

BARRIERS FACED BY AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

It is a commonly held assumption that education, and especially higher education, is the recognized corridor through which America's minorities, including African-Americans, move from rejection, deprivation, and isolation to acceptance, economic efficiency, and inclusion. It is probably the only way to achieve social and economic equality in our society. Barton has commented that "it appears that the attainment of higher education will continue to be one of the most important requirements for occupational and economic success" (Barton, 2003, p. 1). African-Americans who have graduated from college have expressed that as a result of their college experience they have developed connectedness in society and that their participation in higher education is a source of healing, satisfaction, and personal growth which influences them to see themselves as contributing members of society (Boylan, 1994, p. 12).

In the 2000 Census, African Americans represented 15% of the population of the United States, being the largest minority group in the country. Over the years, the number of African-American college students has increased, but these apparent successes hid the basic situation that compared to their percentage in the population of the country, they still lag behind whites at every level of the educational ladder.

In 2001, only 77% of African Americans ages 18 to 24 completed high school, while 80% of white students completed it. Although a 3% gap may not seem much, it means that every year, about a quarter of a million African-Americans students do not complete their high school education, although they could graduate if they had the same completion rates as whites.

Since 1999, the college participation rate for African American students has remained unchanged at 39.4%, while the whites' college participation rates remain at 43.9% (Carter & Wilson, 2003, p. 9). Once again, the gap difference of 4.5% between whites and African-Americans means that, every year, about 80,000 African-American students who completed high school do not enroll college, who would have enrolled had African-Americans had the same college participation rates as whites.

The graduation rates for African-Americans also remain below the corresponding rates for whites (American Council on Education, 2002, p. 14). Throughout the 1990s, the national college dropout rate for African-Americans was from 20 to 25% higher than that for whites. Among those who finish college, the grade point average of African-American students is two thirds of a grade below that of whites (Steele, 2001, p. 6). In 2000, only 1700 African Americans earned a doctorate degree, of which 25 were earned at historically black colleges and universities (American Council on Education, 2002, p. 36).

African-Americans do not complete high school, enroll in college, or graduate from college, at the same rates as whites, although, at least in theory, the same educational opportunities are available to all.

It is impossible to describe a "typical" student, because each student is unique and it is impossible to average the statistics of all the variables to fabricate a hypothetical character that we could call typical. However, Yarrow, Campbell & Yarrow have ventured to say that the typical African-American college student is a low-income woman in her mid-twenties with a child. She works full time and attends a community college on a part-time basis. She receives some grant assistance and does not take out student loans. Given the attendance pattern and understandable focus on work and family, she is unlikely to complete a degree (Yarrow,

standable focus on work and family, she is unlikely to complete a degree (Yarrow, Campbell & Yarrow, 1993, p. 817).

Of course, many African-American college students are very different from this woman; they are of traditional college age and attend four-year institutions from which they graduate, often with substantial loan debt (Yarrow, Campbell & Yarrow, 1993, p. 817). However, because these are the students on whom educators and the public focus most often, it is instructive to keep in mind a second model: the low-income, older, working mother attending a community college part-time.

In general, I will suggest that there are three main barriers that present great difficulties and hinder the success of African-American college students:

- The barrier of finances.
- The barrier of institutional stereotyping, and
- The barrier of social prejudice.

In this essay, I will review, summarize, and compare several studies about the financial, academic, social difficulties that African-American college students have had in college, from admission to graduation, and some strategies they have used to overcome the barriers and obstacles they have faced. I will use government reports, journal articles, internet-generated reports, and even fictional works (cultural narrative) to explore these difficulties and problems; review the governmental and organizational resources currently in place at the undergraduate college level, and assess how successful these approaches have been; and lastly, propose some recommendations for the problems identified.

In general, I found that African-American college students face great problems in the financial, academic and social areas, and that those barriers hinder their possibilities of success in

American colleges and universities, especially in predominantly white institutions. While most American institutions of higher education publicly advocate support of African-American college students, and some progress has been made in the recruitment and retention of the members of this minority group, still much needs to be done to provide African-American students with the same access and opportunities as their white counterparts.

The barrier of finances

Money is one of the biggest hurdles for prospective college students – particularly African American and other minority students whose families, on average, have lower incomes and less wealth than whites. Meanwhile, increases in tuition and fees are now outpacing inflation according to the College Board (1999), putting the average tuition at private university at over \$ 16,000 per year. At public universities, the average is about \$ 4,500. Room and board brings the total even higher (Williams, 2001a, p. 46).

Eighty eight percent of African American students require financial aid (Cappanari, 2002, p. 2). This is not a surprise, because three recent surveys show that more than half of the African-American college students come from families with annual incomes of less than \$ 6,000.00 (King, 2002, p. 20). This also means that many African-American students will not complete their degrees for economic reasons. Many African-American students in two-year colleges will not go on to become four-year college graduates, and many of the students in four-year colleges will also become casualties due to financial problems.

African-American college students have the highest proportion of females of any racial or ethnic group; almost two-thirds of African-American college students are women. Also, about half are age 24 or older, and most (62 percent) are considered independent for financial aid purposes. About two-thirds of independent African-American college students have depend-

ents, making this the largest subgroup. In addition, almost two-thirds of these students are single parents, the largest proportion of any racial or ethnic group (King, 2002, p. 21). This means that a substantial group of African-American students start college with the added burden of being single-parents with dependents, responsibilities which may detract from the goals of achieving a college education.

More than half (52%) of dependent African-American college students come from families with an annual income of less than \$ 6,000, what means that more than half of the African American college students are very poor. More than one-quarter (28 percent) come from families with income of less than \$ 15,000. Only less than one-fifth (about 17 percent) has income of \$ 30,000 or more (King, 2002, p. 21).

More than one-third (36 percent) of African-American college students are not expected to make any financial contribution to their educational costs. That is, their families' income and assets are so limited that the government does not expect them to be able to pay anything for post-secondary education. About one-quarter are expected to contribute less than \$ 2,500 annually. Only 10 percent are expected to contribute \$ 12,500 or more each year to pay for post-secondary education, while 80% of whites are expected to contribute the same amount, or more, each year for post-secondary education (King, 2002, p. 22).

