

## Spelman College

Spelman College, the nation's oldest historically black college for women, has provided women with access to education since the post–Civil War (1861-65) era. A predominantly residential, private, liberal arts college, Spelman promotes academic excellence in the liberal arts and develops the intellectual, ethical, and leadership potential of its students. In 2005 enrollment was 2,318. The college employs about 150 full-time faculty, approximately 85 percent of whom hold Ph.D.s or other terminal degrees. Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees are offered in the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and education. As a member of the Atlanta University Center (AUC) consortium, Spelman students enjoy the benefits of a small college while having access to the faculty and physical resources of five other historically black institutions.

Spelman College's history began on April 11, 1881. With the help of Frank Quarles, pastor of Atlanta's Friendship Baptist Church, Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles, schoolteachers and Baptist missionaries from New England, started a school in the church's basement. The school was supported by the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society and named the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary. With \$100 from the First Baptist Church of Medford, Massachusetts, the founders embarked on a noble mission—providing quality education to black women and girls. Ten women, some of whom were former slaves, and one young girl, eager to acquire basic educational skills, constituted the first student body. The basement soon overflowed, and it became imperative to move to larger and more suitable quarters.

Through the philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller, whom Packard and Giles met at a church conference in Cleveland, Ohio, the school was able to relocate from its basement quarters to a nine-acre site once used as army barracks by Union troops during the Civil War. In 1884 the school expressed its gratitude for Rockefeller's generosity by changing the name of the school to Spelman Seminary in honor of the parents of his wife, Laura Spelman Rockefeller. The school was legally organized with a charter and a board of trustees in 1888 under the presidency of Packard.

In 1891 Harriet Giles succeeded Sophia Packard and served as president of Spelman for eighteen years. During her tenure the school enrolled 800 students, employed 30 teachers, and owned property valued at \$90,000. Curricular offerings expanded to include high school and college programs of instruction, teacher training, missionary training, and nurses' training. The seminary conferred its first high school diplomas in 1887 and its first college degrees in 1901. Giles's death on November 12, 1909, marked the end of the era of the founders.

From 1910 to 1953 the seminary experienced unprecedented growth during the presidencies of Lucy Hale Tapley (1910-27) and Florence Matilda Read (1927-53). On June 1, 1924, Spelman Seminary officially became Spelman College, and substantial strides were made in its curriculum and organization. An "Agreement of Affiliation," signed in 1929, set up a university system in which Spelman and Morehouse colleges served as undergraduate institutions and Atlanta University served as a graduate school, thereby providing the undergraduate institutions immediate access to graduate facilities in an era when blacks were denied entrance to southern research universities.

Under its two male presidents, Albert Edward Manley and Donald Mitchell Stewart, Spelman made great educational strides that enhanced the academic standards and reputation of the college. Manley

became the first male and the first African American to lead the institution. During his administration (1953-76) the college increased its enrollment considerably, enlarged its physical plant, and established programs that broadened the educational experience, such as the Merrill Foreign Travel-Study Program.

Stewart (1976-86) strengthened the faculty, tripled the college's endowment, and improved academic quality with the addition of new majors and career-oriented minors and the establishment of the Comprehensive Writing Program, the Honors Program, and the Women's Research and Resource Center. As Spelman entered its second century of service to women who achieve, it remained committed to maintaining its identity as a distinctive liberal arts college for women.

In 1987 Johnnetta Betsch Cole became the first African American woman president of Spelman College. During Cole's tenure (1987-97) programs that strengthened ties between the college and local and national constituencies were initiated. Spelman received national and international recognition for its commitment to community building and service. Money magazine's list of "Best College Buys" for 1997 ranked Spelman first among women's colleges and seventh in the nation. Cole spearheaded the most successful major capital campaign in the history of the college. In 1996 the "Spelman Campaign: Initiatives for the '90s" was successfully completed, having raised \$113.8 million, which included a gift of \$20 million from comedian Bill Cosby and his wife, Camille Hanks Cosby.

History was again made in 1997, as Audrey Forbes Manley, a 1955 graduate of Spelman, became the institution's first alumna president. Under her leadership (1997-2002) the college made the transition to the twenty-first century through strategic planning, strengthening the infrastructure, technology enhancement, and community building. Hallmarks of her tenure included a student-centered environment, land acquisition for the college, renovation and restoration of campus facilities, alumnae empowerment, access to technology, and the institutionalized delivery of community service.

In April 2002 Beverly Daniel Tatum, dean of the college and acting president of Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, was named Spelman's ninth president. A scholar, teacher, author, administrator, and race relations expert, Tatum brought to the Spelman community twenty-two years of experience in higher education, liberal arts education, and women's education. She initiated a strategic plan for Spelman that includes five goals—academic excellence, leadership development, improving the infrastructure, improving the visibility of accomplishments of the campus community, and exemplary customer service—all designed to create a vision for Spelman of "Nothing Less than the Best."

Spelman College has grown from its roots as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary to become one of the nation's prominent institutions of higher learning in the liberal arts tradition. Spelman's steadfast commitment to preparing black women for service and leadership is evident in the more than six generations of Spelman women who have reached the highest levels of academic, community, and professional achievement. Notable among the alumnae are Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund; Ruth A. Davis, director general of the U.S. Foreign Service; Aurelia Brazeal, U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia; physicians Virginia Davis Floyd and Deborah Prothrow-Stith; writers Pearl Cleage and Tina McElroy Ansa; actress LaTanya Richardson; artist Varnette Honeywood; opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs; and singer Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of the Grammy Award-winning a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Suggested Reading

Johnetta Cross-Brazzell, "Brick without Straw: Missionary-Sponsored Black Higher Education in the Post-Emancipation Era," *Journal of Higher Education* 63 (January/February 1992).

Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Jo Moore Stewart, *Spelman: A Centennial Celebration, 1881-1981* (Atlanta: Spelman College, 1981).

Albert E. Manley, *A Legacy Continues: The Manley Years at Spelman College, 1953-1976* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995).

Florence M. Read, *The Story of Spelman College* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Taronda Spencer, *Spelman College*

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