

JOHNETTA COLE

When Johnnetta Cole is asked about the value of a liberal arts education, she recalls her own experience as an undergraduate at Oberlin College. She entered Oberlin as a pre-med student. Left to her own inclinations, she recalls, she would have taken nothing but science courses at Oberlin. But against her will, she found herself in a course in which a white professor played Jamaican cult music, jumped up and down, hyperventilated, and talked about African retentions in the New World. "This is what anthropologists try to understand," he explained. From that moment afterward, she recalls, Johnnetta Cole had to be an anthropologist.

After her graduation from Oberlin, she earned her master's and doctoral degrees in anthropology at Northwestern University, working with Melville J. Herskovits. For two years, she worked on a Northwestern University economic survey project in Liberia, and subsequently moved to Washington State University, where she taught anthropology and became the university's first Director of Black Studies. In 1970, she won the university's Outstanding Faculty Member award.

In the same year, Dr. Cole moved to the University of Massachusetts, where, over the next 13 years, she served in a variety of academic and administrative positions and also edited her major work, *Anthropology for the Eighties*. This book quickly became one of the most widely-used textbooks in its field. In 1983, Dr. Cole became Professor of Anthropology at Hunter College and subsequently directed the College's Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program. At the same time, during the mid-'80s, she served as a Visiting Professor at Williams College and Oberlin College. Her second major edited volume, *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind*, was published in 1986, shortly before she accepted the presidency of Spelman College.

When she became president of Spelman in 1987, Dr. Cole became the first African American woman to head this historically Black college for women. During her tenure, the College has created an International Affairs Center, launched a mentorship program coordinated with Atlanta's business community, started a Corporate Women's Roundtable, and expanded its student volunteer outreach program.

It has been written of Johnnetta Cole that while she is highly purposeful, proficient, and serious, she is also a thoroughly warm and unpretentious *sister*—in both the black and feminist senses of the term. It is a sign of the respect and affection she inspires that at Spelman she is often referred to as "Sister President." In deepest admiration and appreciation for her work and her care for others, it is our privilege to award an honorary doctorate to Dr. Johnnetta Cole.