



**Remarks by the Director of National Intelligence
Mr. Dennis C. Blair**

**White House Initiative on
Historically Black Colleges and Universities National Annual Conference**

**The Renaissance Hotel
Washington, DC**

September 1, 2009

DR. LENORA PETERS GANT (Intelligence Community Centers of Academic Excellence Director): Good afternoon. Before I introduce the Director, I would like to give some open-ended remarks to recognize a lot of people in the audience who have been very instrumental in supporting the Centers of Academic Excellence. To platform officials, speakers, college and university deans, presidents and guests, it's a pleasure for me to give these opening comments.

At this time, I would like for IC senior managers who are here today to stand and be recognized for their many contributions to HBCUs. (Applause.) Thank you so much. Our academic outreach efforts are a collaborative across the entire 16-member agency Intelligence Community's enterprise.

The Centers of Academic Excellence program planning started back in November 2003. At that time, I was at Trinity University as a scholar-in-residence. I left Trinity and met with all the agency heads and course skills managers to make sure I would shape the program as they saw fit. And by fall of 2004, we had our first pilot test school for the Centers of Academic Excellence. And that was Trinity University here in Washington, D.C. I am pleased to note today that we have the first primary investigator (sic) of the Centers of Academic Excellence from Trinity here with us today, Dr. Kathy McGinnis. Please stand, Kathy. (Applause.)

I would like to report to you that we started with one school, added three more, and this academic year 2009-2010, we have a total of 20-plus CAE institutions across the country. (Applause.) This is due in large measure to the leadership of the directors of national intelligence, past and present, including Director Blair, who is here today.

I couldn't get this job done without the help of a lot of people. I would like to give special thanks right now to Ron Sanders, who is the Chief Human Capital Officer of the Intelligence Community. His championship, his leadership and his sponsorship have been invaluable. Ron, thank you. (Applause.)

I would like to give special thanks to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and you're probably asking, why them? Well, we use NGA's grant authority, and they make sure the schools get their money. Phil Hwang is here today from NGA. (Applause.)

The Historically Black Colleges and Universities' mission is about strengthening the capacity and excellence in education. And that is exactly what the Intelligence Community programs intend to do with its outreach programs. The Intelligence Community programs embody the spirit of your Executive Order 13256, especially Sections 4 and 7, because those sections of the executive order deal with educational enrichment, study abroad and employment opportunities.

University officials – deans, professors – you are the real champions in this equation to build America's talent for the future. Your actions and your deeds are a testament to the HBCUs inspiring service to our great country.

The Intelligence Community is very purposefully (sic). The 2009 National Intelligence Strategy signed by Director Blair in August of '09 articulates six mission objectives and seven enterprise objectives. Just to let you know how serious he is, enterprise objectives 2, 5 and 7 are about academic partnerships and building talent for the Intelligence Community core mission needs. And this is where I believe HBCUs excel in helping America build its intellectual capital.

The intelligence and national security business is also about public service at the very highest level. And as you know, the Intelligence Community people who are here today – they are very serious about their careers. They are so serious – I want you to think about this – as some of you might have been teased on occasion – if we tell you what we do, we will have to – what? Shoot you. (Laughter.)

But, seriously, together, the Intelligence Community and HBCUs make a phenomenal team when we align our efforts. And as you know, there is no "I" in "team." However, let me leave you with three "I's" that I believe we can all hang our hats on: influence, intellectual talent and inspiration.

Yes, HBCUs have the power to influence national security by developing competitive talent that the Intelligence Community can attract, recruit and hire. And your talent will keep America and the Intelligence Community on the leading edge around the globe.

HBCUs inspire students to exceed expectations in any endeavor. So continue to establish that incredible HCBU world-class brand and legacy, and I'll leave you with this as a final thought: When we were born, we entered this world not knowing what we would find. We were not responsible for how we found it. However, ladies and gentlemen, we are responsible for how we leave it.

I challenge HCBUs to seize every opportunity to thrive because, in my heart, "Yes, you can." Thank you. (Applause.)

