

Terry F. Walker, Sr.*

Re-establishing Missing Links

Introduction

The title of this paper may be a misnomer with two assumptions: for missing links to be re-established, they must first exist and then cease to exist. Regarding the first supposition, much debate has occurred concerning the existence of links between an African past and the experience of Africans on American soil.¹ This writer assumes that regardless of the degree to which descendants of Africans in America exemplify their cultural heritage, a transcultural connection inextricably binds the common purpose of Africans of the Diaspora and Africans remaining on the continent, striving toward the fullness of potential.

Regarding the second speculation, history, however fragmented in written form, appears to support the notion that Africans in America struggle to reconnect with their homeland at varying levels of intensity and with mixed responses from brothers and sisters on the other shore. Therefore, rather than emphasizing a missing-links metaphor resembling a chain—which maintains little to no continuity in the absence of a link—it is suggested that the reader consider the image

*Terry F. Walker, Sr., is Director of Constituency Relations and Advancement Research, Office of Institutional Advancement, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

¹Probably the most famous debate on this subject was between anthropologist Melville Herskovits and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. Following their disagreement over the retention of "africanisms" in the cultural context of Africans in America, many scholars have presented evidence on both sides. However, the prevailing opinion appears to favor the Herskovits argument that many African cultural norms continue to find expression of the ravages of the Middle Passage.

of a string of pearls with a connection, no matter how thin or tenuous, that continues regardless of the number of pearls that it holds together. Further, if the metaphor is extended to imply that each pearl represents an aspect of life and social order, the reconnecting of individual pearls to the string will ultimately yield not only an object of great beauty but one also of significant value. This presentation will specifically address two such pearls, higher education and theology.

Higher Education and Theology

Two of the earliest institutional formulations within communities of Africans in America related to religion and education. Even as Africans in America developed religious and denominational structures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their proponents understood education to hold keys capable of unlocking myriad doors of opportunity for Blacks. Free persons and former slaves alike placed great value on education, a cornerstone of "uplift" to the race. Although some Black institutions of higher education preceded Emancipation,² the explosion of growth in Black institutions of higher education following Emancipation is especially noteworthy, as is the involvement of religious persons in their establishment.

Since slaves had been denied formal education of any sort, universal illiteracy characterized the masses of

²"The first black colleges were the Cheyney State Training School (PA), established in 1837; Avery College (PA), established in 1849; Lincoln University (PA), established in 1854; Wilberforce (OH), established in 1856." See Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1987), 641.

blacks as they greeted the Emancipation Act. The churches immediately sought to remedy that condition by founding schools and allying with both northern philanthropists and white churches to alter this severely crippling social condition. By the turn of the century both the black Methodists and the black Baptists credited themselves with having had no little hand in reversing the situation to a veritable state of literacy in less than thirty years.³

Armed with meager resources but bountiful vision and honored commitments to future generations, educational enterprises were launched, many of which continue today, serving the great-great grandsons and granddaughters of their founders.

The interweaving of a socio-political agenda of improving external conditions among Blacks with an internal emphasis spawned through Black churches created an approach with sufficient grounding to withstand great challenges. Communities recognized the potential impact of the organizational structure that these churches provided, operating with an expansive mission to incorporate more than simply "other-worldly" concerns. Churches, in fact, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, served as incubators for religious denominations as well as for secular organizations, fraternal orders, businesses and private educational institutions through providing human and financial resources along with physical meeting space.⁴

³Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 68.

⁴Note discussions in John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 268-294; Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radical-*

Historically and presently, the relatedness of many private institutions of higher education with churches and religious orders is undeniable. Due to issues of separation of church and state, the relationship between public institutions, churches, and religious orders is less obvious. However, the value placed on higher education coupled with the pervasive influence of religion in American life, even in the public sphere, and especially concerning matters of education, guarantees a continuing struggle for control of educational curricula and institutions well into the future.

Moreover, the importance of education—particularly higher education—in the broader socio-economic and socio-political arenas demands attention by governing bodies at the highest level. In this context, the United States government, through the Agency for International Development (USAID), has incorporated a strategic approach to address the challenge of capacity-building and development in countries around the world. USAID's preamble states that "promoting sustainable development among developing and transitional countries contributes to U.S. national interests⁵ and is a necessary and critical component of America's role as a world leader."⁶

This stance is further clarified in USAID's mission statement:

ism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People, 2d ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 99-134; and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1-19.

