

The Changing Face Of Philanthropy In Higher Education: Case Of Historical Black Institutions In The Eastern Region

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*S*ome scholars from schools of thought examined the word philanthropy and the impact it has on higher education in a two-week seminar sponsored by the Lilly Foundation at the Indiana University- Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). These scholars came from all disciplines such as social work, history, sociology, English, psychology, language, communication, liberal education, American humanists, anthropology, religion and philosophy. This seminar aimed at integrating new fields of study in philanthropy such as endowment, foundation, voluntarism, donation, civil society and advocacy into multidisciplinary courses and how they relate to academic disciplines. The practices of organized philanthropy and voluntary association have played an important role in shaping the character of the economic, political and social life of American society unlike other developing societies.

The fundamental questions posed to these experts are – how can institutions of higher learning create courses to incorporate philanthropy? How can the faculty engage themselves in the community in scholarship, teaching, and how do they see themselves as institutions? These experts could only attempt to answer these questions by defining the complexity and contradictory word “philanthropy” Carnegies defined philanthropy as “In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves, to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all.” (Carnegie, 1993).

Few researchers, such as Salamon see philanthropy as the giving of time of variables such as money, securities, property, time for the public purposes (Salamon, 1998). In other words, one way of looking at philanthropy is a form of income of private, nonprofit organizations that refers to a collection of entities that includes organizations, provide, nonprofit, self-governing and voluntary. Philanthropy, in a way of thinking according to Jon Van Til, is not distinct because of its location in a clearly defined or bounded institutional sector or realm (Jon Van Till, 1990).

Organizations are looked as institutionalized to some extent, informal, ad hoc and temporary gathering of people. Another hypothetical question we must not fail to answer is how unique are the American traditions of philanthropy and voluntarism? The history of philanthropy started in the United States with the drawing of the Constitution. Alexis de Tocqueville believed they were among the United States’ most distinguishing characteristics, responsible in no small measure for the success of “democracy in America.” (Alexis deTocqueville, 1945).

Throughout human history, families have helped themselves; people tackle their own problems and volunteered their time in helping others. Citizens took matters into their own hands until they could persuade their fellow citizens that government help was needed. Philanthropy originated from cultural association because giving has always been a part of culture.

Looking at the practical synopsis defined by some communication scholars, culture is the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, roles, and relations concepts of the universe, material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generation

through individual and group striving. According to Dolce, culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration, (Dolce, 1990). People give based on their values and beliefs. Traditions of sharing and giving are important features of communal and familial life patterns on the African tribes. Just like other traditional societies, status is measured by one's ability to disperse wealth, rather than by accumulation of wealth. Based on this tradition, there was no perceivably distinct category of sharing or giving, which can be compared to Western notions of philanthropy. Rather, giving aid and sharing resources is part of the fabric of everyday life.

Within the United States slavery, system there were ample examples of benevolence from sharing food and clothing, to providing education, to giving the gift of life. These acts of benevolence and altruism accomplished the survival of the group and maintenance of values for their communities just like the majority groups. Naturally, charity describes the personal acts of compassion. Perhaps giving in the African American community was often overlooked because it took place through churches or social organizations as part of their routine business. Voluntary services to churches and other organizations within the communities were often extended to benefit the larger community, especially during times of crisis.

An economist, Weisbrod (1988) for instance, posited an approach that confirmed that Nonprofit organization was created due to certain inherent limitations of the market system that dominates the American economy. Economist referred to these as market failure. This was referred to as market failure theory, because nonprofit organizations exist to fill the unsatisfied demands for collective goods left. On the other hand, nonprofit organizations secure legal standing as corporations chartered under state laws. Nevertheless, the creation of nonprofit organizations was to promote democracy and economic growth, individuals and organizations ranging from billionaire George Soros and the World Bank to grassroots activists and student groups are trying to develop the institutions of their own worldwide.

