

### Christopher Cathcart

#### Preserving the Art of Giving Back

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Christopher Cathcart still gets excited remembering his first real protest. Marching down Seventh Street with classmates to join Stevie Wonder, Coretta Scott King and the Rev. Jesse Jackson at the Capitol, the Plainfield, N.J., freshman was front and center in the fight to make Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a national holiday. Now 25 years later, Cathcart's involvement in social issues continues, which he directly credits to his days at Howard University.



"D.C. is a great town to be in for college," he said. "You can study critically the various issues affecting society. Students are afforded the luxury to analyze the world they live in, challenge injustices and right wrongs without having to worry about a family or paying bills. And hopefully that socially active mindset carries over to life after graduation."

While a student at Howard, Cathcart became involved in student government under Howard Newell, president of the Howard University Student Association (HUSA). When *The Hilltop's* editor was dismissed by the administration for articles she wrote, Newell led a protest to have the campus newspaper leader reinstated, called for the resignation of university President James E. Cheek and took over the Administration Building.

Learning from Newell, Cathcart ran for HUSA president in 1984 with his good friend Manotti Jenkins and won. One of their biggest accomplishments was a year-long anti-apartheid campaign. They not only protested on campus, at the [South African Embassy](#) and around the city, but also hosted forums to ensure students were educated on the cause. Though Cathcart shed a lot of light on the issue by spearheading the anti-apartheid movement on campus, his most prized contribution to the university was the campaign to require that all students take a class on African-American history.

"Of all the things I am proud of from my time here, that's it," said Cathcart, who graduated from the School of Communications in 1986. "I remember going door to door with Manotti to get signatures for our petition. We didn't believe students should come through such a historical place like this and not have at least one class on

Cathcart's vision is now a reality for current students as classes quickly fill each semester. However, the philanthropic entrepreneur he is today and the politically active student Cathcart was when he graduated is a far stretch from the high school football player seeking to enter Howard. Back then, his decision to come to Howard had a lot to do with the abundance of attractive women he saw when visiting the campus.

Once here, he soon answered the call to student activism and came face to face with the reality that being involved isn't a priority shared by all. After attending packed parties on the Yard and various social events around campus that were filled to capacity, Cathcart saw a flyer for a Malcolm X movie and thought students would attend the screening with the same zest. Five students showed up.

"That's when I realized I would have to seek out that rich tradition this university is known for and not just take for granted being on the campus was enough," he said. "Howard is known for producing leaders, the world's movers and shakers. As students here you have the responsibility to address the social issues, not just Howard's."

Student activism in the District during Cathcart's time was a joint effort among universities as they all shared the struggles of Ronald Reagan's presidency. He remembers working with University of the District of Columbia, the State University of New York, Morgan State University and Morehouse College among others.

Cathcart has continued his dedication to social issues throughout his career in public relations, which has included positions at Turner Broadcasting Systems Inc., Warner Brothers Television and Motown Records. Along with operating his own company, the [OneDiaspora Group](#), he is still heavily involved in volunteering, ranging from the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles to R.I.S.E. (Reaching Inside for Self Esteem), a youth assistance program in the District. Not only is he giving back, his first book, ["The Lost Art of Giving Back."](#)

breaks down how others can find the time as well.

King's birthday is a national holiday and students at Howard must take African-American history classes, showing that Christopher Cathcart's activism as a student continues to make an impact today.