HBCU Information Sheet
Fisk University

Fisk University was founded in Nashville, Tennessee in 1865 (although it did not accept students and offer classes until January 1866.) It was named after General Clinton B. Fisk, who provided the young institution with its first facilities at the former Union Army barracks in the state’s capital. The school was founded by John Ogden, Reverend Erastus Cravath, and Reverend Edward P. Smith of the American Missionary Association to help educate freedmen following the Civil War.¹

From its founding, Fisk accepted women and men as students. In its early years, Fisk was known as Fisk Free Colored School, and sought to teach freedmen of all ages and genders to read, write and count. In 1867, however, the school became Fisk University, with a new mission to help train teachers to meet the growing demand among emerging public schools. In the early 1900s, three paths to a bachelor of arts degree were added to the curriculum, including social science. Over the next decades, the university’s curriculum continued to expand, and by the 1930s, Fisk was nationally perceived as the “leading African American University in the nation.”²

Fisk’s Physics Department was established in 1930 as Elmer Imes—who had earned his bachelor’s in science from Fisk and his PhD from the University of Michigan—returned to serve as the Chair of the Department, which he helped develop into a strong program.³

A sample of notable graduates and alumni from Fisk University includes:

- **W.E.B. Du Bois**: co-founder of NAACP
- **Elmer S. Imes**: spectroscopy specialist, major force in the development of the physics department
- **Saint Elmo Brady**: chemist, peer of Elmer Imes

³ AIP’s handout on Elmer Imes and Fisk University.
HBCU Information Sheet
Morehouse College

Morehouse College’s origins begin in 1867 in Augusta, Georgia, when the Augusta Theological Society was established by the Baptist Reverend William Jefferson White. He created the Society at the urging of Reverend Richard C. Coulter and Reverend Edmund Turney, who worked for the National Theological Institute for educating freedmen in Washington, DC. In 1879, the Society moved to Atlanta and changed its name to the Atlanta Baptist Seminary. In 1897 it was once again renamed Atlanta Baptist College. Simultaneously the curriculum was expanded “for educating leaders for all areas of life,” challenging Booker T. Washington’s utilitarian view of African American education. In 1913 the school became Morehouse College in honor of Henry L. Morehouse, the college’s corresponding secretary to the American Baptist Home Mission Society, who was responsible for raising philanthropic funds for the school.1

Morehouse began and has remained a men’s only education institution. It is the only HBCU that is a men’s college. In 1940, Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays became president of Morehouse. He dramatically improved the academic status and reputation of the college by increasing the number of faculty with degrees 17-fold, from two to thirty-four professors. He also drastically improved the college’s residential and scientific facilities, building new laboratories, classrooms and dormitories between 1940 and 1967. The school continues as an eminent liberal arts college, boasting a 15:1 student-faculty ratio.2

Physics has been a part of the curriculum at Morehouse for decades. In 1995 Walter E. Massey, a renowned physicist who had worked as manager of Argonne National Laboratory and the National Science Foundation, became the college’s president. He placed an increased emphasis on science, and created the Center for Excellence in Science, Engineering and Mathematics.3 Some notable Morehouse alumni include Martin Luther King, Jr., David Satcher (former US Surgeon General), and Paul Q. Judge (inventor, entrepreneur).

3 “Morehouse Legacy”
North Carolina A&T was created as a land-grant institution following the 1890 Second Morrill Act. Like all schools created by this legislation, the Agricultural and Mechanical College for the Colored Race (which became N.C. A&T) was designed to educate students in agricultural and mechanical arts, English, and applied sciences.¹ It was established in 1891 in Raleigh as an annex to Shaw University, but through local philanthropy moved to a permanent home in Greensboro. The name was changed to the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, and became a University in 1967.²

In 1902, enrollment was restricted to only males. This decision was overturned in 1928, when co-education was reinstated. By 1939, the school was authorized to issue Master of Science degrees. In 1957, the mission of the college was expanded to include training educators and administrators for public schools. In 1968 the university was reorganized into the following schools:

- School of Agriculture
- School of Arts and Sciences containing the Division of Humanities
- Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
- Division of Social Sciences
- School of Education
- School of Engineering
- School of Nursing
- School of Graduate Studies
- Division of Business Administration³

Some notable alumni from North Carolina A&T are Ronald McNair: physicist and astronaut who died in the Challenger tragedy, Clara Leach Adams-Ender: Army Nursing Corps Officer, and Jesse Jackson Jr.: politician.

