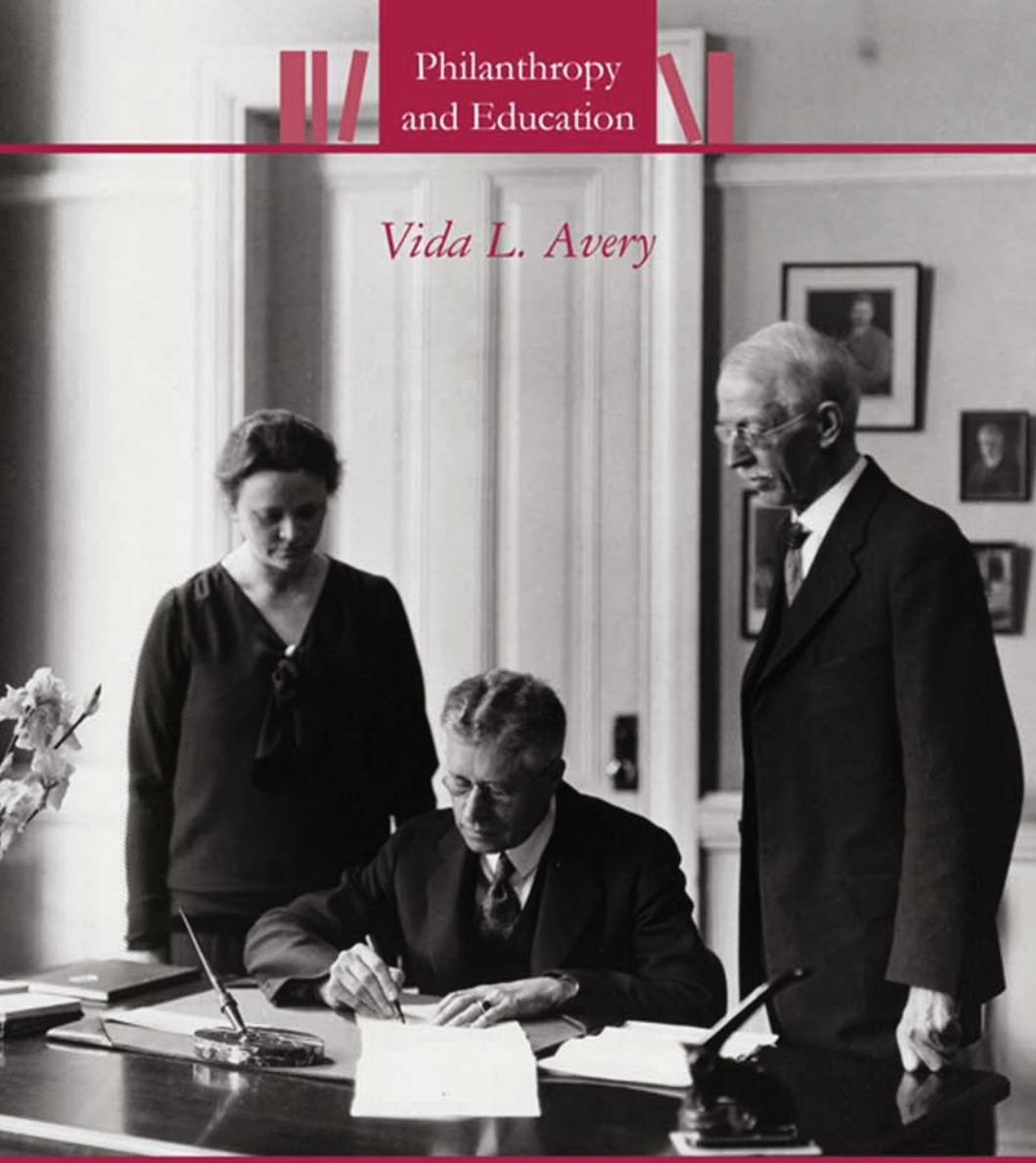
Philanthropy and Education

Vida L. Avery



Philanthropy in Black Higher Education

A Fateful Hour Creating the Atlanta University System

Philanthropy and Education

Marybeth Gasman, professor of Higher Education, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania

This series highlights first-rate scholarship related to education and philanthropy, attracting the top authors writing in the field. Philanthropy is broadly defined to include time, talent, and treasure. In addition to traditional forms and definitions of philanthropy, the series highlights philanthropy in communities of color as well as philanthropy among women and LGBT communities. Books in the series focus on fund-raising as it is an integral part of increasing philanthropy and has an ever-increasing market.

