



**National  
Urban League**

**To Be Equal #44  
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State of Emergency for Black Colleges**

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*"HBCUs have always been in a situation where a lot of them have had to struggle. A lot of that has to do with inequitable funding." Marybeth Gasman, University of Pennsylvania*

Current financial problems facing the storied Grambling State University football program are a sign of funding inequities that are shortchanging students and threatening the very existence of a growing number of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). On October 19th, in protest of severe budget cuts that have decimated the football facilities and led to the firing of Coach Doug Williams, the Grambling State Tigers players refused to take the 160 mile trip to Jackson, Mississippi for their scheduled matchup with Jackson State. The Grambling players' boycott of the Jackson State homecoming game sent shockwaves through the Southwestern Athletic Conference and highlighted the dire financial status of many of our nation's 105 HBCUs.

Draconian higher education budget cuts in Louisiana being pushed by Governor Bobby Jindal are a big part of the Grambling problem. According to the New York Times, state funding for Grambling is "down 56 percent since 2008. In response, the university has laid off more than 120 staff members and reduced the number of degree programs to 47 from 67." This has left the football program in shambles, with players forced to practice and play in unsafe and unsanitary facilities while sometimes enduring thousand-mile bus trips for away games. The Grambling football experience is unique, but it is also symptomatic of a larger problem that extends beyond the football field to the financial offices and classrooms of the institutions that have traditionally produced the lion's share of African American professionals.

With lower endowments, cut-rate tuition fees, fund raising challenge and a disproportionate number of first-generation, low-income students, HBCUs have been hit especially hard by the economic downturn. Recent cuts in government aid and other funding streams have been the last straw for several of them. St. Paul's College in southern Virginia closed its doors in June. Atlanta's Morris Brown College recently declared bankruptcy. And a board member at Howard University, considered by many to be the nation's premier HBCU, recently wrote,

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“Howard will not be here in three years if we don’t make some crucial decisions now.”

In addition to the financial strains on HBCUs, prospective students are finding it harder to scrape up the money to enroll. A recent change in credit history criteria in the federal Parent PLUS Loan Program has resulted in the denial of loans to 28,000 HBCU students and a loss of \$154 million in revenue to HBCUs. Congressional Black Caucus Chair, Marcia L. Fudge has responded to this crisis by demanding a return to the previous credit policy. She says, “The issue must be addressed and the policy must be fixed now.”

The contributions of HBCUs cannot be overstated. While the 105 HBCU institutions represent just three percent of the nation’s higher education establishment, they graduate nearly 20 percent of African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees. They also graduate more than 50 percent of African American professionals, half of black public school teachers, and most of the African American students who earn bachelor’s degrees in STEM fields.

For decades HBCUs have been the backbone of a growing black middle class and a stronger America. We must do everything we can to prevent their decline and keep them alive.

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