



HISTORY & GOVERNMENT

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Dr. George French, President

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My name is Carmen Walker. I am currently an Associate Professor of Government at Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland. It is only because of the Department of Political Science that I am here. This letter is kindly written in support of the effort to name the CAU Department of Political Science in honor of Dr. Mack H. Jones. His writings, teaching, and commitment to HBCUs has shaped my teaching and research career.

I remember sitting in the office of Dr. Jones as he informed me that I had been awarded a Ford Fellowship and admitted to the doctoral program. I had a sense of both excitement and fear. This Department challenged me; at times corrected me, and certainly affirmed my ability, right, and *most of all responsibility* to contribute my ideas efforts for change in the world. I did not want to be that ‘cog in the wheel of oppression.’ I felt that for the first time in my life, something was really expected of me. I would not be who I am and where I am today, were it not for my experience in the CAU Department of Political Science. Next to the birth of my daughter, CAU in general and more specifically, the Department is one of the best things to ever happen to me. The mentoring and support from Drs. William Boone, Hashim Gibrill, Marvin Haire, Robert Holmes, Dr. Jones, along with the late Michael Bailey and late Robert Fishman shaped the direction of my career, encouraged my research on black women, and cemented my commitment to HBCUs.

I did not fully understand Dr. Jones’ role in the founding of our Department’s graduate program until much later. I didn’t really know how fortunate I was to have taken classes with him. However, I am reminded whenever I meet others who admire him and his work, but have had never had a chance to meet him. I have learned more about Dr. Jones since graduating; and so much more about our Department during this campaign. During my time in school, I knew he had written articles that all of us devoured and debated in and out of class. I remember one year in particular, a few of us searched high and low for a copy of his essay entitled “White Custodians of the Black Experience.” This was a critique that people kept casually mentioning in class and conversations, but some of us could not get our hands on the article because the reserved copy had been permanently borrowed from library! It took a while to get a copy of that essay, but when we did it was like finding gold. I am so happy that he included it in his published collection of writings.

One essay written by Dr. Jones, which became one of my favorites, is “The Responsibility of Black Political Scientists to the Black Community.” It became my favorite because of the story

behind the essay. During class, Dr. Jones explained what led him to write that essay. It wasn't just a reflection on political scientists. Beginning with a story about his experience with social workers who were not doing enough to help black people, he maintained that black people in all occupations or positions had a responsibility to improve the conditions of black people. This would mean that sometimes *we* would have to take additional steps, be inconvenienced, sacrifice, or take a stand, but not callously turn away when we have the ability (no matter how large or small) to make a difference in someone's life. If we were not helping, according to Dr. Jones, we were a part of the problem. I had to connect myself to something larger than my immediate (though limited) circumstances. He forced us to take a sobering look at the aggregate socioeconomic condition of black people in the US and throughout the Diaspora. There was a bigger picture and we had to learn how to use science to create meaning and direction.

What is the black predicament? How can our condition be improved? Dr. Jones gave us the task of considering what our purpose and relevance would be to the black community and world; it was not for him to decide. However, there was no grey area in the matter. Ultimately, given the nature of American political science, I had to decide how I would use my voice and research to improve the world. Classes with Dr. Jones gave me wonderful headaches! His teaching and vocabulary pushed me to think, rethink, examine new ideas and reconsider old assumptions about political experiences, the nature of political science, and research. Dr. Jones would write on the board and sometimes say, 'Discipline is the sinew of struggle.' What did that mean? For me, this meant that I had to take my studies and work seriously. He expected us to dig deeper and not simply be passive consumers of easy ideas or phrases.

I found myself part of a group of students Dr. Jones would affectionately refer to as his 'runaways.' I still don't know what that meant, but I do know that as part of that group, during and since graduate school, he continues to make time to listen, question us, mentor, laugh, talk, share articles/readings, and reflect on his experiences with us. He has always made time for us and makes us feel special even when we have been away for a while. As a young black female, his stories and one essay in particular to his daughter Tayari inspired me and encouraged me during my moments of self-doubt. I know that he believes in me. Even before I had my first graduate teaching assignment, Dr. Jones gave me the opportunity to sit in on his US National Government class and teach a few sessions. I didn't know if I was ready or not. While he did ask, I knew this was an opportunity I could not say no to! Through that invaluable experience, I learned grading, classroom management, and how to work with students to encourage them to develop and use their voice.

Yes, I believe in the usefulness of science and I believe that every student must grapple with the question of what they consider to be their responsibility for improving the conditions in our world today. This is Dr. Jones' legacy.

Respectfully,

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Department of History and Government