Philanthropy in Black Education: A Fateful Hour Creating the Atlanta University System
By Vida L. Avery

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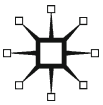

PHILANTHROPY IN BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION

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I dedicate this book to my parents, Dr. Parnell and Gloria "Glorious" Avery, who encouraged my siblings and me to attend a historically black college and university.

This book is possible because of them.

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Preface

Philanthropy in Black Higher Education is the first book in a new series on Philanthropy and Fund-Raising in Higher Education. Vida L. Avery draws upon the archives located in the Robert Woodruff Library at the Atlanta University Center and The Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York to tell the story of Black higher education and White philanthropy. She brings to life the actions and leadership of John Hope, who spearheaded the center and held a vision for Black colleges in Atlanta. Avery also weaves the history of White philanthropy and its often-controlling nature throughout the narrative. She thoughtfully explores the Rockefeller-sponsored General Education Board and its role in propelling Black education forward and simultaneously holding it back.

Readers interested in Black colleges and philanthropy in general will enjoy reading *Philanthropy in Black Higher Education* as it uncovers the stories and perspectives of often-overlooked leaders and shapers of Black education. Avery's beautifully-crafted history of the Atlanta University Center is a fitting book to begin the series, which seeks to unearth rigorous research. With her work, we are off to a great start.

Marybeth Gasman,
University of Pennsylvania
Philanthropy and Education,
Series Editor

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Acknowledgments

I thanked God for giving me the strength, ability, and perseverance to sustain such an endeavor when I first began research for this book, and I give thanks again now that I have finished it. I thank my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Parnell (Gloria) Avery, for always believing in my ability to complete this task, even when I doubted myself, and spending time in numerous discussions as to where I was in the process and how it was coming along. Thank you for giving me the love of history and reading, the foundation of my education, and the inquisitiveness that led me to know that those things of the past shape our future. I am especially thankful to my mother, who pushed me to go back to school for my doctorate; yet sadly by the time of this publication had passed away. I also thank other family members who aided in me achieving this goal. Sibyl Avery Jackson, my sister, thanks for reminding me that "we Averys can do anything we put in our minds to," for lighting a fire to get my mind back on writing when I got tired, and for knowing what it takes to pull ideas out of one's mind and to craft them onto the page to tell a story. Natalie (Sherry) Avery Webster, my sister, Toni Williams, my sister-in-law, Kimberly Clayborn and Blyss Lewis, my sisters of the heart, thank you for being excited about my endeavor to write this book and for understanding when I did not have time to socialize.

Much appreciation and adulation I give to Drs. Marybeth Gasman, Wayne J. Urban, and Philo Hutcheson, my early mentors and instructors who championed my research in black higher education and philanthropy, and especially to Marybeth again for believing in the importance of completing this book

and the impact it would have in higher education and philanthropic studies. I could not have completed my research or this book without the much-needed help from archival departments and their staff. I thank Karen Jefferson, Andrea Jackson and the staff at the Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Archives Department, for assisting me with documents, finding images and providing permission letters. I thank Taronda Spencer from the Spelman College Archives Department for her assistance. I also thank the Rockefeller Archive Center for giving me the initial grant for my research, and the late Dr. Kenneth Rose and the staff at the center for assisting me during my visit to conduct research. Michele Hiltzik, thank you for assisting me with obtaining subsequent approvals for image use and answering last minute questions. Last, I thank the staff at Auburn Avenue Research Library for their assistance.

