

2021 WINTER ISSUE

# HBCU *Times*



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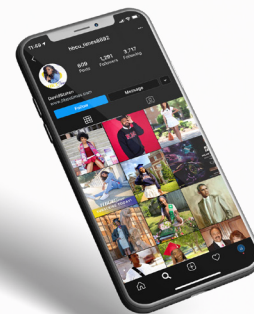
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# DR. JOHNNETTA B. COLE: STILL FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE AND EQUITY

BY OLANMA HAZEL MANG

**T**he empowerment of Black women in the United States has been a passionate undertaking for anthropologist, activist and educator, Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, throughout her life. Her career spans decades of service to the Black community through education, leadership and advocacy, avenues she continues to tread today as president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).

The organization aims to lead, advocate for, and empower women of African descent so they can effect change in their families and their communities at large, Cole told HBCU Times in an interview. This mission has always been central to NCNW since its inception in 1935, and it is perfectly in line with Cole's own ideals about Black women and their advancement in society. She herself has presided over two Historically Black Colleges for women: Spelman College, where she served as its first Black female president from 1987 until 1997, and Bennett College from 2002 to 2007.

“That was an amazing gift, an amazing gift for me to be the president of these two institutions that are focused on educating Black women,” she told the magazine. “When you educate a man, you educate a man. When you educate a woman, you educate a nation.”

Before presiding at these institutions, Cole led the Black studies program at Washington State University and has taught women's studies, African American studies and anthropology, a field in which she holds a PhD and master's degree.

Now, she is the national chair and president of NCNW. The organization is still continuing the fight against inequality, almost 85 years since its founding, with their Four for the Future agenda that focuses on education, health, entrepreneurship and financial literacy and civic engagement and public policy.

Through webinars, panels, discussions and workshops, the organization promotes education in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), educates its audience on financial literacy and entrepreneurship, and creates

awareness about the disparities that affect Black women today, one of which is healthcare. The coronavirus pandemic, she said, highlights this even further.

“If this pandemic, centered of course in the spread of COVID-19, has taught us anything, it has surely taught us the absolute injustice of health disparity,” she said. “Black people, brown people, indigenous people are being infected and dying at rates that are unbelievably higher, not unbelievably, unjustly higher than the rate at which white people are infected and are dying.”

Studies from APM Research Lab, a division of American Public Media Group, showed that the coronavirus disease mortality rate for Black Americans was two or more times as high as that for Whites and Asians.

“NCNW is committed to first helping our communities and all communities understand the ongoing results of systemic racism that are reflected in health disparities,” Cole said.

Part of its efforts include penning public policies on healthcare. The organization regards access to healthcare services as a basic human right and advocates for the distribution of these services without discrimination of any kind, whether it be age, race, gender, geography or pre-existing conditions.

But civic engagement is priority right now for NCNW, Cole said, especially as the presidential election draws near and the national census comes to an end.

“We are laser-focused, I'd even say obsessed, on getting out to vote. We believe the reality that's captured in that expression, ‘We must vote like our lives depend on it because they do,’” she said. NCNW dispenses information about voting through its website, to ensure that the public and its members understand and are up to date with the voting process and requirements.

NCNW has also partnered with Fair Count with the Sisters for the Census national campaign to encourage Black women to

**“WE KNOW THAT IF WE  
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be actively involved in making sure they and members of their families and communities are counted in the U.S. 2020 Census. Fair Count is a nonprofit founded by former Georgia House minority leader and gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams. The group is especially dedicated to achieving a fair and accurate count for Georgia residents and in the nation at large.

Cole said this initiative is very important because it ensures that resources are secured for Black communities. An estimated 132 programs used Census Bureau data to allocate over \$675 billion in funds during the 2015 fiscal year, according to a 2017 working paper from the Census Bureau. The federal government also relies on census data to distribute about \$1.5 trillion in funds to programs like Medicare, food stamps, as well as rural and public education.

“That’s how we get more resources for our schools. That’s how we have better roads, better health care facilities and that’s how we have more political power because representation is based on the census,” Cole explained.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities will also benefit from sufficient federal funding. Though recently, these institutions have received more endowments and funding from the federal government, they are still behind their predominantly white counterparts in that regard. This is something Cole said is a result of systemic racism that permeates the education system in the United States.

