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The Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

*"The Rise in Violence
Against Minority
Institutions"*

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Submitted by

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NON TH C D D O R TH N

Madam Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Committee Member Biggs, and other members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. I am Dr. David K. Wilson, the 10th President of Morgan State University, an historically Black university in Baltimore, Maryland. I am currently concluding my 12th year as President of this historic institution, which, in 2016, was named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation — the only university in the nation with its entire campus so designated.

The purpose of our gathering today, to address the bomb threats made to Morgan and more than 20 other historically Black college or university campuses this year alone — in addition to other such threats in 2021 — is a topic that has, in all candor, tested my resolve and tried my composure during the past several weeks. During this time, I have thought constantly about the impact of these psychological assaults on the mental health of Morgan’s students, who view the campus as a place of refuge and safety to enable their dreams to grow. And I have communicated regularly with our staff, faculty and counseling center about their interactions with the students, which are critical in times like these. I have also received regular reports from Morgan’s Police and Public Safety division, which has done a stellar job of responding to the threats, in close collaboration with the Historically Black College and University Law Enforcement Executives and Administrators (HBCU-LEEA) and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

But, after serious reflection, and with the habits imbued by more than 30 years' experience in higher education, I noted an opportunity to channel our energy not only into the daunting task of security oversight and organizational response, but also into participation in a teaching moment for the nation, and especially for the perpetrators and would-be perpetrators of the terrorism in question, about the real work and true mission of the institutions commonly known as HBCUs.

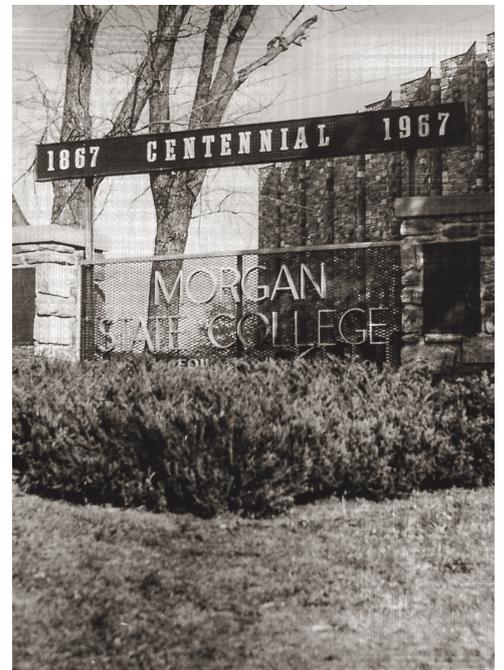
Before I begin, however, I think it is important to acknowledge that, for many, my brief message today will provide an all too necessary synopsis of "HBCUs 101," so to speak, and, as such, will help to establish an historical backdrop and just cause for a sweeping resolution to the problem we have assembled to address. My goal today is merely to provide some additional context and a useful perspective to begin, once again, to grapple with an intractable national problem.



BACKGROUND (WHY HBCUS CAME INTO BEING)

Morgan was founded in 1867 as an institution to educate African-American male children for Christian ministry and to have them serve as leaders and educators of Baltimore's Black community. Baltimore's Black population of that time was composed largely of newly freed slaves who had previously been denied, by law, a formal education. By 1874, Morgan was a coeducational school, open, as it had been since its establishment, to students of all races.

One of Morgan's visionary founders, the late Reverend Samuel Green, was a slave from southern Maryland who had won his freedom and was encouraged by his slave owner to learn how to read — although it was against the law for slaves to read. A law in place at the time, named the Fugitive Slave Act, essentially said that if a slave was apprehended north of the Mason/Dixon line, the slave could be returned to his or her owner or jailed. The Reverend Green left his owner's plantation in Dorchester County, Maryland, was caught by slave bounty hunters, and was sentenced to 10 years in a Baltimore city penitentiary, where he served five years before being released. His crime, you ask? He was in possession of a book, Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin." So, Morgan came into existence as a result of the burning desire that raged inside of the Reverend Green, and its other founders, to ensure that Blacks were literate and that they could read and understand the U.S. Constitution and be in a position to always advocate for their inclusion in it, and for the Constitution to be true to those powerful words inked on its canvas that "all men are created equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."