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Historical Timeline

1839	b. John D. Rockefeller Sr.
1861	Civil War begins
1862	Morrill Act, creation of land-grant institutions
1865	Civil War ends
	Enactment of Jim Crow laws and Segregation
	State Constitution Amendments, public education for whites
	Atlanta University (AU) founded by Congregationalist and the Freedman's Bureau
1867	George Peabody establishes the George Peabody Fund
	Atlanta University incorporated
	Augusta Institute Seminary founded by American Baptist Association
1868	b. John Hope, Augusta, GA
	Establishment of Friendship Baptist Church
1869	AU creates Normal Department
1870	Blacks prohibited from attending University of Georgia
1872	AU opens College Department
1873	AU opens Scientific Preparatory
1874	AU opens Agricultural Department
1877	Gilded Age (*industrial, urban, and agricultural growth in the United States*)
1879	Augusta Institute relocates to Atlanta, GA, and incorporates as Atlanta Baptist Seminary
	AU creates Department of Industrial Training
1881	Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary founded by Sophia B. Pachard and Harriet E. Giles

1882 John F. Slater creates The Slater Fund
Rockefeller Sr. endows $600,000 to University of Chicago
Rockefeller Sr.'s first donation to Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary

1883 Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary opens College Department

1884 Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary changes name to Spelman Seminary

1885 Spelman Seminary and Atlanta Baptist Seminary—1st Commencement Exercise

1886 John Hope attends Worchester Academy in Massachusetts
Rockefeller donation to Spelman Seminary, erection of Rockefeller Hall

1888 AMA establishes The Daniel Hand Education Fund for Colored People
Spelman Seminary receives State Charter

1889 Carnegie's essays, "The Gospel of Wealth" and "The Best Fields of Philanthropy"

1890 Progressive Era (*time of eliminating corruption, prohibition, and achieving efficiency in every sector*)
Sherman Anti-Trust Act, any monopoly in restraint of trade is illegal and prohibits business activities that reduced competition
John Hope graduates from Worchester and enrolls at Brown University

1894 John Hope graduates from Brown University, starts teaching position at Roger Williams University (Nashville, TN)
Atlanta University separates its Elementary School

1895 Booker T. Washington's speech, "Atlanta Compromise"
Atlanta Cotton State Exposition
Hope's speech, "The Need of a Liberal Education for Us"

1896 Andrew Carnegie creates Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh
Plessy v. Ferguson, doctrine of "separate but equal" racial status

1897 Atlanta Baptist Seminary amends charter; changes its name to Atlanta Baptist College

1898 John Hope hired as professor at Atlanta Baptist College
W. E. B. Du Bois hired as professor at Atlanta University
1900 Andrew Carnegie creates Carnegie Technical School
Negrophobia, beginning of race riots
1901 Rockefeller Sr. creates Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research
Robert C. Odgen's "Millionaire's Special" train trips to the South
W. E. B. Du Bois's study, "The College-Bred Negro"
1902 Ida Tarbell's exposé, *The History of Standard Oil*
Rockefeller Sr. gives $1 million to create the General Education Board (GEB)
Carnegie creates The Carnegie Institute of Washington
1903 GEB receives charter and incorporates
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*
1905 Carnegie founds the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teachers
Rockefeller Sr. endows $10 million to the GEB
GEB receives funds from the Anne T. Jeanes Fund
1906 Congress passes *Hepburn Act*, regulating and imposing penalties for rebates in the business industry
Race riots in Atlanta, GA
John Hope elected president of Atlanta Baptist College
Niagara Movement, Storrs College in Harpers Ferry
GEB pledges $250,000 to Spelman Seminary
1909 Rockefeller Sr. creates Sanitary Commission for Eradication of the Hookworm Disease
John Hope's funding request to Andrew Carnegie, Booker T. Washington intercedes for John Hope
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) created
1910 Carnegie creates the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Abraham Flexner's, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*—later *The Flexner Report*, survey of medical schools

	Du Bois's Fifteenth Annual Conference at Atlanta University, The College-Bred Negro American
	Du Bois resigns from teaching position at Atlanta University
	The Great Black Migration to the North
	Julius Rosenwald creates the Julius Rosenwald Fund
1911	Catherine Phelps-Stokes's bequest of $1 million creates the Phelps-Stokes Fund
	Standard Oil dissolves into 38 separate and smaller companies
	Carnegie creates the Carnegie Corporation of New York
1912	Rockefeller Sr. creates The Rockefeller Foundation
	Jesse Jones's survey, *"Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States"*
1913	Wallace Buttrick's "Study of Black Colleges"
	Atlanta Baptist College changes name to Morehouse College
1914	World War I begins
	GEB begins appropriations to select black colleges and universities
	Bureau of Education conducts survey, "Report on Negro Education"
1915	GEB holds first Interracial Conference on Negro Education
	Harlem Renaissance, cultural "New Negro Movement"
1917	Rockefeller Sr. establishes The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund
1918	World War I ends
1918	W. T. B. Williams's *Study of Atlanta University*
	GEB appropriates conditional grants to black colleges
	GEB focuses on building up select black colleges and universities
1919	Atlanta mayor, William Hartsfield, successfully brings new southern airmail route through Atlanta
	Atlanta Chamber of Commerce launches "Forward Atlanta" campaign