African-American students are unique in that even among those that attend community colleges, more than half receive grant assistance. Three out of five African-American students receive grant assistance in average amounts of \$ 2,500 (King, 2002, p. 20). This is due to the fact that independent African-American students with dependents account for 50 percent of the African-American student population at community colleges. African-American independent students with dependents are more likely to be single parents, and to have a lower income pro-

file than any other group, and thus, are far more likely to receive grant assistance than any other group of students with this dependency status (Doss & Mendoza, 1996, p. 77).

Given that African-American students are likely to attend low-cost institutions, to receive grants, and to enroll on a part-time or part-year basis, it is not surprising that their cost of education is low. More than half (53 percent) of African-American students have a cost of education less than \$ 5,000 per year. Only seven percent face an annual cost of \$ 12,500 or more (King, 2002, p. 23).

For most African-American students (88 percent), student loans and/or earnings from employment during the academic year help pay college bills. One-third of African-American students take out student loans each year; 80 percent work during the academic year (King, 2002, p. 21). Work is a very important factor in the life of most African-American students. In fact, almost half of employed African-American students (43 percent) identify themselves as primarily employees who are also taking classes, as opposed to students who are working to meet college expenses (King, 2002, p. 23).

Almost 40 percent of African-American students work full time (more than 35 hours per week), and another 30 percent work between 16 and 35 hours per week. Only 11 percent work the recommended 15 hours or less per week, compared to 12% of American Indians, 13% of Whites, and 22% of Asian Americans (King, 2002, p. 23).

African-American students are more likely than students from any other racial or ethnic group to take up student loans, regardless of our 'typical' student profile. One-third of African-American students borrow an average of \$ 3,800 in a given year (Williams, 2001a, p. 45). Borrowing patterns vary dramatically according to the type of institution students attend. More than half of African-American students attending public or private four-year colleges take out

student loans, compared to only 11 percent of those attending community colleges. Consequently, among African-American students who complete a bachelor's degree, the share of students with debt is quite high. Almost eight out of ten African-Americans who earn a bachelor's degree borrow, and the average amount of student loan debt they accrue is about \$ 13,000 (King, 2002, p. 21). Although most African American community college students do not borrow, just under half (44 percent) of those who complete an associate degree graduate with some student loan debt. The average amount these students borrow is about \$ 6,500 (King, 2002, p. 23), although the average conceals great disparities. Debt manageability is a big problem for many African-American graduates (Cappannari, 2002, p. 2).

While one-quarter of African-American college students work and borrow in a given year, most students choose between these two approaches to pay the college bills. More than half of African-American students work and do not borrow, and almost all of these students work more than a part-time schedule. Conversely, only eight percent of African-American students borrow but do not work (King, 20002, p. 23-24). Despite their high borrowing rate, work is the means most African-Americans prefer for meeting college bills.

The financial burden is particularly heavy on students who do not complete college because they do not reap the benefits of higher paying jobs that go to college graduates (Williams, 2001b, p. 23).

The barrier of institutional stereotyping

More than half of the African-American college students fail to complete their degree work for reasons that have little to do with innate ability or environmental conditioning, compared to about 70 percent of whites, and many of those African-American students who do earn a degree take longer than the traditional four years (Forte, 2002, p. 35). The problem is that they are un-

dervalued, in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes not (Steele, 1992, p. 24). About 70 percent of all African-American students who enroll in four-year colleges drop out at some point, as compared with 45 percent of whites (Steele, 1992, p. 25). Williams (2001) claims that African-American and Hispanics are more likely to attend low-performing high schools that do not do enough to prepare them for the rigors of college work (47).

The fact most often cited in support of the underpreparation explanation is the lower scholastic achievement test (SAT) scores of African-American students, which sometimes average 200 points below those of other students on the same campus (Steele, 1992, p. 23; Forte, 2002, p. 34; Williams, 2001a, p. 47). Nationally, from 1996 to 2002, African-American students have been about 100 points lower than whites in verbal scores, and another 100 points lower in mathematical scores, with very small yearly variations (Average SAT Scores 1996-2002, 2002, p. 1). The test score gap has become shorthand for African-American students' achievement problems.

However, Steele (1999) warns that the gap must be analyzed with caution. He mentions that African-American students have better skills than the gaps suggest. He explains that most of the gap exists because the proportion of African-Americans with very high SAT scores is smaller than the corresponding proportions of whites and Asians; and that when each group's scores are averaged the African-American average is lower than the white and Asian averages.

Why a smaller proportion of African-Americans have very high scores is, of course, a complex question with multiple answers, involving, among other things, the effects of race on educational access and experience as well as other variables. Still, African-American's test-score deficits are taken as a sign of underpreparation, although virtually all African-American students on a given campus have tested skills within the same range as the tested skills of other

dents on a given campus have tested skills within the same range as the tested skills of other students on the campus (Steele, 1999, p. 24). Steele's concludes that:

“the skills and preparation measured by these tests also turn out not to be good determinants of college success. As the makers of the SAT themselves tell us, although this test is among the best of its kind, it measures only about 18 percent of the skills that influence first-year grades, and even less of what influences subsequent grades, graduation rates, and professional success” (Steele, 1999, p. 24).

At the essence of the problem, of course, is whether the SAT are biased against minority populations, including African-Americans because the subject matter they test may be outside of the experience of many minority students or for other reasons. This is a complex issue about which no definitive answer has been reached, with academic advocates on both side of the issue. The tests serve a useful purpose in the admission process of most universities, especially all the selective universities, and its continuity is almost guaranteed not only because there is no other tool available that takes into consideration the specific cultural upbringings of minority students, but also because universities have become accustomed to use it in their admission process and are unlikely to change unless forced by law. In addition, without agreement by academics about whether the tests are biased or not, it does not seem realistic at the present time to even consider the alternative of judicial intervention.

One important reason why the American educational system has failed to close the achievement gap between white students and African-American and other minority students is that its goal, more often than not, has been simply to raise the standardized test scores. However, students who are perceived to be culturally and cognitively deficient, as a result of their cultural differences, are given less-challenging educational opportunities and support for their educational efforts. What the college professors believe and think that they know about their students, the ways in which they interpret student behavior or respond to the students' use of

native languages can affect significantly the quality of their interactions with students during the learning process, and the quality of their relationships with colleagues and members of the college community (Steele, 1992, p. 25; Steele, 1999, p. 24; Forte 2002, p. 34; Williams, 2001a, p. 47).

