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the universities for non-whites

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IT IS A FACT that before the second world war the development of university education for Africans was very slow indeed, in comparison with the tremendous expansion that has taken place during the 20 to 25 years. With the exception of three institutions all the universities serving the black nations of Africa have been established since 1945. Today there are 34 such universities with close on 50 000 students.

The three institutions referred to above were: The Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, which accepted students as early as 1876 to sit for degrees in Arts to be conferred by the University of Durham; the Achimota College in Ghana established in 1824 and which in 1939, had 32 students preparing themselves for various external examinations of the University of London, and finally, the University College of Fort Hare in the then Union of South Africa, founded in 1916 mainly by the Church of Scotland Mission.

The establishment of this institution was undoubtedly the most notable achievement in the field of higher education for the black nations on the continent of Africa before the war. Dr. James Stewart of Lovedale recognised as early as 1878 the need for an institution that would provide education of university standard. Though he passed away several years before the College was established in 1916, his preparatory work played an important part in its establishment. In 1923 the College was incorporated as an institution for higher education under the education act of 1923 and students sat for the examinations of the University of South Africa.

At Fort Hare only non-whites were enrolled, but non-white students were permitted to enrol at certain universities for whites—Rhodes University in post-graduate courses not provided for at Fort Hare; Cape Town, in all departments, except that Bantu students were not accepted in the Faculty of Medicine; Wits, in all departments except in dentistry; Natal (Durban) in all departments, but in separate classes for non-whites except in some post-graduate courses.

The University of South Africa, which is purely a correspondence university, accepted and still accepts non-white students in all its departments, and non-whites are enrolled at the Medical School of the University of Natal.

In the middle fifties the Government considered the establishment of universities for non-whites only and an inter-departmental fact finding committee under the chairmanship of Mr. H. S. van der Walt, Secretary for Education, Arts and Science was appointed. Its terms of reference were to enquire into and make recommendations on:

(a) the financial implications;
(b) the establishment of separate institutions or the conversion of existing institutions;
(c) which courses are to be offered;
(d) personnel supply, including administrative staff;
(f) bursaries;
(g) control;
(h) how the separate facilities should be provided — gradually or all at once;
(i) from what date non-white students should no longer be admitted into white universities;

The commission was not requested to report on the advisability of the establishment of non-white universities, as the Government had already decided in favour of separate universities as a matter of policy.

In addition the committee was given certain indications of what the government had in mind:

(a) A University College for Coloureds in the Western Cape and for Indians in Durban.
(b) The University College of Fort Hare to be placed under the control of the Department of Native Affairs.

(c) That in the North-Eastern Transvaal and in Zululand University Colleges to be esttablished for the Bantu peoples of the Transvaal and Natal respectively.

(d) That these institutions were to fall under the academic control of the University of South Africa.

In August, 1956 the committee presented its report to the Minister of Education, Arts and Science. The Government accepted the recommendations and a Bill was drafted giving effect to the recommendations. The Bill was referred to a parliamentary select committee for thorough scrutiny. This committee formulated the objectives of the proposed universities as follows:

1. Each of these universities should serve a specific national group, enriching it spiritually and materially, whilst at the same time promoting the interests of South Africa as a whole;
2. Each of them should contribute to the development and prosperity of the group it serves;
3. Each of them should guide the national group concerned towards increasing responsibility, knowledge, and self-sufficiency;
4. They should develop the individual fully and should inspire him with pride, self-respect and the willingness to serve his own people;
5. They must train and form the students and so equip them for the fullest participation in all aspects of their communal life for the students must become torch-bearers of civilisation among their own people;
6. This training and forming should also serve towards engendering in the students a greater consciousness of the needs of the whole of South Africa and mankind in general.

It summarised its findings by pointing out that "a university could only carry out its functions if it purposefully were to strive to serve the needs of the community in which it exists."

The committee also pointed out that the state had decided to provide higher education for the non-European national groups in South Africa, and that it was therefore the responsibility of the state to finance these institutions as the non-whites were not in a position to provide this type of education themselves.