1920 AU holds Interracial Student Meetings
Black student protests begin
Atlanta has the largest black population than any other city in the South

1924 Spelman Seminary changes its name to Spelman College
Lucy Tapely, Spelman College's president, resigns

1926 John D. Rockefeller Jr. donates $175.000 to Spelman College to erect Sisters Chapel in memory of his mother (Laura Spelman Rockefeller) and aunt (Lucy Maria Spelman)
John T. Tigert, Commissioner of Education, *Study on Negro Education*, conducted from 1926 to 1928

1927 Jackson Davis's study of all black colleges, *Recent Development in Negro Colleges and Schools*
Florence Read elected Spelman College's new president
Morehouse-Spelman Summer School

1928 GEB and Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation pledge $2.5 million toward Spelman's $3 million endowment campaign
Arthur Klein's, *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities*, sponsored by the Phelps-Stokes Foundation
GEB pledges $300,000 toward Morehouse's $600,00 endowment campaign

1929 Stock market crashes
Affiliation of Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College creates the Atlanta University System
Myron Adams, Atlanta University's president, resigns
John Hope elected president of Atlanta University; continues as president of Morehouse College
Atlanta University's Commencement, sixtieth year as an undergraduate institution
Jackson Davis, *Survey of the Atlanta Institutions*, focuses on Clark and Morris Brown Colleges

1930 United States Great Depression
John Hope's "Six-Year Plan" requires $6.4 million

	GEB resolves $450,000 in appropriations to AU for the library and appropriates $600,000 for an endowment
	Morehouse and Spelman elected to the Association of American Colleges, receives "Class B" rating
	GEB grants $3.2 million toward Atlanta University's $6.4 million endowment for Hope's Six-Year Plan
	Atlanta University awards its first master's degree
	Spelman celebrates its fiftieth anniversary
	Atlanta University, Morehouse, and Spelman Colleges receives "Class A" rating from the SACS
	ABHMS severs ties with Morehouse College
1932	Trevor Arnett Library construction completed
	Morris Brown College joins the affiliation
1936	John Hope dies
1941	Clark University changes name to Clark College and joins the affiliation
1953	Florence Read retires
	Albert E. Manley becomes the first black and first male president of Spelman College
1957	The Atlanta University System changes name to The Atlanta University Center

Introduction

It was springtime in Atlanta, the beginning of April. The harsh climate and the chill of winter had retreated, and the temperature had grown warmer. Seeds planted in previous seasons now produced fruits, and blossoming flowers bore new life—a new beginning. April 1, 1929, marked a beginning and new life of a different kind.

President John Hope, Morehouse College, sat with pen in hand, in southwest Atlanta, and signed a "revolutionary educational undertaking" into history.[1] Standing behind Hope and watching this historic event were Presidents Florence M. Read and Myron W. Adams, Spelman College and Atlanta University respectively. This undertaking was the culmination of seeds planted over the past two decades that now bore the fruit of several individuals' labor to ensure higher education for blacks in the south, particularly in Atlanta, Georgia.

The decision to affiliate Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College was, as John Hope later stated, "a fateful hour in the history of Negro higher education, with circumstances favoring cooperation that might not occur again for 100 years."[2] With a charter granted from the State of Georgia for this university plan, Atlanta University would provide graduate and professional courses, while Morehouse College and Spelman College would provide undergraduate courses that led to a bachelor's degree.[3]

As a Spelman alumna, I had read Spelman's institutional history, as all freshmen at the time I attended were required to, and knew of the affiliation signed in 1929. However, I did not fully comprehend the magnitude of its significance until I began my research for this book. I discovered just how monumental and

historic the affiliation was, especially considering that it occurred during a tumultuous time in US history. First, despite Jim Crow laws and segregation, Atlanta University practiced social equality and educated black and white students together. From inception, each Atlanta University president stood firm on this principle of social equality and never wavered even in the wake of possible financial ruin. Second, rather than deny students broad cultural and intellectual exposure, Atlanta University created a venue for interaction between the races and the institution integrated all of its activities.[4] Wealthy northerners, distinguished scholars, and artists visited the institution to see how blacks were being educated, and to give speeches and musical performances. By the 1920s, groups of students organized interracial meetings on the campus of Atlanta University, though white campuses, such as Emory University or Agnes Scott College, took substantially more time for allowing such meetings. These meetings opened a path for serious dialogue and provided an opportunity to resolve misconceptions about each race during a time when students were in need of such developmental maturity.