Astin (1992) correctly affirmed that the mission of the college is not simply to maximize the output of distinguished alumni by maximizing its input of talented students. Colleges and universities exist to change the student, to contribute to his or her personal development, to make a difference in the life of the student. The defenders of the merit system in admissions argue that applying different admissions standards to different races is basically unfair and discriminatory. While this is obviously true, for many years colleges and universities have been willing to subordinate merit to other criteria in admissions. Some colleges reduce their merit standards for athletes, the children of alumni, and even use varying merit standards for different regions, or set higher standards for out-of-state applicants to public institutions (Astin, 1992, p.

~~A~~ Academic and Social Integration

Tinto's (1987) Student Integration model posits two important factors in student's persistence and success in college: academic integration and social integration. Academic integration has been defined as the development of a strong affiliation with the college academic environment both in the classroom and outside of class. It includes interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers, but of an academic nature. Social integration has been defined as the development of a strong affiliation with the college social environment both in the classroom and outside of class. It includes interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers, but of a social nature, such as peer group interactions, informal contact with faculty, or involvement in organizations (Tinto, 1987, p. 19). Ellis (2001) thinks that social integration is not as important as aca-

ademic integration (Ellis, 2002, p. 64). Tinto's student integration model continues to be widely used in educational research.

The academic and social experiences of African-American students in higher education have received increased research attention. An important part of this scholarly work examines African-American student life at predominantly white institutions and focuses mainly on the perceptions of what Davis calls the racial climate on campus (Davis, 2002, p. 62; Colon, 1991, p. 121; Sedlacek, 1987, p. 485; Smedly, Myers & Harrell, 1993. p. 436; Smith, 1991, p. 305).

Academic Integration

Half of African-American college students attend two-year community colleges compared to only 35% of the white college students. Another 12 percent of African-American college students attend public or private vocational institutions and proprietary schools. Only 40 percent of the African-American students attend private or public four-year colleges and universities compared to 65% of the white college students. Among those African-American college students who do choose four-year institutions, two out of five choose private institutions (King, 2002, p. 22). Less than one-third of African-American students (31 percent) attend on a full-time/full-academic year basis, while the percentage of whites is 63%, more than double the percentage for African-Americans. More than half of the African-American students attend college part time, either for a full or part year, and the remainder attends full time, but only for part of the year (King, 2002, p. 22; American Council on Education, 2003, p. 55).

Hedegard (1992) mentioned that the experience of racism is manifested in a variety of classroom experience: (a) being prejudged as inferior or inadequately prepared for academic work; (b) being constantly criticized for forms and style of speech and writing; (c) being singled out for criticism, such as being constantly called upon by an instructor who knows the stu-

dent will be unprepared; (d) feeling that papers or exams are downgraded because of irrelevant reasons, and (e) feeling classroom pressures to become intellectual, or middle-class white (Hedegard, 1992, p. 48).

Cherry (1993) mentions that typically African-American students in white colleges have problems working in integrated groups. He mentions that for most African-American students, the worst assignments are group projects in which the group members are supposedly selected at random. Usually what happens is that the African-American students are split up among different groups. An African-American student talks about her experiences: “You can almost depend on getting frozen out of those types of groups. Sometimes they will have meetings and not contact you. Sometimes they may ignore what you have to say. They may assign you a menial task such as making sure all group members have a copy of the final report. Basically, many African-American students get the feeling that this kind of group thinks that African-American students have nothing to contribute” (Cherry, 1993, p. 132).

Several studies completed at a variety of predominantly white colleges and universities show that most African-Americans (and a majority of whites) find college contributing positively to their personal goals and ambitions, and feel closer to the lives they want eventually to lead than before entering college (Loo & Rolison, 1986, p. 76-77). Hedegard factor analyzed specially-admitted African-American student questionnaire responses dealing with the experienced seriousness of 39 different potential problems of college students. He concluded that the academic area was perhaps the most stressful for more than half of the sample, and that most students, after having experienced serious academic problems, tended to view their problems more as the product of poor high school preparation and stiff competition than as the result of their lacking the ability needed for college work. These same African-American students, how-

ever, had a great reluctance to seek remedial help at the university (Hedegard, 1992, p. 51-54). A more recent study still found that African-American college students who have experienced serious academic problems still tend to view their problems more as the product of poor high school preparation and stiff competition than the result of their lacking the ability needed for college work. However, the newer generation of African-American students is more likely to seek remedial help at the university (Walker & Satterwhite, 2002, p. 114-115).

A recent study by William Bowen and Derek Bok reported in their book *The Shape of the River*, brings some happy news: despite the fact that still some African-American students have academic problems while attending colleges, African-American students who attend the most selective schools in the country go on to do just as well in postgraduate programs and professional attainment as other students from those schools. The authors used sophisticated statistical analysis to demonstrate that affirmative action programs have succeeded in their goal of providing African-Americans with educational opportunities (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 198). Still, the underperformance (overall) of African-American undergraduates compared to whites is an unsettling problem, one that may alter or hamper career development, especially among African-Americans not attending the most selective schools (Steele, 1999, p. 22).

Some authors are so radical that they go so far as to recommend the use of illegal means to achieve academic performance. Cherry, a radical educator and analyst of African-American culture, for example, recommends African American college students to cheat in their exams in order to succeed and “beat the system”. He advises the students in this manner: “All students, if they are serious about passing exams, should prepare to cheat on an exam. Preparing to cheat is one of the best ways to improve the probability of exam success” (Cherry, 1993, p. 143). He then follows his advice with some justifications:

“Cheating is far more widespread than most non-students believe; there are a number of preferred methods of cheating on tests, but only four overlapping general categories. You can cheat: (a) before the test (by stealing it); (b) during the test; (c) by yourself; (d) with someone else. I believe most students who cheat do it by themselves during the test, for a number of reasons: One, you don’t have to try anybody. Two, you don’t have to depend on anybody else for the correct answers. Three, it’s much less risky than breaking into an instructor’s office or trying to bribe a secretary into giving you a copy. Four, it’s harder to detect and prove if you are skillful enough” (Cherry, 1993, p. 143).

I think that what Cherry has in mind when he says that the cheater does not need to try anybody is that for cheating the student does not need a partner.