To confirm the growth of nonprofit organizations Susan Ostrandar stated that out of 50,000 nonprofit organizations active in the United States, 90% are independent and the top twelve are Lilly Foundation (IN), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (WA), Ford Foundation (NY), The David and Lucile Packard Foundation (CA), J. Paul Getty Trust (CA), The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (NJ), The Pew Charitable Trusts (PA), W.K. Kellogg (MI), John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (IL), The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (NY), The Starr Foundation (NY), and the Rockefeller Foundation (NY). This report was based on most current audited financial data in the Foundation Center's database as of June 29, 2001.

How many African Americans are presently working for these 50,000 foundations? It is "confirmed that the number of blacks has not increased in proportion to the growth in the nonprofit world" said Alice Greene Burnett, a fundraising consultant who has completed a major study of blacks in philanthropy for the Lilly Endowment and the Ford Foundation. The scarcity of blacks comes at a time of unprecedented growth in the nonprofit sector. The number of nonprofit organizations jumped 43% from 123,687 in 1989 to 177,604 in 1996, according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

In the post-antebellum period W.E.B Dubois noted that the importance of secret societies among blacks was second only to the church for organized philanthropic activities. The societies were full of practices of rituals and secrecy reminiscent of traditional African mysticism but they also worked as insurance and benevolence associations. However, blacks were most often seen as an object of charity rather than as donors because after emancipation the government made no provisions to compensate the former slaves. As a result, African Americans become the largest and the needy group in America.

During the late 19th.Century many institutions were founded to assist African Americans. Thousands of African Americans were given health care, taught to read and write, manage small farms, launch small businesses and move closer to self-sufficiency. These efforts were tempered by severe economic realities and Jim Crow laws (separate but equal).

Americans traditionally have expected higher education to help prepare students for citizenship, to give students a broader perspective and knowledge base and, encourage and reinforce the development of basic ethical values of integrity, tolerance, respect for others and responsibility . Higher education has come under attack according to Payton in recent years for failing its students and society in these respects (Payton, 1991).

Since there is a strong service ethos at the historically black institutions for example, that could promote students involvement in community services and academic centers, devoted to the study of non-profit organizations is highly recommended. Philanthropic studies would help provide the stimulus for the students to reflect personally on how they feel about and relate to various ways of being involved in community action and services. This course clearly encourages integrative as well as analytical thinking and also enable students to make connections between what they care about and what they are learning.

Presently for African Americans to get into the mainstream America for survival, philanthropic study through liberal education must be incorporated into their curriculum. This is the vehicle in which students can study strategies of engagement with ideas and their consequences, testing theory against practice. What is the role of liberal education in accomplishing philanthropy? It happens that the study of Philanthropy is an exceedingly effective form of liberal education said Jeavon. (Jeavon, 1991). Liberal education is the loom that weaves together the development of mind and the development of character. To some degree, liberal education is more effective in preserving and advancing the ideals of freedom and democracy than other more utilitarian and educational models.

To bring the study of philanthropy into black schools such as Coppin State College is to call attention to the mission of a university of higher learning and more socially responsible than the recent media reports would suggest. Liberal education insists that philanthropic ideas be weighed and reflected upon, discussed and evaluated. In addition, the study of philanthropy must include the principal critiques of voluntary actions. The distinguished historian Karl Weintraup once told a class entering the college of the University of Chicago that the first objective of a liberal education is to come to some understanding of the complexities of things.

There are different reasons for people to become involved in philanthropy and volunteerism. The reasons include: infusing intellectual curiosity by helping students in their search for meaning, purpose, and hope in their lives; teaching the good society and the good life through the study of good works; enhancing philanthropic dimensions of their lives, thinking all disciplines that opens the spirit of questioning; integrating current curriculum on philanthropy and fundraising both locally and nationally; strengthening current leadership and fund development courses by introducing a more diverse teaching approach; and stimulating the establishment and growth of foundations operated by the African American community, thus increasing the number of African American philanthropists.

It is necessary to recognize the contributions and traditions of the ethnic groups made in the field of philanthropy since our society is moving fast towards globalization. The author welcomes questions and comments on philanthropic studies.

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