HISTORICAL THREATS AND ATTACKS ON THE NATION'S HBCUS

Unlike the vast majority of this nation's universities that came into existence from 1619 through the early part of the 20th century, Morgan State University, and other historically Black colleges and universities in the United States, were not racially exclusive. Rather, they were open to all who desired to benefit from their mission. As I recently wrote in a national editorial, "HBCU Strong: Bomb Threats Will Not Deter Us": "The same connective tissue supported the founding of practically every HBCU in the country: the desire to hold America accountable and have her live up to the ideals embedded in her Constitution that 'all men (and women) are created equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'" (Source: <https://afro.com/wordinblack-hbcu-strong-bomb-threats-will-not-deter-us/>)

The bomb threats now besetting so many of our campuses are the latest chapter in a sad and sordid history of terrorism, threats, and violence that has followed these historic institutions, and the communities in which they serve, for more than a century and a half.

Let us take a brief look at a few events from that history, beginning shortly after HBCUs had begun to emerge in the North during the antebellum period, and moving past the period soon after, when these vital institutions were founded in large numbers in the post-Civil War era South.





01

In 1865, an arsonist set fire to Wilberforce University, in Ohio, the first college owned and operated by Black people, which in 1856 was one of the last of the early HBCUs established in the North. Several of its buildings were set ablaze and damaged on the same day as the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln and days before the end of the Civil War.

02

A year later, LeMoyne-Owen College, a private HBCU in Tennessee, was also set ablaze. The fire took 46 lives and injured another 70 persons during a race massacre that summoned federal troops to the area.

03

In 1876, a suspicious fire destroyed administrative buildings at Claflin University, a private HBCU in South Carolina.

04

Roger Williams University, an HBCU in Nashville, Tennessee, was also destroyed by a suspicious fire in 1905.

05

In 1906, five of the 11 buildings on the campus of Wiley College, an HBCU in Marshall, Texas, were destroyed by fire.



(Orangeburg Massacre Demonstration)

06

Fearing the possibility of an attack during the “Red Summer” of 1919, Black World War I veterans set up armed blockades around Howard University to protect the campus and students from violent racial unrest.

07

At my alma mater, Tuskegee University, in Tuskegee, Alabama, more than 700 Klansmen paraded through the city to protest the installation of Black physicians at a hospital established for Black veterans on campus, on July 16, 1923.

08

On May 28, 1963, Black students and a white professor from Tougaloo College were brutally attacked as they sat peacefully at the “whites only” lunch counter in the segregated Woolworth’s in downtown Jackson, Mississippi.

09

On February 8, 1968, white state troopers fired into a mostly African-American crowd on the campus of South Carolina State College, an historically Black college in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In what became known as the “Orangeburg Massacre,” the troopers shot and wounded 28 people and killed three Black male students.

TERROR AT HOME: MORGAN CONFRONTS RACIAL TURMOIL



Morgan has its own history of being challenged by racial terrorism. As I learned from my research soon after I arrived to lead the University in 2010, the institutions that would become Morgan State University, Bowie State University, and Coppin State University were all neighbors in an affluent, middle-class, African-American community named Gallows Hill. In an effort to keep this Black community from encroaching upon white spaces considered more important, Baltimore Mayor James Preston used his authority to declare Gallows Hill a slum. The African-American community was razed to the ground, and the three HBCUs were relocated: Bowie State moved to its present site in Prince George's County, Maryland, and Coppin State to its current site in western Baltimore City. Morgan, however, would have another home and some major challenges to overcome before finally settling at its current site in northeastern Baltimore City.