Kunjufu, a scholar that has been analyzing, studying, and writing about the performance of African-American students in higher education for some time, put part of the blame for the underperformance and underachievement on the African-Americans students themselves. He wrote that African-American students “are being destroyed not by white supremacy, but by their own bad habits” (Kunjufu, 1997, p. 61). He added that “many African American students wait until the last week of the class to cram. Some cram the night before the final exam. They attempt to digest 16 chapters and notes between noon and midnight” (p. 82). Kunjufu concluded that it seems that some African-American students “are majoring in sex, and minoring in drugs under the auspices of being college students”, and that “something must be wrong when African American students prefer the student union, gymnasium, cafeteria, or kicking it with friends in the dormitory more than the classroom” (p. 79). This statement, of course, may apply to many college students, not only African-Americans. However, the same author blatantly rejects the option of the predominantly white colleges and universities, because he considers these institutions detrimental to the African-American college students. He wrote that “non African schools are designed either to destroy African people or make them committed to

white values” (p. 144). For this radical author, the only alternative for African-Americans is to attend a predominantly black institution.

Black colleges

Until perhaps almost forty years ago when the Civil Rights legislation was passed in 1965, the United States had adopted a mono-cultural attitude, symbolized by the idea of the melting pot: that there was one dominant culture, and groups with different cultural backgrounds needed to assimilate themselves to that standard, to “the way we do things here”. However, this mono-cultural attitude has been eroded, especially in recent years, when groups from different cultures have demanded, and received, better treatment, which has usually caused bitter resentment in the dominant, hegemonic culture (Bonnycastle, 1998, p. 217). In the case of African-Americans, this has meant the creation of African-American studies departments at the colleges and universities, and, of course, the continuation of predominantly Black colleges and universities (Isaacs, 2002, p. 3). Some African-American authors have gone so far as to advocate that African-Americans attend exclusively predominantly Black colleges and universities.

However, black colleges are not monolithic. There is a wide array of experiences beyond the variance in population. There are schools like Hampton and Spellman that have endowments in the tens of millions of dollars, and there are other schools “that are struggling to buy enough toilet paper and produce enough hot water for the showers” (Kunjufu, 1997, p. 33). In general, it is possible “for an African-American student to attend a Negro college for approximately a third to a half the cost of attending a comparable white school” (Kunjufu 1997, p. 33).

However, inexpensive tuition, in many cases, may mean a low quality education. Astin, an African-American scholar that has studied the performance of African American students at predominantly black colleges and universities, mentions that the administration and faculty of

Howard University and other African American colleges are aware that the majority of their students are inadequately prepared for college work, but that they are generally unwilling to acknowledge this fact openly, because to do so would mean admitting the failure of African American educators (Astin, 1992, p. 43). This author believes that African American college administrators ignore the problem and hand black college graduates diplomas of less and less value, although one out of every two native-born African American students is still unable to meet even the lower academic requirements of Howard University's curriculum due to inadequate preparation for higher education (Astin, 1992, p. 44-46). This means that because of the barrier of institutional stereotyping African-American college students do not obtain all the educational and academic benefits of their white counterparts, regardless of the rhetoric that they have equal opportunities in higher education.

The influence of campus environments on the educational experience and outcomes of African-American students is a consistent thread in research on students in higher education (Allen, 1995, p. 29; Fleming, 1994, p. 116; Nettles, 1998, p. 23). Of particular importance has been the observed link between perception of campus racial climate and students' academic achievement. Hurtado (1992) argues that campus racial conflicts are connected to elements in the institutions' racial climate, which influence the relationship between African-American students and their white peers, faculty, and administration. Hurtado mentions that conceptions of campus climate that include race relations, whether considered to be a positive or a negative influence, are critical for understanding the educational experiences and subsequent development of African-American students (Hurtado, 1992, p. 568). Negative campus climate may be one of the reasons why only 15 percent of African-American students live on campus, although this statistic is for all colleges and universities, and I do not know the percentage for African-

American students attending only predominantly white colleges and universities. More than half (57 percent) live off campus, and just over one-quarter (28 percent) live with their parents or other relatives. King reasons that the high proportion of students living off campus is due, at least in part, to the fact that many are independent and have their own families (King, 2002, p. 22).

Many institutions are concerned about the possible negative effects of increased racial tolerance and perceived hostile environments on students at predominantly white campuses (Ferrell, 1994, p. 232; Green, 1989, p. 33). However, research on campus climate rarely includes a race relations dimension. When campus climate is conceived as including perception of race relations along with indicators of traditional institutional support, its importance for students' experiences becomes even more important, especially for African Americans. Several studies suggest that there are two salient nonacademic factors that influence African-American students' academic experience and performance at predominantly white institutions: the general institutional support, and the perceptions of racial climate and race relations (Allen, 1990, p. 30; Hughes, 1992, p. 540; Oliver, Smith & Wilson, 1994, p. 220-221).

There is, of course, another explanation for why African-American college students have not fared well on predominantly white campuses: that they are not prepared for the competition. This has become an assumption of those who oppose affirmative action in college admissions. Racial preference, the argument goes, brings African-American students onto campuses where they simply are not prepared to compete (Lewis, 1997, p. 176-177).

However, African-Americans have been admitted to college in larger numbers after the passage of the affirmative action laws. Affirmative action has made possible for many African-American high school graduates to be admitted to colleges and universities, but as several

states have moved in the direction to eliminate affirmative action, the number of African-Americans admitted to different colleges and programs has been reduced. In 1997, the legislators in the state of California passed Proposition 209, which abolished affirmative action, and this brought dramatic reduction in the admission of African-Americans to some colleges. In 1996, the University of California admitted 26 African Americans to their law school. However, in 1997, they only admitted one and he was from the 1996 class. The state of Texas was next, the same year. In 1996, the University of Texas enrolled 31 African American law students. In 1997, only three (Kunjufu, 1997, p. ix).

African Americans also have obtained increased educational opportunities since desegregation policies changed the demographics of most higher education institutions. However, only about three decades after these corrective reforms began, the nation is now witnessing a distressing ebb in the tide of educational opportunity and success for African Americans in the form of a decrease in the quality of their educational experience (Davis, 2002, p. 4). This decrease is occurring at a time when the move to desegregation has seen produced sharp increases in the number of African-American students at predominantly white institutions (American Council on Education, 2002, p. 18; Anderson, 1994, p. 73). The movement of African Americans into predominantly white institutions of higher learning has produced both optimism and some concern that negative race relations will affect the quality of students' experiences and educational outcomes (Allen, 1992, p. 415; Altbach & Lomotey, 1996, p. 89; Nettles, 1991, p. 18).

