

Johnnetta Cole

January 1996 Calendar

Dr. Johnnetta Cole made history in 1987 by becoming the first African American woman to serve as president of Spellman College. A role model to many, she calls her mother, Mary Frances Lewis Betsch, and her grandfather, A.L. Lewis, her primary sources of inspiration. However, while at Spellman College, she was also moved by the courage and tenacity of a young freshman student- Kristi Merriweather.

“I was struck by the aura of enthusiasm she had,” Cole said of the hearing-impaired woman who maintained a 4.0 average and was named 1991-92 Miss Black Deaf America. She was, to Cole, a genuine “shero.”

Many have called Cole the same. She is the only individual to have served as the president of both Bennett College for Women and Spelman College, two historically black colleges for women. She also is professor emerita of Emory University. From 2004 to 2006, she was the first person of color to serve as the chair of the board of United Way of America.

Under Cole’s leadership, Spellman College became the first historically black college or university to receive a No.1 rating by U.S. News and World Report magazine.



Much of Cole’s work in the interest of equality and social justice is now centered on her role as the chair of the board of the Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity and Inclusion Institute, founded at Bennett College for Women.