After leaving a downtown Baltimore location, Morgan College moved to western Baltimore City. Almost a decade later, it moved to a property named Ivy Mill in what was then Baltimore County, in December of 1917. In that same year, a campus of the college that had been founded in Lynchburg, Virginia, was destroyed by a suspicious fire. The students there were transferred to the new campus in Baltimore. By the spring of 1918, every adjacent neighborhood association had begun a legal campaign to deem Morgan's presence in a white Christian community unlawful. After winning a protracted legal fight, Morgan was legally permitted to remain, but its troubles with its white neighbors were far from over. In the late 1930s, a brick wall, dubbed the "spite wall" by Morgan President Dwight Oliver Wendell Holmes, was erected on the northeast boundary of Morgan's campus. Holmes was convinced that since the neighbors could not legally remove the college, they preferred not to see it. Remnants of that wall still stand today.

THE EFFECTS OF THREATS ON HBCU COMMUNITIES

Much like the physical structures that remain intact preserving the ill-effects of history upon these Black institutions, there is yet another consequence of the incessant barrage of terrorism, threats, and violence: psychological trauma. The often crippling and intergenerational effects of trauma are among the most widely reported and documented psychological afflictions of our modern era. Many Black, indigenous, and people of color in the United States, including those at HBCUs, have experienced racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression, which is why many elect to attend HBCUs as safe harbor. Our students are able to increase identity development, improve relational management, trust, and promote the idea of safety and security within the communities we've forged since our charter. Accordingly, the experience of situational race-based trauma is limited on our campuses.

Bombings and bomb threats rooted in racist bigotry are, unfortunately, commonplace in our nation's history, a fact I learned quite well growing up in rural, Jim Crow Alabama. Receiving these recent threats is an example of historical trauma that may undermine the recipients' sense of safety, level of energy and mood. Racial stressors like these are often overlooked but are important to address.

Many students are resilient, and not all traumatic incidents will lead to psychological disorders. Not everyone who experiences a stressful event will develop trauma, initially. Some people will develop symptoms that resolve after a few weeks, while others will have more long-term effects. But coupling the anxieties aroused by the COVID-19 pandemic with these recurring bomb threats can produce a powder keg event. The response of Morgan's staff, faculty, and counseling center have been essential. Their interactions with the students provide a safe environment for critical self-reflection and dialogues about healing. Our students may endure psychological struggles following adversity, however, there is growth afterward — with personal strength, closer relationships, greater appreciation of life, better coping strategies, and a stronger sense of self as results.

Our students are able to increase identity development, improve relational management, trust, and promote the idea of safety and security within the communities we've forged since our charter.

RESPONDING TO THREATS AND SAFEGUARDING HBCUS

From the onset of the bomb threats — which began at the start of the new year, when eight institutions were targeted on January 4, 2022 — HBCUs have been collaborating with one another, sharing information, and offering support. This was made possible through each institution’s participation in the nonprofit Historically Black College and University Law Enforcement Executives and Administrators (HBCU-LEEA) organization. This national organization of police chiefs, executives, and security directors advances campus public safety for its students attending the nation’s 105 HBCUs.