I'm about to introduce the Director of National Intelligence. Director Dennis Blair is a public servant at the highest level. He wears many hats and has responsibilities abroad. He was

confirmed by the Senate on the 28th of January, 2009. Director Blair did not waste any time taking charge, because the very next day, he walked into his office as head of the Intelligence Community.

Now, some of you might be wondering, what is the Intelligence Community? Well, it is comprised of 16 national-level agencies. And just to name a few, it includes the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA; DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency; NGA, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency; and NSA, often referred to as “No Such Agency.” (Laughter.)

Director Blair also serves as the principal advisor to President Obama and the National Security Council. He oversees and directs the National Intelligence Program, and we all know that means money.

Director Blair graduated from the Naval Academy, which has been said already this morning. After 34 years of military service, he retired as a four-star admiral. And during his public service career, Director Blair received many prestigious awards and commendations.

And this is something that he might not want me to share with you, but I’m going to share it anyway: As a skipper during his early military career – (laughter) – Director Blair was somewhat renowned – I would say, even, famous – in naval circles. And I guess you’re wondering why. Well, this brave and daring gentleman attempted to water ski behind his huge destroyer, the USS Cochrane.

It is a pleasure and honor for me to present to you my big boss, Director Blair. (Applause.)

DIRECTOR DENNIS C. BLAIR: Thanks, Lenora. The rest of the story is I did not succeed in water skiing – (laughter) – behind the destroyer. But, good afternoon, and to all of you, it’s a pleasure to be here, and thank you very much, President Hughes, Dr. Garland, Dr. Wilson, for inviting me and being part of this.

And it’s also, of course, a wonderful honor and pleasure to be with Charlie Bolden back again on a podium. He didn’t tell you the whole story of our times at the Naval Academy. “You never bilge your classmate,” as we say. But he and I actually were candidates for this elective office at the Naval Academy, president of our class. And as I recall, he won a few and I won a few. But I always felt at a disadvantage at times like this – which I certainly am now.

Now, I’m certainly here to pay tribute to the Historically Black Colleges and University, and so is he; but we both also are kind of recruiting, right? We want to get good people to come into our agencies, and we want your colleges and universities to open up their eyes to those possibilities, and so on.

But let’s look at this for a minute. NASA: African-American astronaut? Intelligence Community: White guy recruiting spies. (Laughter.) So I’m going to have to do what we do when we’re at a tremendous disadvantage – I’m going to use money a little later in the program. (Laughter, applause.)

And I do have to mention one other sort of competitive aspect between Administrator Bolden's organization and my organization. I was very proud to learn a few weeks ago that in a survey taken around this town, which is the heart of the federal government, that the Intelligence Community – many of which members Lenora mentioned – came in pretty well. We turned out to be the fourth best place to work in the federal government. But I'm embarrassed to say that NASA was the third best place to work. (Laughter, applause). So just wait until next year, Charlie, we're gaining on you.

But the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, of course, is a fantastic organization that's done so much for this country. And I'm sure that Administrator Bolden is going to take it on to new heights, and we certainly look forward to that.

But I'm speaking for the Intelligence Community, for those of us who try to make sure that when the United States goes out and operates in the world, we have a better appreciation of what's going on than anybody else, so we can make good decisions and do the right thing for the country.

And so in order to be successful in what we're doing, we simply have to be diverse. Because if we are going to be effective in the number of places we operate, the things we have to do, we simply have to have a workforce that understands and reflects the diversity of the world, which we have to, at heart, understand and pass on.

To put it in very simple terms, people who look like me don't blend in very well in East Africa and don't understand different parts of the world as well as those who have ties to that region, who can understand it better.

So for us, the definition and purposes of diversity are really broader than they are, perhaps, for many organizations. And in addition to the categories that the EEOC requires us to track – minorities, women, persons with disabilities and so on – we also need employees with a wide background with national ethnic origin in order to be effective with different foreign language capabilities, different heritages, different ethnicities, different orientations, different perspectives, different ideas for us to do our job. And we're a better force for it.

Now, in order to reach that goal, we have a number of innovative programs in recruitment, hiring, career development and training that are all aimed at increasing and building on this diversity. And over the past five years, we have seen steady increases every year in each category, especially in the higher-grade senior positions – our core mission skills in the Intelligence Community – which are analysis, collection, science, and technology.