Although previous research indicates that some African-American students are doing well academically at predominantly white campuses, many of them exhibit a marked decrease in performance from their high school grades over and beyond what is generally expected for ad-

justment to college-level work (Allen, 1989, p. 146). Most African American students attending predominantly white campuses report that their relationships with faculty members and peers are negative, and that they avoid interaction with them inside and outside the classroom. Also, most African-American students in these universities “have reported that they have very limited participation in cross-racial activities and events, and many of them even report rarely attending African-American-sponsored events” (Fleming, 1994, p. 111).

Other findings suggest that, in general, students who do better academically are on better terms with faculty members and find the institution to be supportive of their educational needs (Ferguson, 1992, p. 510). These students appear to make a greater effort to interact with their instructors and peers of other racial and ethnic groups (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1996, p. 177). Allen (1995) suggests that there is a mutual attraction cycle between students and university faculty and administration. In essence, students who perceive a supportive campus climate are less likely to avoid informal contact with faculty and administrators than students who do not perceive a positive climate. Therefore, faculty and administrators respond more actively to students who foster informal contact with them, and this relationship affects academic performance, both directly and indirectly (Allen, 1995, p. 42-44).

The student-faculty relationship has long been noted as a significant predictor of academic achievement, together with other outcome variables such as educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, personal development, and persistence (Pascarella, 1990, p. 594; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 188; Tinto, 1987, p. 210; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1995, p. 408-409). Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1995) review of the literature on student-faculty contact and college outcomes suggest that the quality of the contact between students and faculty should be examined in greater detail in determining the academic outcomes of students. A student, for example, may have very little contact with the faculty, but such contact may be so positive (or negative) as to have a significant effect on the academic performance of the student. Previous findings also suggest that African American students’ perception of campus climate is linked to student-faculty relationships and, therefore, has an influence on achievement-related outcomes, such as college grades (Allen & Haniff, 1998, p. 215; Smith & Allen, 1994, p. 224). Steele wrote that

“the culprit is stigma, the endemic devaluation many blacks face in our society and in our schools. This status is its own condition of life, different from class, money or culture. It is capable, in the words of the late sociologist Erving Goffman, of “breaking the claim” that one’s human attributes have on people. I believe that this connection to school achievement among African-Americans has been vastly underappreciated” (Steele, 1992, p. 28).

Steele has suggested that the predominant reason for the failure of so many African American college students to achieve to their potential in school is an ongoing stigmatization in the classroom. This author argues that the subtle and pervasive messages with which African-American college students are bombarded: that they are intellectually inferior; that there is no place for them in the ranks of the educated and successful often causes them to refocus their energies outside of the college or university. While the recognition of such a pernicious and, for many, crippling problem can hardly be considered good news, the author argued that its identification as the root of poor college performance does “lead us to a heartening principle: if African-Americans are made less racially vulnerable in school, they can overcome even substantial obstacles” (Green, 1989, p. 85).

Slavin and Madden (2001) reporting about the *Success for All Studies*, claim that these studies suggest clearly that African-American students may be particularly responsive to improved quality of instruction, and that with a variety of educational interventions it may be possible to substantially reduce or eliminate the persistent underachievement (Slavin & Madden, 2001, p. 1). Sociological studies have often shown that the payoffs of educational attainment are greater for African-Americans than for other groups, although it is not entirely clear why African-Americans students would be particularly responsive to improvements in educational quality, but the phenomenon has been demonstrated often enough to be taken seriously by policy makers as well as social scientists.

The same authors commented that the gap in academic achievement between African-American students and their white peers is the most important of all educational problems (Allen & Hanif, 1998, p. 215; Green, 1989, p. 85; Slavin & Madden, 2001, p. 2). This gap, which appears early in elementary school, grows in absolute terms over the school years. African-American seventeen years old perform at the level of white thirteen year old (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997, p. 118). These differences translate directly into differences in high school graduation rates, college attendance and completion, and ultimately, the differences in income and socioeconomic status that underlie our most critical social problems. Since 1980, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), achievement for African-Americans virtually has stagnated, and therefore, the gap has remained unchanged. Clearly, African-Americans, on average, attend schools that are far less well funded than those attended by whites, their teachers are less highly qualified, and their families are more likely to suffer from the ills of poverty, which have direct bearing on the students' success first in school and later in college. If African-American and other minority students performed in school at the same level as whites, the broad social impact would be profound, almost certainly affecting the socioeconomic status of minority individuals, college admissions, and ultimately segregation, prejudice, and racial tension.

African Americans have had, and continue to have, more than their share of societal disadvantage: a history of slavery, segregation, and job ceilings; continued lack of economic opportunity; poor schools; and the related problems of broken families, drug-infested communities, and social isolation. Any of these factors –alone- in combination, or through accumulated effects, can undermine school achievement. Some analysts point also to the African-American culture, suggesting that, hampered by disadvantage, it does not sustain the values and expecta-

tions critical to education, or that it fosters learning orientations ill suited to school achievement, or that it even “opposes” mainstream achievement (Steele, 1992, p. 27-28). To provide a favorable environment for African-American college students to succeed in higher education, the American educational system, from elementary school to college, must improve by making true the advocated ideals of equal access, opportunity, and preparation.

African-American students frequently attend under resourced, overcrowded schools; they are apt to feel alienated from, rather than engaged in, the education process. Some do indeed express their discontent through antisocial behavior (Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998, p. 134). Sheets and Gay (1996) point out that “African-American students are triply disadvantaged: Unjustly accused, unfairly silenced, and unnecessarily punished” (Sheets & Gay, 1996, p. 89). They are, in fact, more likely than whites to be suspended (Gordon, Della Piana & Keleher, 2000, p. 15).

Culture mediates all learning – it is the lens through which all learning experiences are filtered. As a result, each member of the learning community brings to the college experience his or her own unique cultural style and ways of viewing the world and his or her place in it. Very often, there is discordance between the cultural styles and worldviews of African-American college students and their professors, typically resulting in poor development and learning outcomes for the students and a less than satisfying teaching experience for the professors. Even African-American students and African-American professors who share a common ethnic heritage can be separated by cultural styles and worldviews that reflect individual class differences and cultural discordance within the prevailing college culture. When professors are in tune with their students’ cultural styles and worldviews “they understand their students’ verbal communication and body language, preferred modes of discussion and participation, time and space ori-

entation and religious beliefs, and preferred styles of learning” (Schwitzer, Alan, Ancis & Thomas, 1999, p. 197-198). These professors are better prepared to develop the kinds of learning opportunities that will engage and motivate their students to master challenging educational materials and goals. As such, education leaders in the field, in academia, in communities and in government cannot have a meaningful conversation about improving the education of African-American college students without having issues of culture out in the open, at front and center stage.

