



Why Talladega band belongs at Donald Trump's inauguration

By William R. Harvey

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Story highlights

- Band from William Harvey's alma mater, Talladega College, to perform at inauguration. People shouldn't be upset, he says
- Harvey: It's right to celebrate peaceful transition of power; parade a chance to spotlight historically black colleges



***Editor's Note:** William R. Harvey is the president of Hampton University and Chairman of President Barack Obama's Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He is the author of the book [Principles of Leadership](#). The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.*

(CNN) The marching band of my alma mater, Talladega College, the oldest historically black college in Alabama, [accepted an invitation to participate in Donald Trump's inaugural parade](#). Many people, including some Talladega alumni, are upset.

They shouldn't be. It is an honor to participate in the inauguration of any president of the United States. Talladega and its band will be celebrating the peaceful transition of power, a hallmark of America's democracy.

Some may believe that performing in the parade is tantamount to endorsing a candidate. It's not. The Talladega band is simply performing in a historical event that will have an international audience and provide a unique opportunity to showcase its talent.

This will be a wonderful learning experience for the student musician. It will be a moment for them to understand the importance of supporting the leader of the free world, despite one's political viewpoint. The chief reason-for-being of any college and university should be to promote learning, not to enhance a political agenda.

The band's decision should also be celebrated beyond the Talladega community. For those who attend the inauguration or simply watch on television, this is a unique learning opportunity to become familiar with America's historically black colleges and universities or HBCUs, and an opportunity for those who already know about HBCUs to be proud.

Just like majority institutions, HBCUs are not a monolith. Some are very good, some are not so good, and others are somewhere in the middle. Allow me to share a few examples. In 2011, Xavier University was the top producer of African-American students who earned medical degrees. For six consecutive years, North Carolina A&T University has been the top producer of African-American engineers.

My own institution, Hampton University, where I have served as president for nearly 40 years, is one of the best modest-sized universities, black or white, in the country. Not only is Hampton a top producer of Ph.D.s awarded to African-Americans in physics, we are also the only HBCU to ever have 100% responsibility to NASA for one of their space missions. In addition, Hampton scientists are principal investigators for experiments on two other satellite missions in orbit and another to be launched in the coming weeks. All these satellites are gathering information on weather patterns and environmental conditions.

We are also home to the Hampton University Proton Therapy Institute, where prostate, breast, lung, ocular, spine, head, neck, brain, gastrointestinal, and pediatric cancers are treated. Each day our center is easing human misery and saving lives.

It is easy to see how Talladega's participation in the inauguration parade will help draw deserved attention to the vast contributions HBCUs make to advanced education in America. And Talladega should be free to do so with pride.

Throughout our nation's history, we have had presidents who many did not feel were right for the job. In many instances, those same presidents did much to help individuals and groups who did not support them.

I can personally attest to the fact that many African-Americans did not support President Richard M. Nixon, but I also personally remember the presidents of Talladega College, Fisk University, Clark College, (now Clark Atlanta University) and Wilberforce University coming from a private meeting with President Nixon and reporting that he had vowed his support to work with allies in the Congress to increase the Title III appropriations to HBCUs. Some of those HBCU's currently receive more than \$5 million annually.

America is a proud and diverse democracy. There will always be differences of opinion as to who should lead our country and how they should lead it. However, these differences should not prevent us from participating in our nation's democratic processes, nor should they preclude the Talladega band students from performing at the inauguration of President Trump.