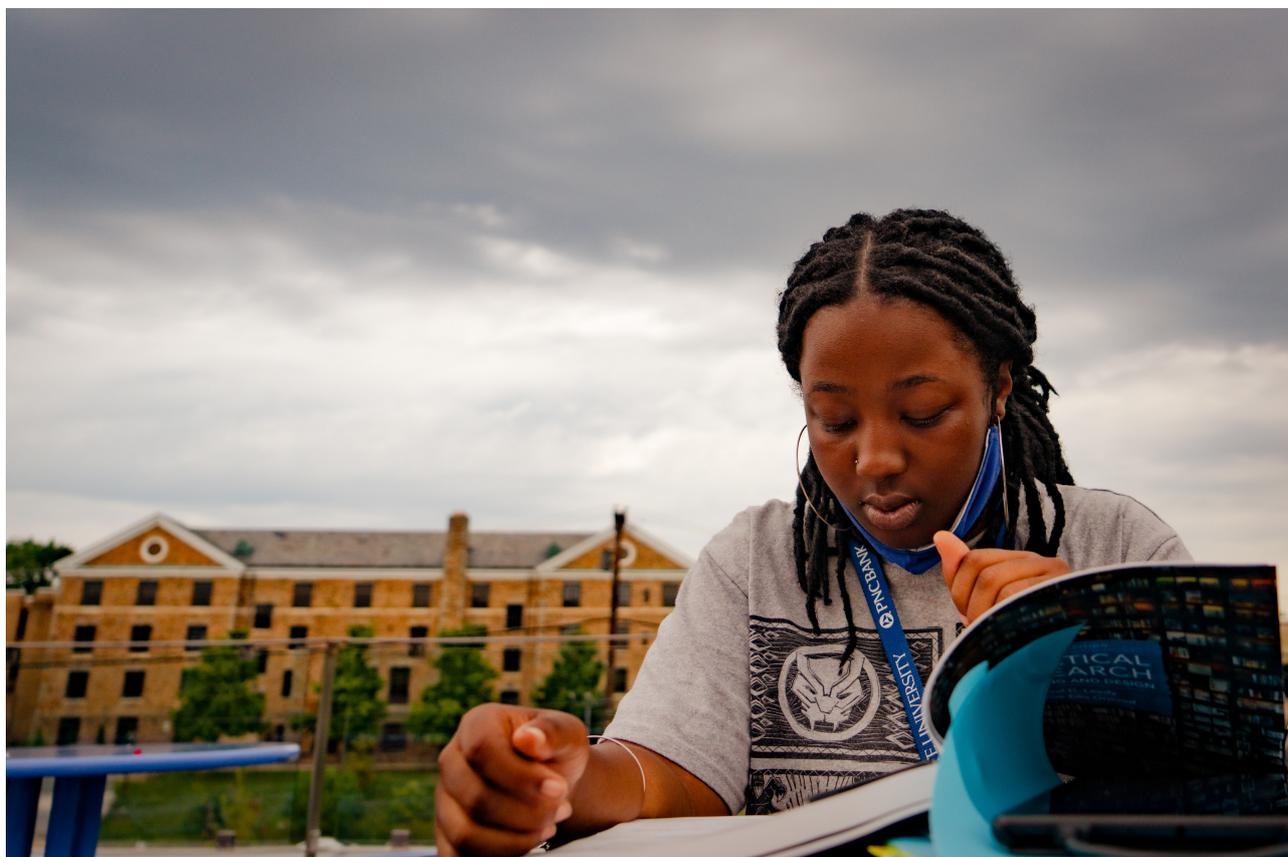
Since the first round of bomb threats to America’s HBCUs, the HBCU-LEEA has served as a driving force to find those responsible and to advocate for federal intervention. At Morgan, HBCU-LEEA participating members alerted and briefed the other members of the Morgan State University Police Department (MSUPD) leadership team and the Office of the President. Armed with this information, the University began protective preparation by reviewing existing policies and procedures regarding bomb threats and organizing the MSUPD rank and file and the dispatches to be at the ready in anticipation of Morgan’s receiving a bomb threat call. As a result of the HBCU-LEEA’s effort, the Federal Bureau of Investigation began engaging with HBCUs and making available their resources.

On January 31, 2022, six HBCUs received bomb threats. On the next day, February 1, the beginning of Black History Month, eight HBCUs received bomb threats. Morgan was included among this third group of institutions targeted, and the threat achieved its intended goal of sowing disruption and stoking fears within our community of students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni. HBCUs provide refuge to the students they serve and are commonly viewed as safe harbors for learning and personal development. The threats received on February 1 challenged that assertion and jeopardized all of our work toward creating a safe and welcoming environment for Morgan students.



However, Morgan’s involvement with the HBCU-LEEA led to a more positive outcome. Ongoing communication with other institutions and sharing of information was highly beneficial. Leveraging lessons learned and other intelligence, Morgan was able to bolster communications with local, state, and federal partners; review and disseminate policies and procedures related to the university’s response to threats; evaluate bomb threat protocols from other organizations; ensure that outdoor warning systems were operational; increase patrols with heightened inspections of buildings and grounds; appraise equipment and assess resource needs; and identify opportunities to utilize research grants and training opportunities.