An important institutional resource for African-American college students is the United Negro College Fund, which represents 36 private institutions with a combined enrollment of 40,000 students. These colleges range in size from over 10,000 to less than 300 students. According to a recent press release this represents 25 percent of enrollment in black colleges and 12 percent of African-American students enrolled in all colleges and universities. African-American students at biracial colleges are a relatively elite group when compared to their counterparts at the predominantly black colleges (ACT News, 2003, p. 1).

Black Studies

An important organizational resource offered to African American students by most colleges and universities are the courses in the African American studies or Black studies. Black studies at most schools came from the struggles of African-American students, and their participation in the quest for a reordering of university priorities, despite strong opposition from university faculties (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996, p. 19). Miller said, “It is racism that has caused our educational system to fail in the most fundamental way to provide educational experiences that are relevant to African-Americans. It is racism which dictates not only the choice of materials

to be presented and the way they are presented, but also the way African-American students' problems are perceived and dealt with by teachers and professors" (Miller, 1992, p. 87).

Kunjufu has also expressed his dissatisfaction with what some colleges and universities have done so far in providing studies about African American culture. He wrote, "We now have Black History Month, which was initially founded by Carter G. Woodson in 1926 and named Black History Week. It is obvious that seven days was inadequate to cover more than four million years of history. Hopefully we now realize that 28 days, the shortest month of the year, is also insufficient" (Kunjufu, 1997, p. iv).

The barrier of social prejudice

African-American students experience college (and themselves) in widely differing ways. Even in their experiencing "being black", in experiencing the attitudes of whites toward them, and in their perceptions of the posture and intentions of the university in its various dealings with blacks, there is virtually a full spectrum of possible opinion and response among African-American students. Terms like "prejudice" and "racism" often miss the full scope of racial devaluation in our society, implying as they do that racial devaluation comes primarily from the strongly prejudiced segments of our society and not from the "good people".

Racism has become institutionalized in the American school system, since elementary school through college through hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability. Educators value a statistical bell curve, for example, which assumes high levels of intellectual abilities for only a small percentage of the population. This assumption does not motivate educators to create and nurture intellectual ability. Instead, it supports the institutionalization of a hierarchical notion of innate mental ability through practices such as academic tracking. These hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability have led to a focus on the individual and cultural characteris-

tics of students rather than the ways that the social system structures academic success for some and academic failure for others. The result has been a variety of college policies and practices that foil the full development of the intellectual potential of African-American college students.

In 1990, Irene R. Kiernan and Roy P. Daniels studied 23 African-American students in a community college in a large Eastern city. All of these students were from poor families. None of their family members had been to college or had skilled jobs. The more descriptive of the conditions from which they came would be alcoholism, desertion, illegitimacy, transience, and near financial destitution. They had an attitude of “what’s the use?” in relation to studying hard and obtaining future rewards for a good job. The researchers concluded that these students were trying to make the transition from lower-class to middle-class status, and that in the process became anxiety ridden, bitter, and cynical toward themselves and the groups into which they desired entrance (Morgan, 1992, p. 5).

However, almost one decade later, according to the personal experience reported by an African-American college student, the situation has not improved very much. Although the example of only a single student cannot be extrapolated for the whole African-American college student population, it is a first-hand account descriptive of the living experiences of an individual, of the thoughts and feelings of an African-American student attending a predominantly white institution. This student articulated what it means to be African-American in a white university in the late 1990s:

“Being black means to walk across the campus on my first day of class and not see one black student. Being black means to have all white teachers and be surrounded in class by all white or nearly all white students. Being black is to open my textbooks and see pictures of white folks and to read white-washed theory, philosophy, and history which are irrelevant to me. Being black means to go to a white counselor whom I don’t trust, and who doesn’t know how to handle my presence or my problem. Being black is trying to get administrators to understand my needs and do something about them, or trying to convince a campus policeman

that he should not arrest me out of prejudice. Being black is tolerating “Nigra” for “Negro” and favoring neither. Being black is to watch whites look upon my natural hair, my moustache, my African garments, my black music and literature, my black community language, and my other symbols of black pride as being deviant. Being black is seeing a soul sister or brother slaving overtime on a dirty, menial job and being underpaid. Being black is to go into a class disadvantaged and find that I have a teacher who believes it is impossible for a black student to make an “A” or “B” grade. Being black is not having a penny in my pocket and seeing white students visit Europe and Mexico and driving fancy sport cars and at the same time knowing that their parents and ancestors got rich of the sweat and pain of my parents and ancestors. Being black is to be a resource person for curious white folk who, after being answered, are not willing to accept my expertise. Being black is to know that my great, great grandmother was raped and labeled promiscuous, that my great, great grandfather was worked from dawn to dusk and labeled shiftless, that my sister was busted upside the head by some racist with an axe handle, while policemen laughed, and then labeled her as a troublemaker. And finally, that I was denied an equal education and an equal opportunity and labeled a “culturally deprived”. Being black means to be in an ocean of white stimuli, to be angry consciously or unconsciously, to continuously struggle with oneself to deny hostile feeling, angry feeling. I might add that there is no difference between the anger of a black rioter and that of black Ph D but rather a difference in the way the difference comes out. Finally, being black means to be lonely, hyper-alienated, depressed, displayed, ignored, and harassed. Just the fact of being black is to be at the brink of revolt” (Bowles & DeCosta, 1997, p. 132).

In 1998, Allen reported that the situation has changed very little. He wrote that “African-American students at predominantly white colleges report that racial discrimination occurs there with much greater frequency than at other types of institutions” (Allen, 1998, p. 41). Similarly, Allen also has suggested that these students are only minimally integrated into campus academic and social life. Kunjufu (1997) adds that “another of the major problems in the larger African American community is the lack of cross-generational communication” (Kunjufu, 1997, p. 58).

