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The Black Communities Built Around HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities were never just schools. They were anchors of entire Black communities.

When segregation barred African Americans from white institutions and city centers, HBCUs became safe ground—places where Black businesses, homes, churches, and social life could grow without white control. Barbershops, boarding houses, bookstores, cafés, tailors, and funeral homes sprang up near campuses to serve students, faculty, and visiting families.

These neighborhoods became economic engines. Professors bought homes nearby. Students spent money locally. Alumni returned to invest. Entire corridors—like Auburn Avenue near the Atlanta University Center, Orangeburg’s Five Points near South Carolina State, and Durham’s Hayti district near North Carolina Central University—thrived because HBCUs kept people, money, and talent circulating within Black hands.

HBCU communities also shaped culture and activism. They hosted debates, rallies, concerts, voter-registration drives, and civil-rights meetings. When national movements needed leadership, strategy, or space, HBCU neighborhoods often provided all three.

Even today, many Black neighborhoods owe their survival to nearby HBCUs. When factories closed and urban renewal displaced residents, these campuses remained—continuing to employ, educate, and stabilize communities generation after generation.

HBCUs didn’t just educate students.

They built Black economies, protected Black culture, and powered Black futures.

20 Black Communities Built Around HBCUs

1. Atlanta University Center – Atlanta, GA

Vine City and the West End grew around Spelman, Morehouse, and Clark Atlanta, becoming hubs for Black business, publishing, and civil-rights organizing.

2. Tuskegee Institute – Tuskegee, AL

The surrounding town developed Black-owned farms, trades, and schools tied to Booker T. Washington’s model of economic self-sufficiency.

3. Howard University – Washington, D.C. (LeDroit Park)

LeDroit Park became a center of Black professionals, educators, and intellectual life anchored by Howard.

4. North Carolina Central University – Durham, NC (Hayti District)

Hayti flourished with Black banks, insurance companies, and businesses supported by NCCU students and faculty.

5. Florida A&M University – Tallahassee, FL (South City)

FAMU helped build a thriving Black middle class with strong business, church, and cultural institutions.

6. Jackson State University – Jackson, MS (West Jackson)

West Jackson became a stronghold of Black political organizing, arts, and community leadership.

7. Southern University – Baton Rouge, LA (Scotlandville)

Scotlandville developed into a stable Black community of educators, landowners, and professionals.

8. Alabama State University – Montgomery, AL

Surrounding neighborhoods supported Black teachers, state workers, and civil-rights activists.

9. Prairie View A&M University – Prairie View, TX

The town itself grew around the university, serving as an agricultural, educational, and cultural center.

10. South Carolina State University – Orangeburg, SC (Five Points)

Five Points emerged as a Black business and social district tied closely to student life and activism.

11. Grambling State University – Grambling, LA

Grambling became a self-contained Black town centered on education, culture, and athletics.

12. Tennessee State University – Nashville, TN (Jefferson Street Corridor)

Jefferson Street thrived with Black music venues, restaurants, and commerce connected to TSU.

13. Bethune-Cookman University – Daytona Beach, FL (Midtown)

Midtown grew with Black-owned hotels, businesses, and schools serving students and tourists.

14. Virginia State University – Petersburg, VA (Ettrick)

Ettrick became a stable Black community of educators, clergy, and skilled workers.

15. Langston University – Langston, OK

The town of Langston formed specifically around the university and became an all-Black settlement.

16. Alcorn State University – Lorman, MS

Surrounding rural communities relied on Alcorn for employment, trade, and leadership.

17. Texas Southern University – Houston, TX (Third Ward)

Third Ward became a center of Black culture, entrepreneurship, and political power.

18. Elizabeth City State University – Elizabeth City, NC

Local Black neighborhoods developed businesses and civic life tied to the campus economy.

19. Savannah State University – Savannah, GA

Nearby Black communities grew through education, port labor, and professional training.

20. Lincoln University – Chester County, PA

One of the earliest HBCU-anchored communities, fostering Black landownership and intellectual life.