“Here’s what I mean. If we look at school districts – I’m talking about grade school, middle school, high school – those school districts where the students are predominantly not white, they receive \$23 billion less in funding than predominantly white schools in the United States, even though they have the same number of students,” she explained, alluding to a 2019 report by EdBuild, which concluded that gerrymandered school districts cause this racial and economic divide.

“So, when we talk about inequities experienced by HBCUs, we’re talking about a pattern of inequity with respect to Black students throughout their educational experience,” Cole continued. It’s a point she made passionately. As an educator herself, the provision of and the access to education, are things she considers to be particularly important. She acknowledged the importance and achievements of HBCUs despite the financial disadvantages they face.

“Whenever I have been in a situation where someone wasn’t quite sure about the value of these institutions, among the things that I would do would be to say, well look at the product, look at those who have graduated,” Cole said, naming HBCU alumnae like Democratic vice-president elect Kamala Harris of Howard University and Oprah Winfrey of Tennessee State University. NCNW also has a history with HBCUs, after all, it was founded by educator and civil rights activist, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, who also founded Bethune-Cookman University and co-founded the United Negro College Fund. Cole said NCNW regards HBCUs as crucial hubs to foster excellence and the advancement of Black Americans. It’s one of the reasons they have sections on both HBCU and PWI campuses across the nation.

With 300 campus and community-based sections across the country, Cole says NCNW is hoping to become more intergenerational, attracting more young women and encouraging their transition from college sections to community-based sections across the country after they graduate.

“We have got to make sure that we have a future and that means that NCNW is in deep, deep, deep involvement with young women,” she said.

This engagement with young women heavily revolves around mentorship, something Cole absolutely swears by. She asserted, “I do believe deeply in the power of mentorship. One of the reasons I say that and believe it is because I know that I would not have gotten to where I have gotten, were it not for my mentors.” Cole grew up in the segregated south in Jacksonville, Florida. Her parents saw education as a tool for empowerment. Her mother was an English college professor, and her father encouraged her to learn from the likes of Bethune, who was a friend of his. Her professor at Oberlin College – where she earned her undergraduate degree in sociology – mentored and pushed her to later study anthropology at Northwestern University under her academic mentor, Melville J. Herskovits. Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, and Florida Rep. Donna Shalala urged her to take up the mantle of leadership at Spelman College.

“We know that if we are to have a future that our older members must exercise their responsibility to mentor our younger members,” Cole said. Today, she mentors many young women, from whom she said she also learns, as mentorship is a two-way learning street.

Justice requires that the disparities the Black community continues to face be fixed, the anthropologist said, and Black women play an important role in the fight. “Whether it is on our college campuses or in our communities or in our families, we Black women must continue to do what we have to do and certainly at the top of that list is stay in the struggle for justice,” Cole said.



## NATIONAL COALITION OF 100 BLACK WOMEN AND PRESIDENT JONA' HODGES

BY OLANMA MANG



**T**he issue of economic inequality disproportionately affecting women of color in the United States is a tale as old as time. Champions in the movement towards bridging the pay gap have risen, discussions have been had, and policies and laws have been passed. But it seems the fight still rages on, and the National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW) wants to be a part of the solution.

The coalition advocates gender equality and economic empowerment for Black women, among other core values they embrace. Since its founding in 1970, the organization has established 61 chapters with 2,800 members nationwide. In 2014, it chartered a Columbia, South Carolina chapter, its only chapter in the state. Jona' Hodges was elected as the chapter's president this year in May.

In this leadership role, the new chapter president wants to focus on remedying the economic and health disparities that Black women face in the Columbia area.

"We advocate for girls and women of color, and women of color, as you know, we are still the lowest paid," Hodges said in an

interview with HBCU Times, “and our health disparities in our community as far as mortality rate...when you go to the hospital, you expect excellent care when you’re giving birth but our women of color don’t always receive the same medical treatment,” she continued, referencing the high maternal mortality rate for Black women.

Several publications in the National Library of Medicine state that Black women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy complications than their white counterparts. Additionally, infant mortality rate for infants of Black women is at least twice as high as that for infants of non-Black women, according to a 2018 report from the National Center for Health Statistics.