⁵"USAID Strategic Plan," accessed 12 November 1998; available from <http://www.info.usaid.llov/pubs/strat plan/>; Internet. (According to Footnote 1, "U.S. national interests are defined in the Strategic Plan for International Affairs Agencies and are incorporated into USAID's strategic plan.")

⁶*Ibid.*, "Preamble."

USAID contributes to U.S. national interests through the results it delivers by supporting the people of developing and transitional countries in their efforts to achieve enduring economic and social progress and to participate more fully in resolving the problems of their countries and the world.⁷

To accomplish this mission, USAID operates under its Strategic Plan that is driven by specific goals, objectives, and performance measures. Further, these elements of the Strategic Plan, particularly concerning higher education, filter into the prescriptive approach to funding availability announced in a Request for Proposal (RFP 674-98-P-001) for the Tertiary Education Linkages Project (TELP) issued November 7, 1997. Responded to by The College Fund/UNCF, among others, TELP is a continuation of a prior contract with similar mission and is presently a five-year \$28 million-plus contract awarded by USAID to UNCF—the largest contract ever awarded to UNCF by any governmental agency.

Overview of TELP Development

The College Fund/UNCF has long been the vanguard for strategic development and fund raising on behalf of predominantly African-American institutions of higher education in the U.S. Following encouragement through "an open letter [in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, then president of Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University] to the presidents of the nation's private black colleges urging them to 'pool their small monies and make a

⁷Ibid.

united appeal to the national conscious,"⁸ the United Negro College Fund took wings in 1944 with "27 member colleges and a combined enrollment of 14,000 students."⁹ Now, with thirty-nine member institutions having served over 300,000 students, the UNCF is well-positioned to broaden its reach through sharing learnings both at home and abroad.

In the U.S. inequalities developed under enslavement, disenfranchisement, and a "separate but equal"¹⁰ system of education. The comparable South African situation emerged through the apartheid system fueled by the impact of the Bantu Education Act of 1953—which officially stratified the South African tertiary education system by race—and the University Education Act of 1959 which created "bush colleges" for educating Black, Indian and Colored students. These institutions, now known as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), respond to the charge to educate and train students under the impoverished circumstances of governmentally mandated material insufficiency.

The HDIs of South Africa are not alone. There are institutions throughout the world that categorically, yet not contextually, face similar, if not the same problems of educating and training responsible and prophetic leaders with "hand-me-down" resources. Challenges faced by UNCF and its member institutions across the years provide a source of shared experience that informs the task ahead for HDIs in learning to produce "bricks without straw."

Beginning in 1994, with the end of apartheid and sub-

⁸"UNCF Yesterday and Today," (Fairfax, VA: The College Fund/UNCF, 1998), accessed 10 November 1998; available from <http://www.uncf.or-/mission.htm>; Internet.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰"Plessy vs. Ferguson," the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision which upheld racial segregation in education.

sequent establishment of democratic systems of government led by former political prisoner Nelson Mandela, now the first majority president in the country, South African people are witnessing unparalleled reforms in the economic and education systems. Strengthened by the 1997 Higher Education Bill (B 75B-97), there is a move toward a unified system of higher education. TELP endeavors to help build capacity within HDIs to respond effectively to the changing tide in public policy while simultaneously narrowing the gap in education and training resources and opportunities between HDIs and their better-funded minority counterparts.

Through the astute and persuasive leadership of its CEO, William H. Gray, III, The College Fund/UNCF successfully competed for the contract through forming a UNCF Consortium (including UNCF institutions, other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Majority Institution Partners, and private sub-contractors). Utilizing the collective intellectual and experiential capital of consortium members and their respective staffs, UNCF serves as agent and facilitator. The process will ultimately lead to increased capacity among the South African HDIs to access and administer funds made available through USAID and aid in developing and solidifying linkage opportunities with institutions of higher education in the U.S.

The TELP program is an outgrowth of the South African Mission of USAID, one of eighty-three operating units around the world.¹¹ A separate but somewhat related USAID initiative beyond TELP and South Africa is the establishment

¹¹The number of operating units was derived from tables in the *Agency Performance Report 1997* (Washington, DC: Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, 1998), accessed 15 November 1998; available from <http://www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/apr97/ch1.pdf>; Internet.

of the International Development Partnership (IDP), a product of USAID's global efforts which will be discussed later.

This is the second awarding of a TELP contract by USAID, the first, now concluding, was awarded to a firm called DevTech. TELP II, as this program more aptly should be described, builds upon work concluding under TELPI with the responsibility for supporting the functions established under the first contract.¹² Moreover, the awarding of this TELP contract, although the first to UNCF, should be couched in a long-standing history of HBCUs with USAID on other smaller projects, individually and in partnerships, and between HBCUs and international concerns. An understanding of the ethos of HBCU involvement internationally must include such initiatives that significantly precede USAID funding for such efforts.

