



Waltham Library: 'A Year of Black History' series begins

By: [Kerry Feltner](#)

September 21, 2021

Black history in America is vastly complex, one of the reasons the Waltham Public Library has created programming to explore the breadth and depth of the Black experience in the U.S.

Instead of one month of discussion—Black History Month in February—the WPL’s series is called “A Year of Black History,” enabling a wider conversation to take place.

The program begins this month with a conversation with Bentley University’s president, Dr. E. LaBrent Chrite. [The series will be held virtually on YouTube](#) and will feature Black academics discussing a range of topics.

[Chrite’s talk is called: “A Year in Black History: The Important Role & History of HBCUs.”](#) It will be held virtually on Wednesday, Sept. 29 at 7 p.m.

He recently discussed the evolution of historically Black colleges and universities with the News Tribune.

What are your thoughts on the state of HBCUs today?

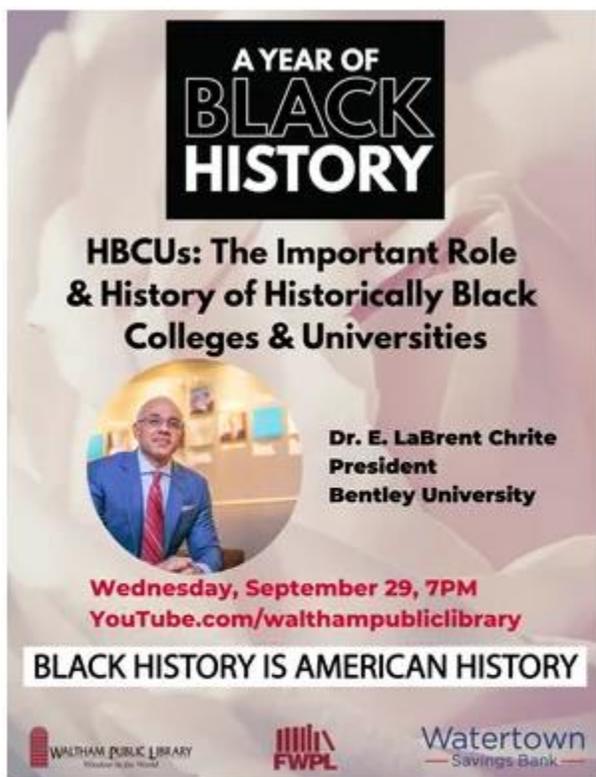
HBCUs writ large, remain in a rather precarious position. However, over the last 15 months or so, since George Floyd and the turbulence and racism of that time, there has been a bit of a renaissance for many HBCUs. Record levels of gifts and investments, high enrollments and much deserved attention have defined this period. However, most HBCUs, as a result of the operating models, still exist on the edge of uncertainty. Critically, they serve disproportionately poor students and this brings added financial burdens to the institutions.

What are some of the ways in which historically Black colleges and universities have evolved?

Many possess exceptionally high-quality academic programs, recruit great faculty and have evolved from their earlier missions of teacher and industrial education-based, though many still focus on this. The other major change is that virtually all corporate recruiting entities now realize that HBCUs must be a vital part of their talent acquisition portfolio.

What are some of the challenges HBCUs face?

Money, governance, deferred maintenance costs, student debt and the costs associated with educating a population that is nearly 90% PELL eligible remain some of the most critical challenges. Also, the operating model is simply not sustainable for HBCUs.



Bentley University President Dr. E. LaBrent Chrite will host the first talks of the series: "A Year of Black History." His talk is titled, "HBCUs: The Important Role & History of Historically Black Colleges & Universities." [Provided By The Waltham Public Library]

As the leader of Bentley University, what do you think is important for any leader of a college or university to keep in mind?

First, education leaders must acknowledge the profound and consequential challenges and disruptions that are dramatically impacting higher education. Second, they must realize the legacy operating structures, governance protocols, revenue models and orthodox institutional

hierarchies – that have defined higher education for hundreds of years – will not enable institutions to meet the demands of the day. A reimagination of higher education in the context of changing demographics, the evolution of the global marketplace, the democratization of information and the distribution of learning platforms requires us to change the way we do things. This is easier said than done but this is the challenge – and opportunity – before us.

What is one thing the wider Waltham community should know about HBCUs? What would you want attendees to take away from your talk about the importance of HBCUs?

That HBCUs are intimately linked to the history of Black people in this country and as such, they are inextricably linked with the history of America. Also, they represent one of the many options in America for students seeking higher education opportunities. America is uniquely fortunate in the world in that we possess a rich array of higher education options. Community colleges, state flagships, regional publics and privates, as well as elite institutions, offer something for everyone. HBCUs are a vital part of that portfolio, created as the only option for black folks. Now, however, they are part of the rich tapestry that is the American higher education system.