On the day of the threat, all available officers were mobilized, and response plans were activated. Teams were organized, local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies were notified, and a building-by-building search was conducted, beginning with the highest priority — student residence halls. During this time, access to the campus was closed, while remote learning and telework protocols were initiated. At the conclusion of the campus-wide search, no threats were discovered, and “all clear” was given. Although the campus was deemed safe for return, the damage had been done, and the peace of mind that was once commonplace had been shattered.



NO S D L C N O C N

Beyond the symbolic wall that separates racial myth from reality in our nation, ignorance and misunderstanding have ample opportunity to flourish, and the recent threats against HBCUs are prime evidence of that. What the terrorists have right about us is that historically Black colleges and universities represent the remarkable advancement of Black people in this country. It is no coincidence that an HBCU produced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Vice President Kamala Harris, Congressman John Lewis, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and so many other African-American leaders who have committed their lives to serving others. But what the would-be bombers have yet to grasp is that HBCUs also represent a matchless path for the progress of the United States of America.

These institutions are not the radical terror camps of their imagination, where students are taught to hate their country or to engage in activity to destroy the fabric of our democracy. Quite the contrary, HBCUs have always had as their foundation an approach to education that prepares, inspires, motivates, and encourages our students to live the American Dream, to become the engineers, elected officials, doctors, lawyers, social workers, architects, teachers, judges, and innovators to make America stronger and more competitive internationally. Said plainly, HBCUs are institutions rooted in truth-telling, where the accurate history of our nation, warts and all, is taught. Our students receive an education that is empowering and that enables them to be free and critical thinkers.

I ask: is this not the heart of a truly functioning, inclusive democracy? I believe the answer is clear to all willing to see.

HBCUs are part and parcel of America, national treasures, all, and deserving of the utmost veneration, respect, and protection.

In processing these threats and evaluating them in an historical context, what becomes even more evident is the legacy of resilience, rebellion, and struggle that the visionary founders of these storied institutions — these HBCUs — had to endure before birthing our current-day campuses.

The founders knew that the journey laid before them would be a rough one, with terrain arduous and rugged and rivers deep and unrelenting. Moreover, they fully recognized that they were putting their very lives on the line as they marched for, fought for, and, sadly, for many, died for the right to live free and to create institutions that would educate their sons and daughters.

When you know that powerful history of struggle to obtain access to an education — and understand what has been sacrificed over centuries by Black people — a bomb threat represents yet another ineffectual scare tactic. Bomb threats are rooted in hatred that will never deter us from what HBCUs have done so extraordinarily well for more than a century and a half: provide a consequential education to millions of students. It is irrefutable that these institutions have transformed so many lives and communities and, in the process, have brought into existence the modern-day Black middle class in this country and have sought to level the proverbial playing field.



If you come to Morgan, you will get, much as I received as an undergraduate at Tuskegee University, a real opportunity to achieve success. You will be challenged to think deeply about the issues of the past, why and how they happened, and what we, as a society, must continue to do to prevent much of what happened in the past from recurring. This is why HBCUs matter and will continue to matter.

If these bomb threats to our campuses were designed to silence us, they will fail, for we will not be moved! Maya Angelou reminded the nation in her powerful poem “And Still I Rise” that, “You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lies. You may trod me in the very dirt, but still, like dust, I’ll rise.”

HBCUs will always be the truth tellers — the innovators — and, as we come through this bitterly polarized era of American history, our campuses are fully prepared to be the single group of institutions that can ultimately keep our democracy from an untimely and unwarranted demise. We will not let anything cloud our focus or deter us from living up to the Morgan State motto: “Growing the Future, Leading the World.”

Respectfully,



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President, Morgan State University

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Thank you for the opportunity to present an oral testimony before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

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