Third, when the institutions affiliated, Atlanta University was the only black institution that focused solely on graduate studies. Fourth, the Atlanta University System was also a "trail-blazer" because of its cooperative arrangements with other American colleges, thus making it a model for higher education throughout the country. The only other place in the United States where a similar concept was put in practice was in California at the Claremont Colleges. Based on the Atlanta University System affiliation, the Rockefeller-founded General Education Board (GEB) attempted to establish another center in Georgia that included University of Georgia, Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Agnes Scott College. Although this affiliation with the white institutions never came to fruition, the Atlanta University System was nevertheless the model.

Last, when John Hope became president of Morehouse College, he was not only the first black president of the institution, but also the first black president of any of the American Baptists Home Missionary Society's institutions. Additionally, at the time of the

affiliation, he was simultaneously the president of both Morehouse College and Atlanta University.

The impact of this affiliation also stretched beyond the world of academe and onto the national stage as it related to the social issue of race relations. US President Herbert Hoover commended Hope for his work and acknowledged the affiliation's importance in improving the relationship between blacks and whites. However, despite these record-breaking first events, most people are unfamiliar with the story behind the affiliation of the three institutions. Most people are also unfamiliar with John Hope and unaware of his involvement with the affiliation, and even less aware of the relationship he cultivated with white philanthropists, which allowed him to negotiate his terms and use funds acquired to further his vision of sustaining black higher education.

Several scholars and historians have advanced a variety of viewpoints and interpretations of philanthropists' involvement with black higher education during the early twentieth century. On one end of the spectrum, scholars analyze the relationship from the philanthropists' perspective by dichotomously limiting their descriptions of the motives of giving as being either manipulative or benevolent. Some portray industrial philanthropists as conspirators who were mainly interested in implementing an industrial education curriculum to keep blacks in a position to provide labor, and not interested in "bringing industrial progress and social harmony to the South." On the contrary, scholars explain that philanthropists were more interested in "a profit motive that was the driving force of black higher education." Further descriptions indicated that philanthropists had a political agenda to recreate the antebellum South after the Civil War. To do this, it was necessary for blacks to be "prepared ideologically and practically for their role in the new America."[5]

Other scholars perceive philanthropists as manipulators of black college presidents, implying there was no other type of relationship that existed between philanthropists and black college presidents, and that black leaders had no sense of agency.[6] However, I found that these accounts neglected to look at the full dynamics of the history of philanthropy and black education

and neglected to acknowledge that black college leaders, such as John Hope, contradicted such claims. Hope clearly had a sense of agency, which not only shaped the conditions of his life, but also the lives of many other black people.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are scholars who view philanthropists' actions largely as benevolent. For these scholars, the difference in race and the segregated circumstances of the South created the initial need for the GEB to provide education (e.g., agricultural and vocational training rather than liberal arts and professional training) for blacks so as not to disrupt a racially-volatile environment. They also point out that over time, the GEB established "democracy by enlarging the opportunities of a social group previously excluded." Blacks in the South could not "afford to forget the foundations upon which colleges for [blacks] have been built," therefore, giving philanthropists credit, at least, for elevating them to an educational level that they would not have otherwise achieved.[7]

While conducting research at the Rockefeller Archives Center, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss Jr., authors of *Dangerous Donations*, who were there conducting research for a project. Though some scholars view them as apologists, Anderson and Moss's study of philanthropy provided a different examination of industrial philanthropists that went beyond philanthropic motives. For Anderson and Moss, historians placed too much emphasis on the motives of philanthropists and too little emphasis on the outcome of their philanthropy. As they noted, almost from the beginning of industrial philanthropy, blacks were educated beyond an industrial curriculum. Members of my family, graduates from the Atlanta University System (Center), and I were, and are, a testament to this contention. At the beginning of my research, I was a fourth-generation educator, and neither my mother, grandmother nor great-grandmother received an industrial education. They attended a college and normal school that prepared them to become teachers and not laborers in a field.