We're not where we want to be in all areas, but we're making steady progress year after year. For example, our African-American population has increased from 10.9 percent of our workforce to 11.5 percent over the last few years. That means our current representation is a percent higher than that in the Civilian Labor Force, which is the official benchmark that we use.

But again, we're not satisfied with that, nor are we in many categories; and we just need to make it better, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes us a better agency, better community, to do our jobs.

Now, again, you're probably asking yourself what possibly could someone like me know about the experience that young African-Americans in college today face in today's job market? And I admit that I rely more on experts in my organizations, like those who are here, like Lenora, who have closer perspectives and more experience on this subject than I do.

I would like to share a couple of stories with you that I believe have given me some insight over the years into this subject, and certainly made a big impact in my life. The first was related to my growing up, moving around with the Navy, just about my entire life.

I was stationed, for instance, many times in Hawaii, where whites are a minority in the population. There are actually more Asians in the island than Caucasians. And my first time was in kindergarten through second grade when I was living out there. And I found that – what it was like to fit in with the locals, and I certainly believe that being a minority was an invaluable experience for a young, white American kid at that time. And I believe that that helped me understand and appreciate the perspective of minorities.

The second time, back in Hawaii as an adult with children my own, a son and a daughter, a wife who had also lived in Hawaii as a teen, and it was certainly important for them to understand that perspective. And I think that's made them better people as a result.

And then the time that I was living in Japan, and really understood what it was like to be part of a very small minority in a country that looked very different from the way that I looked. And of course in these experiences, I was never subjected to the active or passive discrimination which has highlighted the experience of so many minorities, but I think it did give me a feeling of that constant underlying situation that you're just different from those around you, and how do you get ahead? How do you fit in? How do you do the things that all of us have to do?

But the second event that's made a major impact on my life in this respect was the role that I was privileged to play in righting some significant wrongs that were done to American minorities over the years.

As many of you all know, during World War II, over a million African-Americans served in the armed forces, and yet not one of them received, at that time, the nation's highest award for courage and bravery – the Medal of Honor.

Finally, in 1992, the Army commissioned a panel of historians at Shaw University in Raleigh to study why that was so. And their report concluded that there were significant reasons, primarily caused by racist leaders within the Army who disapproved the awards, who discouraged junior officers and enlisted men from even being submitted for awards. And that was in addition to the effect of the general segregation of Army units that was in effect at the time.

And this report in 1992 recommended the reevaluation of the records of several particular soldiers to see what could be done about it. So the Army did that. And it was those records which were truly amazing stories of valor and endurance that I had the privilege of looking at when I was serving in the Pentagon as a director of the Joint Staff.

It was a bittersweet privilege to be involved in that process – bitter because of the fact that this courage and endurance had not been recognized at the time, but sweet that it was finally happening. Because, eventually, justice was served – although it was 50 years later – when President Clinton posthumously awarded Medals of Honor to the families of those who had earned them. And he presented the medal itself, in person, to one man, Lt. Vernon Baker, the only one of the group who was still living.

Now, that event also set the stage for a similar review of the record of Asian-Americans during World War II, and I was even more involved with that event when I was out in Hawaii for my final tour in the Armed Forces.

And quite simply, those two events – watching how long it had taken, watching the talent and fortitude and valor that had been expended for the country and that had not been recognized and not been taken advantage of – those made an impression on me, and made me realize that never again should this country neglect to take advantage of, nor neglect to recognize, the service of all of those.

And that's especially true when it comes to recognizing those heroes within our ranks – the ones who go above and beyond the call of duty. And in particular, we in the Intelligence Community cannot afford to make mistakes like that – to ignore or hold back talented groups of individuals simply because of the color of the skin, whether they were born male or female, whether their parents happened to have been born in another country. The Intelligence Community is a community that benefits by being as diverse as possible so that we can better understand people around the world. It's both the right thing to do; and it makes us more effective.

Fortunately, in spite of some of the other problems and challenges that we face today, we can take justifiable pride in the way we mentor and develop our African-American employees, as well as all of our employees.