It is interesting to note that at a conference on the development of higher education in Africa held at Tananarive in September 1962 the following conclusions were drawn:

In addition to its traditional functions and obligations to teach and to advance knowledge through research, the role of higher education in the social, cultural and economic development of Africa must be:

1. To maintain adherence and loyalty to world academic standards;
2. To ensure the Unification of Africa;
3. To encourage education of and appreciation for African culture and heritage and to dispel misconceptions of Africa, through research and teaching of African studies;
4. To develop completely the human resources for meeting manpower needs;
5. To train the "whole man" for nation building;
6. To evolve over the years a truly African pattern of higher learning dedicated to Africa and its people, yet promoting a band of kinship to the larger human society.

With some reservations on the second point which in any case cannot be realised if political unity is the objective, this brief summary of the role of higher education fits in with the views of the select committee referred to above.

The Extension of University Education Act (Act no. 45 of 1959) made provision for the establishment, maintenance, and control of University Colleges for non-whites; for the admission of students to such colleges; for limiting the admission of non-white students into certain university institutions; and other matters connected therewith.

In terms of this act the following University Colleges were established:

University College of the Western Cape in Bellville for Coloureds, on 1st September 1959;

University College for Indians, Durban, on 1st November, 1960;

University College of the North, near Pietersburg, on 1st August 1959;

University College of Zululand, near Empangeni, on 1st August 1959.

The University College of Fort Hare was transferred to the Department of Bantu Education on 1st January 1960. For this purpose a special act of parliament was necessary.

The University College of Zululand was intended mainly for Zulus and Swazis; the University College of Fort Hare for Xhosas; and the University College of the North for the other ethnic groups.

The Colleges soon began to press for academic freedom. This was not a move aimed at the University of South Africa. It should rather be seen as a natural development, as most universities in the post 1960 era were established as academically independent institutions. The relevant acts were passed by parliament in 1969 and on 1st January 1970 the Colleges became autonomous institutions, except the University College for Indians, which became independent at the beginning of 1971.

The acts provide for the following faculties, new faculuties to be established only with the approval of the Minister concerned: University of Fort Hare: Arts; science; education; law; commerce and administration; theology; agriculture. University of the North: Arts, mathematics and natural sciences; education; economics and administration; theology; University of Zululand: Arts, science; law; theology; education; economics and political sciences. University of Durban-Westville: Arts; science; education; commerce and administration. University of the Western Cape: Arts; science; education.

At the University of Natal the medical faculty for non-white students still admits Indian, Coloured and Bantu students; at the University of Cape Town numerous Coloured students follow courses not yet provided by the University of the Western Cape and Bantu students taking up engineering may be enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand. The faculty of Engineering at Fort Hare is an inter-ethnic faculty; at the University of the North three inter-ethnic departments in the faculty of Mathematics and Science exist: Departments of Pharmaceutical Chemistry and Pharmacology; Pharmaceutics and Pharmaceutical Technology; and Nursing.

The following table of statistics reflects the position in regard to students at the Universities for non-whites in 1971:

Students	Durban-Westville	Western Cape	Fort Hare	Zululand	North
Male	1312	760	570	522	739
Female	398	216	202	179	162

The establishment of these Universities created avenues of employment for non-whites which hitherto hardly existed. In the academic field 7 professorships and 10 senior lectureships are already occupied by non-whites, while more than 100 posts of lecturer, junior lecturer and other professional posts are occupied by non-whites; on the administrative and library staff also more than 100 non-whites are employed, and these do not include hostel staff and labourers, of whom there are several hundred.

What about the future?

The potential for sustained growth is of course very great, and there is no doubt that the expansion of these institutions will be quite spectacular. According to the most conservative estimates the number of students at the end of the century will be considerably more than 40 000. The one great limiting factor, besides finance, will be the availability of suitably qualified staff. And suitably qualified does not and in fact cannot mean a degree only, even if it is the highest degree. Other qualities, amongst others the willingness to continue to study, are equally, if not more important than degrees.

Very frequently the question is asked whether the qualified manpower which these universities produce in ever increasing numbers will find suitable employment. It is the experience of the University of the North that in many directions notably in education, commerce and administration, and pharmacy, the demand is much greater than the University can hope to satisfy in 10 years.

The establishment of these universities has therefore created great opportunities for non-whites towards making a meaningful contribution to the development of their own nations and national groups. Will they rise to the occasion?