The involvement of Africans on American shores in the struggle for equity and justice throughout the continent of Africa has a long and varied history including emphases on establishing missions, political advocacy programs, and possible emigration. It is not new for Africans to study in American universities, particularly HBCUs, nor is it new for African Americans to study at universities across the African continent. This project simply underscores a milestone in con-

¹²Supported functions include: facilitating the operations of the TELP Policy Advisory Panel, consisting of fifteen Vice Chancellors or designees and five external members; Executive Committee, consisting of four Vice Chancellors and two external members appointed by the Advisory Panel; TELP Review Panel, fifteen TELP Coordinators & Contractors, and USAID Strategic Objectives Education Team; and facilitating HDI Coordinator Meetings and the Post Award Conference for the TELP Start-Up Team. See *Tertiary Education Links Project: A TELP Guide for U.S. Partnering Institutions* (Fairfax, VA: United Negro College Fund, 1998), 39.

tractual relations between UNCF and USAID—one that has been in development for years.

Overview of TELP Strategies

The strategies of the UNCF team on behalf of the Consortium proved to be both comprehensive and cooperative. Empowerment to form the UNCF Consortium originated with the UNCF presidents upon recommendation of the UNCF CEO in October 1997. A series of strategic planning meetings was hosted by UNCF through which a working committee for TELP was formed. A UNCF team then journeyed to South Africa to incorporate the issues and concerns of the Vice Chancellors of the fifteen HDIs that comprise a portion of the TELP Advisory Committee. In the interim, Consortium members compiled and submitted summations of past performance in international relations, especially in South Africa, government contract management, along with questions concerning the RFP. In addition, Capability Statements with supporting vitae identified the breadth of the resource pool available through the Consortium while letters of commitment confirmed exclusive participation of Consortium members to UNCF's bid.¹³

Upon returning from South Africa, the UNCF team convened additional strategic planning meetings to compile and match the resources of the Consortium to the needs identified in consultation with the Vice Chancellors. A host of needs were determined: under-prepared students, staff-qualification deficits, the need to meet National Qualification Framework

¹³It should be noted that participation in the UNCF Consortium is strictly voluntary and not all HBCUs or UNCF schools were required to exclusively support UNCF's bid for the TELP contract.

Curriculum Standards, planning needs, grants management needs, and research. Additionally, matters of association and cooperation, leadership development, language problems, brain-drain issues for students and faculty, and effective rather than superficial linkages were brought to the discussion.¹⁴

Subsequent conversations focused the importance of negotiated strategies to meet the objectives of the HDIs within the framework of the strategic objectives of USAID. Through this process specific written queries were generated for USAID concerning matters of needed clarification prior to final proposal development.

Each of the involved entities—the South African HDIs, USAID, UNCF and the resulting Consortium—engaged the process with the understanding that ultimately the gains would result in increased capacity for long-term development in South Africa, among South Africans, and beyond the borders of South Africa. This is not to say that each entity came to the enterprise with completely altruistic commitment to South African empowerment. Two USAID interests were defined in the RFP:

The purpose of this contract is to assist 15 South African Historically Disadvantaged Institutions of Higher Education to increase their institutional capacity, and to assist the Government of South Africa to implement its national higher education policy.¹⁵

Another, that of “U.S. national interests,” has already been mentioned. The interests of the HDIs and UNCF along with

¹⁴Information from TELP strategy planning meeting, December 8, 1997.

¹⁵USAID RFP (674-98-P-001), Cover Letter, November 7, 1997.

the subsequent opportunities for collaboration and partnership are yet evolving. Suffice it to say, however, that one of the Vice Chancellors raised the term "shared experience" to describe the relationship during the UNCF team's visit to South Africa in November 1997. Additionally, one next step in that evolving relationship is a visit in December 1998 by the fifteen Vice Chancellors to the United States for a series of meetings with a cadre of potential partners in the overall future development of the HDIs.

The visit of the Vice Chancellors, although not a part of TELP proper, is one of several distinctive contributions that UNCF brings to the overall project. From its inception, the approach of the UNCF Consortium has been to satisfy the strategic objectives of USAID while taking them at least one step further. UNCF's strategy stretched beyond the prescriptive approach of USAID through including "value-added" components such as establishment of a TELP Resource Center, fostering gender sensitivity and consciousness, developing research capacity at the HDIs, and outreach to the corporate community.¹⁶ Such strategies were intricately woven into the overall TELP structure within the framework of "cross-cutting issues."¹⁷

Overview of TELP Structure

The TELP program is divided into four project components: joint activities, linkage grants, institution specific activities, and policy implementation and systems development. Joint activities include those that apply to all fifteen of the

¹⁶ *TELP Guide*, 24-25.