HBCU Information Sheet
Tuskegee University

Tuskegee University was founded in Tuskegee, Alabama on July 4, 1881. It was created as Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers as reparation for Lewis Adams (a former slave) securing the votes of local African-Americans for Senator W.F. Foster in the election that year. Booker T. Washington was the school’s first president until his death in 1915. While classes were initially held in the local Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, soon the school acquired land on an abandoned plantation and developed there.¹

Booker T. Washington had a specific idea for how African Americans’ education should proceed. His philosophy emphasized utility and training: he recognized that despite emancipation, African Americans continued to face discrimination and other obstacles to education, employment, and other rights. His solution was for African Americans to “prove their value” to white Americans by expressing content with their social status and performing vocational jobs. This philosophy influenced Tuskegee’s curriculum, which was heavily focused on practical trades and training. Tuskegee sought to train teachers that would then teach these skills at public schools, including women since its earlies years.²

In 1985, Tuskegee became a University. In the decades after its earliest years, the University’s curriculum has expanded to include doctoral programs in veterinary science, engineering, and several applied sciences.³

Notable graduates of Tuskegee include:

- **George W. Carver**: scientist, inventor
- **Lonnie Johnson**: engineer, inventor
- **Betty Shabazz**: civil rights activist, wife to Malcom X

³ “History of Tuskegee University”
HBCU Information Sheet
Morgan State University

Morgan State University was established in Baltimore, Maryland in 1867. Created by the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and originally known as the Centenary Biblical Institute, its mission was to train young ministers. It was renamed in 1890 after Reverend Lyttleton Morgan—the first Chairman of the Board of Regents—and offered its first bachelor’s degree in 1895. It was private until Maryland state purchased the institution. By this point, it was already a relatively “comprehensive” institution, offering many liberal arts programs and courses, which was different than many of the technical and agricultural African-American institutions established by the 1890 Morrill Act.¹

The first women students were admitted to Morgan in 1875. The main focus of the school in these early years was to train teachers.² Notable alumni include the following:

- **Valerie Thomas**: physicist, oversaw Landsat program at NASA, inventor of illusion transmitter
- **Elijah Saunders**: cardiologist, Head of Division of Hypertension-University of Maryland
- **Earl G. Graves**: philanthropist, entrepreneur

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Hampton University’s history began on April 1, 1868, when Samuel Armstrong, an American Union Brigadier General, founded the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. He had acquired funding from the American Missionary Association to build a school in Hampton, Virginia to provide African-Americans “practical experience in trades and industrial skills” and also to train teachers for African American public schools. The students of this agricultural/technical school were both male and female. The school’s focus on practicality and self-sufficiency influenced one of its early students, Booker T. Washington, who became a proponent of this type of education in the following decades.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Hampton expanded its infrastructure and programs to include Agriculture, Education, Home Economics, Business, Building, Music, and Librarianship. In the 1950s however, agriculture and technical subjects waned in applicability for African Americans. As a result, Hampton created graduate programs in Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics, as well as expanding the general curriculum. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, high-tech scientific research centers were created at Hampton Institute, and in 1984 the name was changed to Hampton University.¹

Other than Booker T. Washington, notable Hampton alumni include:

- **Kay Coles James**: founder of Gloucester Institute
- **Wanda Sykes**: comedian, actress and writer
- **Spencer Overton**: professor, lawyer, politician²

HBCU Information Sheet
Howard University

Howard University was founded in 1867 in Washington, D.C., and was named after American Union General Oliver Otis Howard, who was the contemporary commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Several (white) members of the First Congregational Society in D.C. sought to create a seminary, but instead opted to establish a university and named it after General Howard. President Johnson approved its creation on March 2, 1867. It was designed to educate the youth in sciences and the liberal arts, and early-on it included law, medicine, agriculture, and general collegiate departments. The curriculum continued to expand in the subsequent decades.¹

From its inception, Howard was coeducational. In fact, the first four students of the University were the white daughters of some of the original trustees.² One of Howard’s current commitments is “to the study of disadvantaged persons in American Society and throughout the world.” It claims to be the only “truly comprehensive” HBCU, rather than retaining a focus on mechanical, agricultural or applied sciences.³ The school is private, and functions as a strong research institution. Some notable alumni include:

- Patricia Era Bath, M.D.: ophthalmologist and inventor
- Beth A. Brown: astrophysicist
- Thurgood Marshall: first African American Supreme Court Justice

Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University began as the State Normal College for Colored Students in 1887 in Tallahassee, Florida. It was created when the Florida legislature elected to create a white state institution in Gainesville, Florida. The bill also required a “colored” school be created in Pensacola, but it was decided to move it to the state’s capital in Tallahassee, instead. When the Second Morrill Act endowed the school with $7,500 for agriculture and mechanical arts, the State Normal College became Florida’s land grant university for African-Americans (as segregation was still in effect).

By the 1920s, the school had become Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College (FAMC), and had begun awarding Bachelor of Science degrees in science, education, agriculture, mechanical arts, and home economics. In 1953 the College became a University, and graduate programs, nursing, law, and pharmacy schools were all added.¹

Notable alumni include:

- Dr. LaSalle Doheny Leffall, Jr.: surgeon, first African-American president of the American Cancer Society
- Leonard Burnett, Jr.: magazine publishing entrepreneur