Other viewpoints have since emerged that challenged how we view philanthropy. In *Uplifting a People,* Marybeth Gasman and Katherine Sedgwick discuss philanthropy by highlighting black

philanthropy as a means of self-help among freed slaves and blacks, which included the support of education. For Gasman and Sedgwick, black philanthropy, or giving, was rooted in "efforts to overcome oppression," this type of black philanthropy has gone mostly unnoticed.[8]

However, philanthropy from blacks to other blacks often involves an additional dimension of giving; examining the words "endow" and "engender" demonstrates this dimension. On one hand, in giving money, philanthropists "endow"; in other words, they give money in order to provide income for the purchase and maintenance of things necessary for a better life. A school is an example. "Engender," on the other hand, means "to bring into being." Many black philanthropists in the past, and even today, not only "endowed" but also "engendered" by being living models of what a changed man could be.

John Hope, for example, both endowed and engendered. Hope was able to "engender" in other black people a new, positive vision of self, by living his life in the manner that he lived: dedicating himself to making intangible principles tangible. For many black people during his time, acquiring a positive view of self was a daunting task given the overwhelming negative view projected onto them from the dominant Jim Crow social order. John Hope "engendered" in other black people a new awareness of self, an ability to dissociate themselves from this negative viewpoint, as reflected by his own life.

Hope's philanthropy extended beyond being the chief financial officer or fundraiser for a college or university. He gave of his personal resources and of himself, a true example of black philanthropy that hardly gets much recognition. Hope "donated more money than he could actually afford to [black] organizations, institutions, and charities that he believed were worthy of his support." An example of this type of giving occurred during the endowment campaign at Morehouse. Hope and his two sons donated $2,000 that created the Lugenia Francis Fund to honor his wife and to contribute to Morehouse.[9]

Hope also managed to give of himself regardless of the position he held. He dedicated his life converting situations into vehicles for the betterment of other blacks. Hope's qualities "made

him a leader on the campus, and in academic circles generally thrust him into positions of local, national, and international leadership in the field of human relations and race relations."[10] During World War I, Hope served under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). In this role, he made several trips to Europe to work with black soldiers to ensure their fair treatment. When the YMCA opened their black branch in Atlanta, Hope taught regularly in the night school.

When black soldiers returned from World War I, many Atlantans, including Hope, foresaw an increase in racial animosity. After much deliberation, a solution to defuse the racial tension was arrived at when Will W. Alexander, a white southerner and former Methodist minister, organized the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) in 1919, which consisted mostly of conservative whites and a few blacks. Although the CIC members questioned Hope's demeanor and friendship with W. E. B. Du Bois, he became a member "after the commission enacted the fulfillment of a promise to commit use of some of the funds from a bond issue for the construction of a public high school for Negroes."[11] The city of Atlanta had "floated a bond referendum to expand and upgrade its public schools"; however, blacks suspected that white schools would reap all the benefit. Hope was the chief spokesperson for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) committee that "had helped organize black Atlantans to defeat the referendum." Hope later became the first black to serve as chairman of the CIC, and became its president in 1932.[12]

Both Hope and his wife, Lugenia Burns Hope, were humanitarians. The area between Morehouse and Spelman was "a general haven for Atlanta's criminals." Lugenia Hope was the first to do social work in this area, as well as other areas in Atlanta; consequently, Hope, his wife, and others "helped organize what eventually became the Atlanta School of Social Work (1922)."[13]

Over time, scholars have both vilified and justified industrial philanthropists' motives and challenged the notion that more attention and discourse in philanthropy should focus on the recipient's perspective. I too was presented with this same challenge. As I was developing and structuring the concept for

this book, I was encouraged to consider adapting the material to address definitions of philanthropy that have arisen around issues regarding the relationship between philanthropists/donors and recipients. At first glance, it appeared, to some, that I was only considering philanthropists' perspectives and motives within my study because it examined their involvement in black higher education and their interaction with John Hope. However, in the end, my study analyzed how Hope and philanthropists discerned common interests; how his solicitation and use of philanthropic gifts allowed him to achieve his vision of higher education of blacks; and illustrated the balance of power from both perspectives. Despite this being the case, neither of these factors nor perspectives was the initial point of departure for this book. For me, it initially boiled down to two simple puzzling questions: Why did the three Atlanta institutions affiliate, and why has the story of the creation of the Atlanta University System never been told?