¹⁷ "Cross-cutting" issues are simply those that apply across the five project focus areas.

HDI. Linkage grants provide opportunity for exchange of resources, human and material, between one or more HDIS and one or more U.S. institutions of higher education. Institution specific activities are developed according to priorities of need established by each HDI. Policy implementation and systems development activities are specifically focused upon the emerging Higher Education Policy of the new democratic government of South Africa and affect the operation of all fifteen of the HDIs.

These four project components cover five focus areas: curriculum development, student academic development, staff development, management and administrative development, and research. Through these four project components and five project-focus areas, the TELP program will accomplish seven key results:

- HDIs will develop and use revised curricula in one Faculty of Science and one other faculty that provides for credit accumulation and multiple entry and exit points for learners and conforms to the current National Qualifications Framework guidelines.
- HDIs will assess all first-year students and provide appropriate compensatory (bridging) programs for at least seventy-five percent of those students requiring help in key strategic areas of math, English, science and study skills.
- HDIs will have the management, administrative, and leadership capacity to effectively develop and implement three-year rolling plans.

- A total of nearly \$7 million in linkage grants with U.S. institutions awarded and implemented with each HDI involved in at least one linkage arrangement.
- Fifteen well-developed HDI proposals are approved for USAID direct funding and successfully implemented.
- Seventy-five percent of the HDIs will submit at least this percentage of TELP accounts payable to USAID for reimbursement on a quarterly basis.
- At least three studies or policy implementation plans completed and two workshops conducted in governance-related areas.¹⁸

The management team that will implement TELP activities includes:

- The Chief and Deputy Chief of Party
- Project Managers for Joint Activities and Institutional Development
- Director of the TELP Resource Center
- Subcontractors—the Desmond Tutu Educational Trust, Aurora Associates International, Inc., and Price Waterhouse Coopers/Nkonki Sizwe Ntsaluba (a joint venture), and

¹⁸TELP Guide, 20-25.

- The Resource Pool of Experts consisting of South African and American independent contractors.¹⁹

In an effort to assure capacity building and empowerment, South Africans as principal contractors are being utilized wherever possible.

Typically, the administration of grant funds takes the form of up-front payments with specific after-the-fact reporting requirements according to a proposal and funding agreement mutually endorsed by the grantor and the grantee. The TELP project is defined by a contractual relationship between UNCF and USAID. Simply put, TELP is a five-year performance-based, firm-fixed price contract for services rendered directly based upon the attainment of clearly defined milestones, each with built-in measurability standards. In addition to the limitations of required Congressional Appropriations approval for each fiscal year's expenditures, the contract specifies payment upon completion of tasks verified by outcomes related to the measurability standards on a prorated basis according to the percentage of outcome achieved.²⁰

Overview of a Related Development

Beginning fall 1998, the International Development Partnerships Activity (IDP) is a five-year performance based cooperative agreement between USAID and UNCF to facilitate collaboration between HBCUs with host countries' Institutions of Higher Education. These partnerships will strengthen the abilities of host countries' institutions to meet economic and social development needs, assist in the achievement of USAID goals and strategic objectives of Missions,

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰See TELP RFP (674-98-P-001), accessed December 1997; available from <http://www.info.usaid.sJov/pubs/>; Internet.

and further the international involvement of HBCUs.

Four sub-agreements of \$200,000 each will be awarded annually. Successfully competing to receive an award, an HBCU may partner with other HBCUs, Non-Governmental Organizations and USAID assisted countries. Unlike the TELP contract that is limited to South Africa, IDP is a global program touching USAID missions in all five regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.²¹

Closing Gaps and Re-establishing Missing Links

Through the maze of developmental turns, strategic approaches, and structural foundations, one would wonder, how does such a project accomplish the task of re-establishing missing links? What does the TELP initiative mean for relationships among continental Africans and Africans of the Diaspora? How can the potential pitfalls of collaboration among diverse agencies with equally diverse agenda be avoided while effectively meeting each concern? Ultimately, when the five-year contract is complete, what will remain of the strategies and structures to continue whatever positive impact the program brings to the constituents being served?