We're very proud of increasing minority representation in the Congressman Louis Stokes Program. It's now above 81 percent. We're proud of the agencies of the Intelligence Community. They all have chapters of Blacks in Government, BIG. We're proud that we work closely with the African-American Federal Executives Association. And we're proud of our recently created Affinity Network Organization, which is a best-practices innovation with ten different employee resource groups, including one for African-American employees.

These are the sorts of efforts that take care of people after they've been on board for a while. We can't just stop once we hire and recruit. We have to work all the way through careers in our agencies, making sure that everybody can reach to the potential contribution of the organization that he or she can do, and is not held back by either seen or unseen barriers.

And that really brings us to today. We're also extremely proud of the Intelligence Community Centers of Academic Excellence Program, under the remarkable leadership of Dr. Lenora Peters Gant for many years. And we're especially proud that we have three Historically Black Universities in the program: Clark Atlanta University, Norfolk State University and Tennessee State University in Nashville. And I'm pleased to publicly announce – and this is news; it's a scoop; you heard it here first – that for this new academic year, we've added eight more schools, including three HBCUs: Florida A&M University, Howard University and Miles College in Birmingham. (Applause.)

And the polls are not closed. (Laughter.) We look forward to having even more partners in the future. So keep coming at us and we'll keep working it. We're not restricted, by any means, to only recruiting those in the Centers for Academic Excellence program; we're definitely on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities who don't happen to be in this program, as well. And we want all of you from all of your colleges and universities, whether it's a CAE college or not, to encourage your best graduates to come think about us when they're thinking about where they go in their professions.

But we do always have this extra bond that links us to those who are in the program. Let me tell you just a little bit about the Centers for Academic Excellence program before I ask the representatives from our three new – from our three schools of last year, excuse me – to come forward to accept an award. The CAE Program in National Security Studies was established in 2004. Its emphasis was and continues to be building long-term relationships with colleges and universities that meet five key requirements.

They need to design, develop and reshape curricula and disciplines that support our mission-critical skills: intelligence gathering, analysis. They must develop competencies in regional and international expertise, critical foreign languages and cultural awareness. They have to develop and host a national security colloquium with other institutions in their area, and it should promote awareness about the intelligence mission, about intelligence careers, the value of public service, internships and scholarship opportunities. They need to develop and host high school outreach programs to attract talent and also, to promote awareness about our mission, which includes demystifying the business of intelligence. I believe strongly that what we do should be more transparent to the American public – we don't have to shoot you – (Laughter) – even if we can't always share how we do it. If we told you that, we would. (Laughter.) And lastly, our partners in the colleges and universities must conduct assessments and track metrics to ensure that what they're doing is a good return on investment, not only for the Intelligence Community, but for the nation.

And when schools meet these requirements, they receive competitive grant funding for their colleges and universities. And that funding will promote the alignment of their criteria with the Intelligence Community's many core missions and skills, because we need criminal justice majors, lawyers, economists, linguists, and other language specialists. We need researchers, historians, political scientists, and transnational threat cybersecurity specialists. We need engineers who can work on advanced satellites, on communications equipment, on sophisticated sensors, and on high-speed computers that have facial recognition technology. We need analysts who can make sense of the flood of data that we receive every day. We need savvy, young

intelligence officers who understand other cultures and who give critical thought to issues such as foreign leaders' views, leadership styles, as well as economic and technological challenges. And we need brave souls who can go out on the dusty streets and develop the personal skills to recruit, hire, develop and form collaborative relationships with agents in hostile countries.

Our program, if we do it right, is a win-win-win for the academic institution, for the students themselves and for the Intelligence Community, and most important, the country.

Over the past two academic years, the three universities that we're recognizing today have helped the Intelligence Community to reach more than 10,000 students – either enrolled in the national security programs, perhaps an individual course, or who had attended the colloquia that I mentioned. They developed pre-collegiate workshops that reached over 4,000 high school students and their teachers. And they competitively selected over 600 scholars, and 84 of the Centers of Academic Excellence scholars have made it into internships.