The general lower performance of African Americans in relation to blacks from other countries has been noted in the literature. Hall (2002) wrote, “It amazes me how students who do not live in the United States and who have greater adjustments to make outperform African American students who live here. Students born in Africa and the Caribbean have a clear focus and purpose for enrolling in college” (Hall, 2002, p. 2-3). The same author also added that “the

Black Jews are recent immigrants primarily from former British colonies in the Caribbean who have come to the United States to go into business. Generally, these West Indian immigrants are better prepared from an academic and social standpoint to cope with the economic environment of white America because they have a better educational background and are strongly motivated to achieve a middle-class economic status” (Hall, 2002, p. 4).

African-Americans are involuntary minorities

Ogbu (1978, 1991) identified three types of minorities. The first are autonomous minorities, those people who are minority only in numerical sense, do not experience disproportionate and persistent problems in learning, and usually have a cultural frame that encourages school success, such as Jews and Mormons. The second are the immigrant minorities. These are people who have moved more or less voluntarily to the United States because they believe that doing so would lead to greater economic well being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom. Although these immigrants often experience difficulties because of language and cultural differences, they do not experience lingering disproportionate school failure. Lastly, the third are the caste-like or involuntary minorities. These are people who were originally brought into the United States through slavery, conquest, or colonization. Thereafter, these minorities are relegated to menial positions and denied true assimilation into mainstream society. Ogbu places American Indians, African-Americans and native Hawaiians in this category (Ogbu, 1978, p. 132-133; Ogbu, 1991, p. 212-224).

Self-esteem

Some authors have pointed out that the low social integration by African-American college students may be related to issues of self-esteem. Self-esteem has been called an image, a conception, a concept, a feeling, an internalization, or the self looking at oneself. It has also been

described as a set of attitudes about the self that seems to have an important influence in people's motivation and success. Triandis' (1987) theory of self-concept includes three parts: self-esteem (the extent to which a person thinks of himself or herself as very good or not too good); perceived potency (the extent to which a person views himself or herself as powerful, able to accomplish almost any task); and perceived activity (the extent to which a person sees himself or herself as a doer, an active shaper of the world).

Beginning with George Herbert Mead's idea of the "looking-glass self", (Mead, 1967, p. 125-150) social psychologists have assumed that one's self-image derives in large part from how one is viewed by others – family, school, and the broader society. When those views are negative, people may internalize them, resulting in lower self-esteem, or self-hatred, as it has also been called (Schwitzer, Oris, Ancis & Thomas, 1999, p. 189-190).

This theory was first applied to the experience of Jews, by Sigmund Freud and Bruno Bettelheim, but it was also soon applied to the experience of African-Americans by Gordon Allport, Frantz Fanon, Kenneth Clark, and others (Lomotey, 1997, p. 132). According to this theory, African-American students internalize negative stereotypes as performance anxiety and low expectations for achievement, which they then fulfill. The self-fulfilling prophecy has become a commonplace for these students. Stereotype threat, however, is something different, something external: the situational threat of being negatively stereotyped (Steele, 2001, p. 6).

Bruce Hare (1992) documented a case in a college in Champaign, Illinois. He found that although African-Americans had considerably lower achievement-test scores than their white classmates, their overall self-esteem was just as high. This stunning imperviousness to poor academic performance was accomplished, he found, by their de-emphasizing school achievement as a basis of self-esteem and giving preference to peer-group relations, a domain in which

their esteem prospects were better. They went where they had to go to feel good about themselves (Steele, 1992, p. 26).

Steele mentions that this finding has two important implications. The first is that the poorer college performance of African-American students may have another source that is not commonly understood, in addition to lack of preparation and, perhaps, of identification with school achievement. This additional source is the threat of being negatively stereotyped in the environment. This has important policy implications because different kinds of students may require different pedagogies of improvement (Steele, 2001, p. 3). Doing well in school requires a belief that school achievement can be a promising basis of self-esteem, and that belief needs constant reaffirmation even for advantaged students.

Belonging and not belonging

Of course, it is logical that African Americans feel more affinity and more comfortable when they are together with other African Americans. Barnes has stated that common to the ethnic group “is the social-psychological element of a special sense of both ancestral and future-oriented identification with the group. These are the “people” of my ancestors; therefore, they are my people, and will be the people of my children and their children. With members of other groups, I may share political participation, occupational relationships, common civic enterprise, perhaps even an occasional warm friendship. But in a very special way, which history has decreed, I share a sense of indissoluble and intimate identity with the group and not that one within the larger society and the world” (Barnes, 1992, p. 62). Barnes also states that all African Americans are subject to victimization at the hands of the American social system (Barnes, 1992, p. 63).

Social scientists have shown a great interest in topics such as prejudice, stereotype, or social image of minority groups. However, although these concepts have been of interest to disciplines such as sociology, social and cognitive psychology and even political science, there is still no clear differentiation between these concepts. A stereotype has been defined as a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group created and shared within a culture. However, this definition is still limited. Most authors who have investigated this area agree that there is a relationship between a stereotype and a prejudice, because a prejudice is a negative attitude toward certain social groups, and stereotypes are beliefs and sets of traits attributed to social groups that accompany these attitudes. In this sense, Allport (1954, 1971) considers that stereotypes have the role of rationalizing intergroup prejudices. Along the same line, other authors maintain that stereotypes are the cognitive component of a prejudiced attitude (Harding, Proshanky, Kunter & Chein, 1991, p. 118).

A recently completed doctoral dissertation measuring the impact of race and gender on graduate students revealed that African-American and white men and women report differences in their experiences (Karnei, 2003, p. 2). The review yielded four areas of concern with regard to key elements of the graduate student experience: (a) mentoring and advising; (b) departmental environments; (c) peer interaction, and (d) research and teaching experiences. As a group, African-American women appeared to be the most isolated and dissatisfied of the four groups of participants. Previous research by Jacqueline Fleming (1994) suggests that African-American women are generally found to be the most isolated group of students on predominantly white campuses. African-American women were less likely than were white women, African-American or white men to have mentors or advisers with whom they reported working closely during their doctoral study (Fleming, 1994, p. 5-6).

In addition, the study found that the relationship that participants had with their primary advisers or mentors within their academic units appeared to have a significant impact on their satisfaction levels. Students who reported good relationships with advisers generally felt the environments of their departments were good. Those who had poor relationships with their advisers reported negative feelings about their departments. Advisers and mentors were key links to departmental resources, both human and financial. When such links did not exist, students did not make academic and social transitions into their departments as well as did those students who had good relationships with their advisers. However, African-American students often found outsiders to help them form dissertation committees, find research articles related to their topics, work on their writing skills, and find presentation opportunities and funding. For African-American students, outsiders filled the gaps that are traditionally filled by faculty members within the students' academic units (Karnei, 2003, p. 82-83).