Reconsidering the metaphor, if the true beauty and value of the string of pearls is to be realized it is important that the string is strong and that the number, size, and quality of the pearls attached are appropriate. The implication is that the string refers to the common purpose attributed to not only the South Africans and Africans of the Diaspora but to all who would be served by a stronger more viable South Africa in

²¹See the "International Development Partnerships" (brochure online), accessed 15 November 1998; available from <http://government.ncat.edu/idp/>; Internet.

the broadening world context. It is further implied that at least one of the pearls that becomes a means to achieving this end is education.

Tertiary education, in and of itself, will probably fail to reach the desired end unless the principal curricular emphasis is sufficiently broad to encompass both skills development and increasing capacity for humane interaction with the ultimate end of justice. This may clearly be a point of interaction between HBCUs and HDIs in that historically one salient feature of education at many HBCUs is providing contact with those for whom education provides a foundation for responsible action. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential. Social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy. Deeds uninformed by educated thought can take false directions.²²

Beyond the individual agenda of each of the participating principals in the TELP enterprise, the ultimate goal is to increase the capacity of South Africans to develop, stabilize and perpetuate systems most beneficial first to them and secondly to those with whom they will interact.

By extension, in the emerging global system, the points of interaction become increasingly universalized. Ali Mazrui articulates this vision:

The increasing influence of Black American organisations [*sic*] such as TransAfrica, a congressional

²² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 155.

lobby designed to influence legislation favourable to African interests, is one measurement of the slow but still promising re-Africanisation [*sic*] of the Black American psyche. It is partly in this sense that the African presence in the outer world has been part of the universalisation [*sic*] of Africa, part of the transition from the ethnocentric image of the 'tribe' as the world to the universalistic image of the world as a family.²³

Moreover, as far as Africa is concerned, this universalization is a bilateral arrangement, "[d]iluting Western influence on African options is one goal; increasing African influence on Western options is another."²⁴ The conversation evolving through the UNCF Consortium between HBCUs and HDIs may conceivably make great strides in empowering continental and diasporan Africans to reap the full benefit of their untapped potential. According to Mazrui:

From a political point of view, Black America especially is Africa's most important external human resource, precisely because it constitutes a large concentration of people of African ancestry lodged in the most powerful nation in the world, and certainly a nation with immense capacity to do Africa harm or good.²⁵

Further, he states that

in the twenty-first century Black South Africans are likely

²³Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: BBC Publications, a division of BBC Enterprises, 1986), 302.

²⁴Ibid, 310.

²⁵Ibid, 302.

to become the most privileged and powerful Blacks of the world. The immense wealth that the country has, the industrial base which whites and Blacks have all helped to construct, the courage hardened by struggle, the sophistication drawn from being part of a global drama, will all contribute towards making South African Blacks a potentially enlightened aristocracy in the world of Blacks, and certainly a major force for Black power in the world economy.²⁶

If taken seriously, Mazrui suggests that collaboration between these two sleeping giants of African descent could very well set the stage for an unparalleled period in empowerment for Africans throughout the world.

Conclusion

The combined intellectual, material, theological, and social capital that exists between Africans in America and Black South Africans would certainly represent pearls of astounding beauty and immense value. A history-making impact of the TELP enterprise would be to re-establish the missing links between so great a people. Would that through the linkages established between HBCUs and HDIs a twentieth-century George Washington Carver should emerge who could tap the span of mineral resources enjoyed by South Africa. Or, that an educator/statesman, Booker T. Washington, would arise to lead one of the South African HDIs in a manner that would galvanize a new approach to education. Or, that an intellectual/philosopher akin to W. E. B. DuBois might emerge to inspire the South African Black intelligentsia to leadership

²⁶Ibid., 310.

and social responsibility. Would that a Stephen Biko-like character emerge in the shared experiential learning that African Americans will inevitably gain from these linkages (provided that the arrogance of status as a "world power" does not cloud the vision of learning as a two-way enterprise). Or, that one with the patience and sacrificial spirit of a Nelson Mandela might grasp the mantle of symbol and hero beyond the temptations of wealth and power.

In such an exchange, the true value of the linkages created through the TELP project can be "abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."²⁷ Should the encouragement of the prophet Amos to "let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream"²⁸ or the ethos of Micah that those involved would "do justice, . . . love kindness, and. . . walk humbly before your God"²⁹ find expression and take wings in those called to this noble task, the missing links between humans, additionally, the missing links between humans and God could yield glimpses of the "beloved community"—even the reign of God.

²⁷Eph 3:20b RSV.

²⁸Amos 5:24 RSV.

²⁹Micah 6:8b RSV.

