Black Higher Education
Subject of Xavier Talk

By JOYCE M. DAVIS

"There is still a deep-seated doubt in the minds of whites of the humanity of blacks," said Lerone Bennett, senior editor of Ebony magazine, speaking to the fourth annual convocation of Ministries to Blacks in Higher Education (MBHE).

Bennett, who is also the author of "The Challenge of Blackness," spoke to a group of approximately 300 ministers and pastors from across the United States at the MBHE convocation banquet held at Xavier University.

Speaking on "The Church's Participation in Black Higher Education," Bennett explained that the black ministry must speak the truth to white Americans and "defend the role of the black institutions." Integration does not mean the death of black institutions, Bennett insisted, criticizing those persons who expect blacks to abandon their institutions in favor of white ones.

"I see a movement in this country to replace black institutions or to destroy them," he said Thursday night, but he added that he was against the merging of black colleges with state institutions that he knew about.

Southern University in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Bennett said, are examples of black institutions that should not be subjected to a merger with the predominantly white state institutions.

The idea of merger revolves around the idea that black institutions are necessarily inferior to white ones, according to Bennett, which is an idea that the black ministry must work to eliminate.

Commending the black institutions of higher learning, Bennett said, "They took students that nobody else wanted and made them into doctors, teachers and lawyers."

"These schools took maimed, tortured minds and molded them into greatness," he said and because of their past achievements, they "cannot and should not die."

"From these schools came the Martin Luther Kings and the Thurgood Marshalls," he said, "and it was in these schools that blacks learned for the first time that they were human beings."

"They have earned their right to existence," he said.

Bennett said he felt "black students and black scholars are obliged to support black institutions of learning by enrolling in them."

The first priority of a black student should be a black college, he said, but he added that he does not condemn a black student for enrolling in a predominantly white institution.

But the enrollment of blacks in all colleges should be increased, he said, emphasizing that one important duty of the black ministry is to get black youth "off the streets and into colleges."

To do this, Bennett explained that the black ministry must combat the "despair" that exists in the black community.

He said that the black ministry must let them know that "we're going to win."

"If slavery didn't destroy us," he said, "then the new white American apartheid isn't going to."

"If the Klan didn't elimine us, then the hardhats won't eliminate us," he said, "and if Jefferson Davis didn't do us in, then Richard Milhous Nixon will not do us in."