Because scrutiny of the philanthropists' motives relegates "the decisions of blacks to the background and margins of the story,"[14] and since historians generally omitted the story of the affiliation in discussions of black higher education, I wanted to find a different lens from which to view past events, black college leaders, and their interaction with philanthropists. I also wanted to analyze the circumstances of the past in more ways than the one-dimensional views previously portrayed. Therefore, as a starting point, I chose the approach of telling a historical account by focusing on a single event, not an individual or individuals. The single event is the affiliation of Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College that took place in 1929 and created the Atlanta University System.[15]

Focusing closely on a single event and using a cultural and historical account allowed me to emphasize information and individuals that have been traditionally lost within the broader accounts of higher education, black higher education, philanthropy, and black college leaders. Using this approach, *A Fateful Hour* tells the story of the affiliation of Atlanta University, Morehouse, College and Spelman College while demonstrating how philanthropists, John Hope, and other individuals pooled

their resources together to ensure higher education for blacks in the South.

A Fateful Hour also provides a different perspective from which to view philanthropic relationships that extend beyond the simple categories of benefactor and recipient, while preserving John Hope's legacy and the story of the creation of the Atlanta University System.

The following questions guided the research that I address in this book: Were philanthropists only interested in providing industrial education for blacks? Were college presidents, such as John Hope, pawns in the game of capitalism and industrialization, as practiced by philanthropists? Why did three higher education institutions for blacks form an affiliation when each was rich in its own history and merit?

In answering these questions, I was surprised to learn how instrumental John Hope was in shaping higher education for blacks and how he used his relationships with philanthropists to further his own agenda and vision. He not only upheld his position to the structure of the affiliated institutions by maintaining a liberal arts curricular focus, but also negotiated terms with philanthropists before the affiliation took place. After the affiliation, he drew up the blueprints for what the affiliation eventually evolved into, the Atlanta University Center.

Collecting the Data

Since I had moving pieces of a puzzle that intersected at different points, I gathered the pieces from various places; afterward, I had to figure out how they fit together. In order to understand all the pieces, my first step was to gain knowledge about the artifacts left behind, the habits of the players involved, and the three institutions that were eventually affiliated.[16] Because there was little to no information published regarding the first-hand accounts or the behind-the-scene negotiations of the affiliation, I relied heavily on primary sources from the historical records left by the philanthropists, members of the General Education Board (GEB), philanthropic organizations, and the presidents of the three respective institutions.

Knowing that John D. Rockefeller Sr. provided the funds to create and establish numerous foundations, particularly the GEB, and that he financially aided Spelman College in its early stages of establishment and became its largest benefactor, I conducted a large part of my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York. I applied and received a grant-in-aid that enabled me to spend a week researching the records of John D. Rockefeller Sr. and Jr., other members of the GEB, and John Hope. The behind-the-scenes correspondence helped me understand philanthropists' mind-set and motives in forming the affiliation and provided the majority of the missing pieces that allowed me to tell the affiliation's story.

Next, I reviewed information from the GEB's organizational history, minutes from meetings, and correspondence between various members. These documents highlighted the GEB's general interest in the development of a comprehensive system of education in the United States in general, and specifically the rationale for aiding black institutions of higher education. I also reviewed the records of and correspondence between significant GEB trustees and presidents, such as Wallace Buttrick, Wickliffe Rose, Frederick Gates, Edwin Embree, and Trevor Arnett. From this material, I learned of the business and personal relationship that existed between the philanthropists and John Hope, as well as Hope's important role in the affiliation. Additionally, I used personal narratives and publications by industrial philanthropists, such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller Sr.[17]

In order to gain more in-depth information about each of the three institutions involved in the affiliation, I conducted research at the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library, Archives and Special Collections Department; the Spelman College Library, Special Collections, Archives Department housed in the Women's Research and Resource Center; and the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Archives Department, in Atlanta, Georgia. Each collection contains material on the three institutions, the institutions' presidential papers, and the personal correspondence of important members of philanthropic organizations.