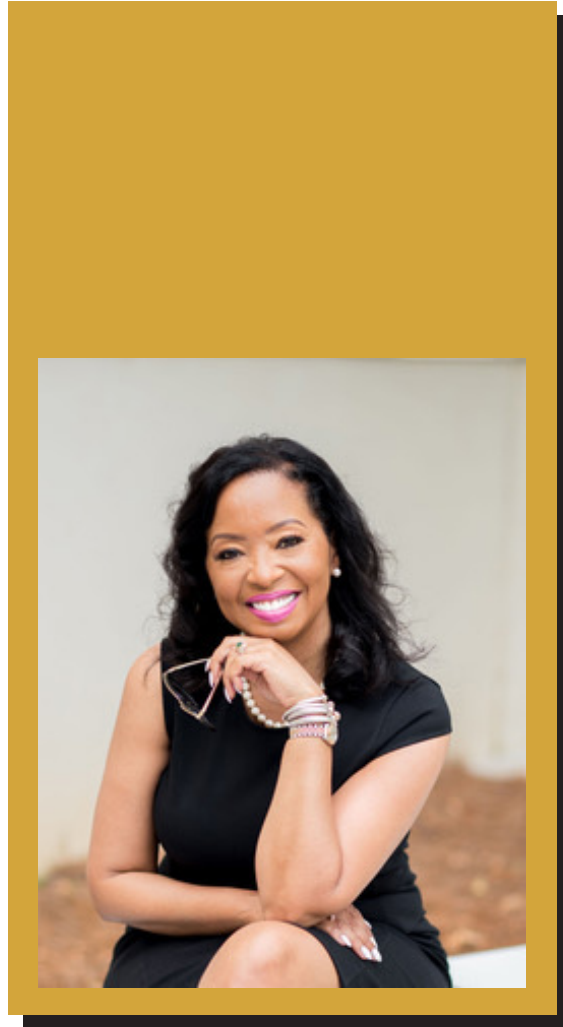
In the economic side of things, Black women still trail behind. The 2019 U.S. Census Bureau showed that the overall pay gap between men and women did not change from the previous year. The earnings ratio between the two sexes remained at 0.823. For Black women, the number was even less at 62 cents for every dollar a white man earned. According to the National Women’s Law Center, there was only a one cent increase in the average earnings for Black women in the country. It also listed South Carolina as one of the top 10 worst states with wage inequality for Black women.

To this effect, Hodges said the chapter will focus on creating awareness about these issues to young Black women. “Our role is to educate our community, educate our sisters. We provide information, we provide resources in the four areas of our goal,” she said, “as well as information regarding programs to assist women and girls of color.”

Hodges, herself, is a native of the South Carolina Lowcountry. She strives to serve her community as a member of several committees in Irmo, South Carolina, including The Rotary Club of Lake Murray-Irmo and the National Association of University Women, among others. Hodges is also a member of three honor societies. She attended South Carolina State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. With strong roots in South Carolina and a passion for serving her community, the empowerment-centered tenets of NCBW attracted her to the organization.

“I feel strongly about the mission of the organization,” she said. “I felt that it would be a way for me to support my community, to work with women of color and girls of color in the Columbia area.”

The organization also mentors young girls from elementary school age upwards to young adults, through forums to highlight the importance of education. Hodges explained, “We would like



to begin at an early age to encourage our young girls and serve as mentors and role models for them as well.”

Keeping in line with its stated purpose on its website, the NCBW Columbia chapter has formed partnerships with some organizations to combat some of the disparities women of color continue to face in the state. The chapter has hosted summits with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to discuss minority health and to combat the HIV epidemic in the state. The League of Women Voters is also another partner that aims to cater to uplifting the voices of women across the country during the upcoming election.

Another major goal for Hodges is to grow the chapter more than its current size. “We have 50 plus professional accomplished women and we would like to grow our organization with additional like-minded community leaders who are willing to serve as advocates on behalf of Black women and girls,” the chapter president said.

Even with the coronavirus pandemic putting a stop to the in-person meetings the chapter is used to having, Hodges said the organization is taking advantage of social media and virtual meetings and webinars. The fight to end social, economic and health disparities for Black women in the United States is one that will not be deterred by the pandemic. Hodges said, as with the times, the organization must and will adapt to continue pressing on.