Those in the CAE program have also traveled to China, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, and Turkey. They say to travel flattens the purse, broadens the mind, and lengthens the conversation. But in addition to all those assessments, I agree with Mark Twain: The most important thing about it is: "Travel is fatal to prejudice." So we must consider travel to be a key part of this program in more ways than one.

And now I'd like to recognize their contributions; and to recognize their contributions, I'd like to call up to the stage the presidents of those Historically Black Universities who are currently members of the Intelligence Community's Centers of Academic Excellence programs. And on behalf of the Intelligence Community, I'd like to thank each of you for being our champions on campus.

And first, with a grant of \$1,380,000, Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Virginia. Carolyn Meyers. (Applause.) We don't want plastic on this thing, Dr. Meyers. Why don't we undo it here? Thank you very much.

(Presented plaque.)

DIRECTOR BLAIR: All right. And second, with a grant for \$1.5 million, Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta – President Carlton Brown. (Applause.)

(Presented plaque.)

DIRECTOR BLAIR: Let's see, and finally, with a grant of \$2.25 million, Tennessee State University in Nashville. And this is President Melvin Johnson.

(Presented plaque.)

DIRECTOR BLAIR: Great. Well, thank all of you very much. And also, the colleges and universities that are joining us this year and those who will be joining us in the future. I think this is the right thing to steer – make the opportunities available to some of your most talented

students, perhaps help them a little bit with their education, and then we hope to show them both the rewards of working in the Intelligence Community and what they can do for their country.

And so let me close with just one last point. On April 5th, 1945, a young African-American Army lieutenant led his infantry platoon against a German stronghold in Italy. On his own, he killed nine enemy soldiers, eliminated three machine gun positions, an observation post and a dugout. When German machine gun and mortar fire wounded most of his platoon, he stayed behind to cover the withdrawal of those who could walk on their own, and then he personally evacuated those who were grievously wounded.

And it was almost 52 years later that Vernon Baker finally received the Medal of Honor which he so bravely earned. And while he was discriminated against with regard to proper recognition, no one ever doubted that Lt. Vernon Baker was a true American hero. And it's my goal – and I think we're partners in this quest – to recruit more men and women of Vernon Baker's caliber into the service of their country – in this case, the U.S. Intelligence Community – and then to see that they are recognized for their excellence – not decades later, but immediately. (Applause.)

And I also want to raise the profile of our patriots within the Intelligence Community – those of all races, all ethnicity, all backgrounds, so that they're equally respected by the American people as those who wear the uniform. Intelligence officers are working hard every day to make America a better place and safer place. And it's a younger workforce than you think; fully half of our people joined after September 11, 2001. There are some remarkable opportunities for patriotic service and for personal growth.

So, finally, thanks to all the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, all of you who lead them – our partners now, our partners in the future – for assisting us, for making it possible for us to get to know such remarkable young men and women, and allowing us to work with them to embrace the mission, the vision, the values of the Intelligence Community. I guarantee that they will not let you down. And that we will not let them down. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

DR. JOHN SILVANUS WILSON, JR. (Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities): Let's give him a hand, please. (Applause.) I want to – let me say something about this and then I'll – (applause). Please, please.

As we close now – and we're at the end of our program – I want to thank everyone at the head table. But we have an award for Admiral Blair. And I just want to give him this award and let him know that all of the HBCU Presidents in here, all the HBCU Presidents in the room, please stand for a second so we just know who you are. And remain standing for a second.

All of the HBCU Presidents and I have something in common with you. And that is we are charged with the care and management of intelligence communities, okay? And we also have in common the fact that our intelligence communities are hidden. If you do your job right, yours will remain hidden. If we do our job right, the light will shine on our intelligence communities;

the profile will be raised and we'll get more and more support from the government and the private sector and be as strong and have as much capacity as we are called to have.

Okay, so for our intelligence communities together, for the work that you've done on our behalf and the work that you will do, we give you this award and we thank you for what you've done and we thank you for the future we will create together. Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. (Applause.)

Now let's pose for a picture. Thank you. Enjoy the rest of the conference.

(END)



Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair (Right) and Dr. Lenora Peters Gant (Left) present Norfolk State University President Carolyn Meyers with a plaque.