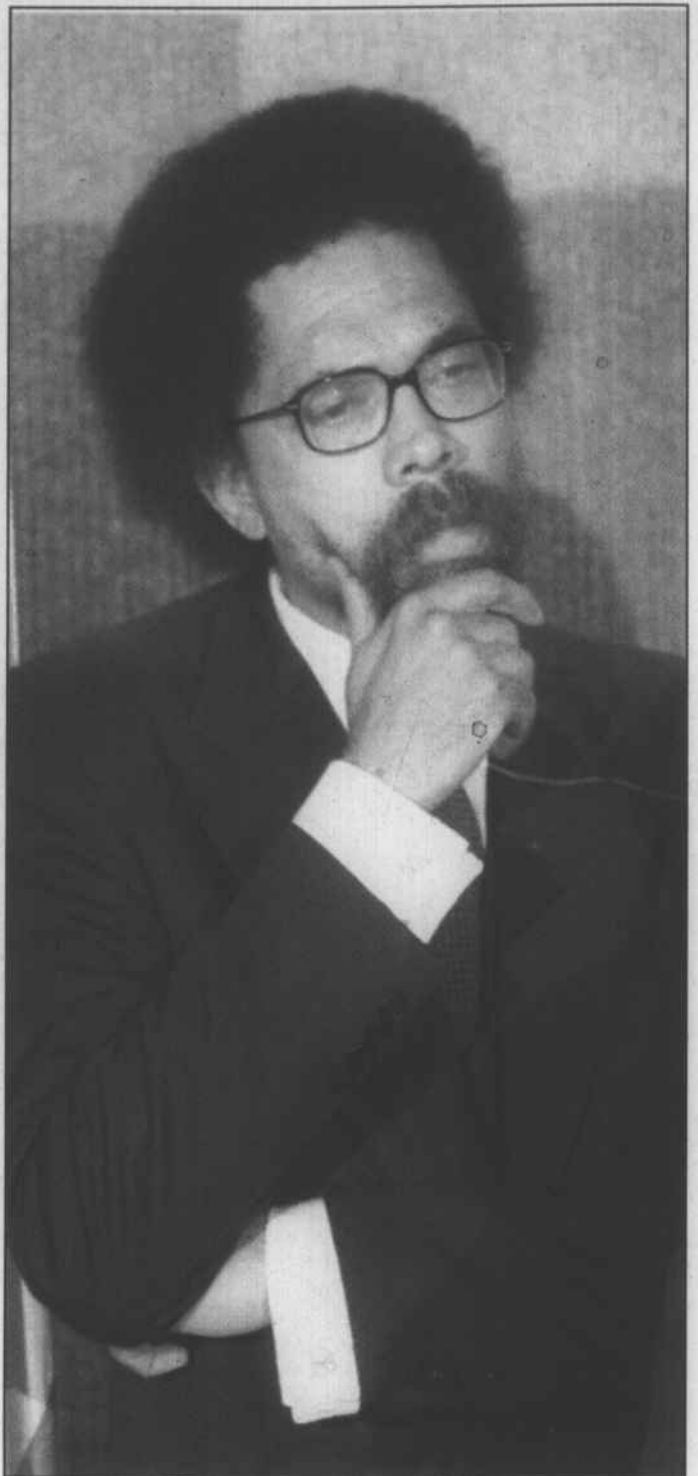
by
George E. Curry

black colleges. Manning Marable of Columbia University, Michael Eric Dyson of DePaul University in Chicago, as well as Sonia Sanchez and Molefi Kete Asante of Temple University, would also add star power to any historically black college. Those first-rate professors would help develop first-rate students and, in the process, help some black colleges become first-rate.

All of the aforementioned professors have expressed, to varying degrees, admiration for W.E.B. DuBois, the noted activist and scholar, DuBois, who did his undergraduate work at Fisk University in Nashville, did more than give lip service to the importance of black colleges. Armed with a doctorate from Harvard, DuBois taught at two HBCUs, Wilberforce in Ohio and Atlanta University, before becoming editor of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's official organ. In fact, some of DuBois' best work was produced while he was in Atlanta.

In the interest of candor, let's state publicly what we often say in private: Some of these black university administrators are difficult to work with, and trying to get things done on a black campus is needlessly frustrating. On that point, you'll get no argument from me, though the same can be said of some white institutions.

However, if we really care about the kind of education our students are receiving in African-American col-



File Photo
Cornel West is considered one of the foremost black intellectuals in the country.

A Musical Celebration of Black History Month



Al Green
I'm Still In Love With You



The Whispers
Greatest Hits



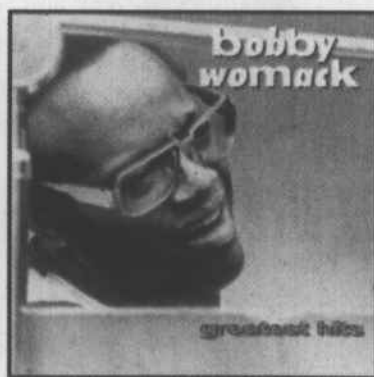
Maze
Anthology



Rachelle Ferrell
Rachelle Ferrell



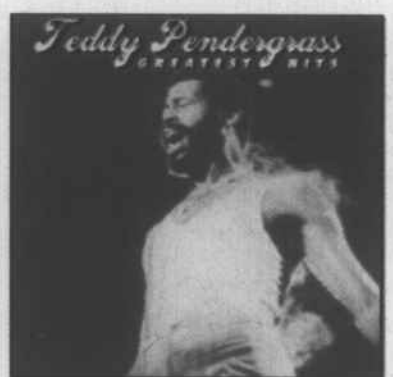
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Greatest Hits



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Greatest Hits

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