# WILL JONES: FORMER BALLER AND AGGIE SHOT CALLER

BY OLANMA MANG

**T**he 2019-20 college basketball season was a notable run for North Carolina A&T's men's basketball team, The Aggies. Under then-acting head coach Will Jones, the team led a 14-5 record and finished second place in the Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference (MEAC). Its accomplishments during the season put the team on the map and garnered Jones a Coach of the Year nod from the conference. Now the official head men's basketball coach of The Aggies, Jones continues to have his eyes set on winning the next season.

Before stepping into the role of interim head coach last December, Jones served as an associate coach at the university for four years under former head coach Jay Joyner. The pair worked hand-in-hand to push the team into an upward momentum. It was on Joyner's foundation that Jones built the successes that decorated the team last season. He led The Aggies to a first-round MEAC tournament win over Howard University, with the team leading MEAC in eight statistical categories. He also received the BOXTOROW Coach of the Year award and was a Ben Jobe Award finalist, just to name a few of his accomplishments.

The university announced his promotion to head coach in June of this year.

"Being a head coach at a Division I school is really like winning the lottery," Jones said in an interview with HBCU Times. "Coaches coach all their careers and most don't get an opportunity to be

a head coach at the Division I level, and so I consider that to be a blessing."

But luck plays a very small role in the success Jones was able to lead The Aggies to. One of the key factors in maintaining a strong team, he said, is making sure the student athletes properly balance their courses and basketball training. He also acknowledged that fortifying the strong team spirit between the players and the team staff so that it translates to coordination and teamwork on the court was a key factor in their victories last season.

"Just having that relationship and them believing in me and believing what we were trying to do, I think was an ingredient for us to go out there and have the success," the coach said.

Their winning streak was unfortunately cut short when the coronavirus pandemic hit. Jones said it was tough to relay the season's cancellation to the team, part of whom were seniors who had worked very hard and were looking forward to completing their last season as college students. However, he said it was important for the team to espouse a positive attitude to stay hopeful and motivated for the next season.

The pandemic also posed another potential setback for the collegiate sports world. The original start date for the new season was Nov. 10. But with many states in lockdown and with strict enforcement of limited size gatherings, plans to even commence





the 2020-21 season were uncertain. Coaches also face the challenge of how to safely conduct training and practice in preparation for the next season.

“We are practicing with our guys in person under strict protocols to stay safe under the COVID guidelines here at A&T, and so we’re kind of operating in a small pod system right now,” Jones told the magazine.

At the time of this interview with HBCU Times, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) had not decided on when to start the next basketball season. Despite the ambiguity, Jones said the team will continue practicing in small groups and working on individual skill work in preparation for the next season, whenever it will be announced.

The NCAA has set the start date for the 2020-21 season for Nov. 25.

Jones’ leadership last season and during this pandemic has been a while in the making. As a college basketball player and the polemarch for the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity chapter in South Carolina State University, he said he learned a lot about leadership and teamwork. In 2003, the Moncks Corner, South Carolina native earned a bachelor’s degree in physical education with a concentration in sports communication. This experience, he said, piqued his interest in leadership and mentoring.

“I’ve always wanted to have an opportunity to lead. Leadership has always been something that I’ve always researched and tried to get the best perspective of,” he said. “I tell people all the time, that opportunity to do that really gave me a great example of leadership.”

And his ultimate goal is to lead The Aggies to the NCAA tournament and win first place in the MEAC conference. “We want to pick up where we left off and finish this job, our last year in this conference, in MEAC and put another banner up in our gym,” he said.

NC A&T announced in February that it would be leaving MEAC to join the Big South Conference on June 31, 2021. It is a move Jones applauds the university’s administration for making as a means to further increase the university’s prestige among prospective students.

“So for the next five years, the next two years, I’m totally focused on being that coach that really makes the HBCU brand a 360-degree brand that students across the country will be interested in coming to, the head coach said.

With this eagle eye focus, Jones’ mission transcends the court. His new role is all-encompassing. He wants to impact lives: the lives of his team and the life of the HBCU student.



OLANMA HAZEL MANG is a freelance writer for HBCU Times.