Reduction of prejudice

The majority of social scientists writing in this area has directed their efforts towards the search for and analysis of certain techniques allowing the improvement, or at least change, of social interactions between majority and minority groups. Results from some studies indicate that one of the most effective procedures is inter-groups contact. This technique works on the assumption that if people manage to make more contact and cooperate more with members of minority and discriminated groups, that better relationships will be achieved, and, consequently, that there will be a reduction of unfavorable prejudices and stereotypes.

This conception, known as the contact hypothesis, has been implemented in numerous contexts, such as industry, the army, residential areas and schools. However, although in the original hypothesis Allport (1954) specified the conditions for its effectiveness (same status in all

group members, institutional support, common objectives among participants, etc.) the results were not completely satisfactory (Allport, 1954, p. 80-89). The contact technique applied in segregated schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s neither favored nor increased interpersonal relations between children from different races. The most prejudiced individuals may attempt to avoid contact with out groups and may even increase anxiety (Hruby, 1985, p. 22; Stephan & Stephan, 1995, p. 170-171). In addition, the personalized nature of the information learned about an individual out-group member may also diminish its potential for generalization (Brewer, 1988, p. 211). As a consequence of these findings, the contact hypothesis was modified (Cook, 1962, p. 66-84; Cook, 1979, p. 420-437), by adding a series of situational and group factors such as similarity, norms, and attitudes held among members of both groups.

This process of revision continued as more authors added new situational and social factors (Cook, 1969, p. 235; Amir, 1996, p. 305-307), and even personal, behavioral, and affective factors (Rokeach, 1991, p. 458; Geartner, 1995, p. 100). In 1993, Yarrow, Campbell and Yarrow added a new condition: to maintain intergroup contact over a long period of time in order to achieve consolidation and produce changes in attitudes, behaviors and stereotypes towards the outside group (Moreno, 1996, p. 215; Garcia, Castillo & Umpierrez, 1997, p. 131).

Another factor for the low social integration of African-American students may have to do with difficulties in communication issues. When we bring disparate groups of people together to enact any educational policy, the nature and style of communication among people will have significant impacts on their ability to work together effectively. Communication has direct effects on feelings of wellbeing, and can enhance or detract from the efficacy of individual's work.

Contradictory value systems

Cherry mentions that African-Americans have some common assumptions about white students, such as (a) whites are smarter than African-Americans and that whites always know what they are doing; (b) white people are after you; (c) whites are racist; (d) all whites have money; and (e) whites had it easier than African-Americans. On the other hand, whites also have some common assumptions about African-Americans, such as (a) African-Americans are intellectually inferior to whites; (b) African-American students may not fit a white teacher's mold of how a good student walks, talks, or acts; (c) all African-Americans have some type of artistic or athletic talent; and (d) African-Americans are economically and culturally deprived (Cherry, 1993, p. 1-22). Kunjufu expressed that these racial prejudices make social integration totally impossible. He wrote: "we make the same mistake diagnosing the majority of White people. We continue to treat them from our "can we all just get along" value system, when it is obvious that they are obsessed with power and control" (Kunjufu, 1997, p. 142).

In many situations, communication is jeopardized when people feel that the manner or style of the communication is inappropriate, or that the person involved is not the appropriate person. Effective communication is difficult to achieve when a person from the majority culture speaks for the interests of the minority group in the absence of an appropriate spokesperson, when an administrator makes decisions about a program or service without consulting his or her staff, or when academic experts with little field experience are responsible for professional training.

In addition, apart from these basic conditions of communication, the manner, style, and organization of communicative activity will provide many cues and messages that can have significant impacts on people's feelings of well-being, and their orientation to activities and agendas.

College experiences

According to Fleming (1994), exposure to prejudice and discrimination on campus has a significant effect on African-American student's cognitive and affective development at predominantly white institutions (Fleming, 1994, p. 112). These negative effects have been shown to be particularly pernicious for African-American males' social and academic development (Davis, 1994, p. 630-631).

Others have shown that experience with racism and discrimination on college campuses along with other noncognitive factors such as self-concept are more important indicators of academic performance than traditional cognitive factors such as previous academic background and performance (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1996, p. 172). Research by Suen (1993) and Leo and Rolison (1986) have focused on the lack of congruency between African-American students' cultural background and the social milieu of predominantly white institutions that tends to marginalize their experiences and alienate them socially (Suen, 1993, p. 120, Bean, 1992, p. 318).

The experience and outcomes of African-American students at predominantly white college and universities are often affected by gender differences. However, very little within-race analysis of gender has been done to disentangle the differential experience of African-American students in predominantly white college settings (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2003, p. 2). Fleming has suggested that African-American males reap more benefits, both socially and academically, by attending historically Black colleges. He believes that white colleges could retard the development of African-American males (Fleming, 1994, p. 111). In a study performed at four predominantly white institutions, the authors found that academic interaction while attending a predominantly white college was found to have a negative effect on

the academic self-concept of African-American males (Pascarella, Smart, Ethington & Nettles, 1997, p. 76-77).

Other factors differentially affecting the academic and social experiences of African-American males and females are important in developing and maintaining institutional support that meets the need of all students. For example, previous work has shown that African-American females have lower educational aspirations (Gurin & Epps, 1995, p. 221), while African American males are more likely to be withdrawn, unhappy, and feel they are being treated unfairly by faculty and peers (Knott, 1991, p. 16). While exposure to a climate of prejudice and discrimination on campus has significant effects on African-American students' cognitive and affective development, there are also important variations based on gender (Pascarella, Smart, Ethington & Nettles, 1997, p. 77). More research on gender and success among African-American females in the academic environment is needed to better understand these gender gaps.

Recommendations

The American educational system has attempted to deal with the problems of African-American college students through legislation and, depending on what administration is in the White House, with additional financial resources, and while both approaches have been partially successful, still African-Americans are under-represented in the college student population.

The following are some thoughts about how to improve the fate of African-American college students on American campuses for each of the three barriers identified:

Finances

- Increased financial assistance in the form of grants and subsidized loans which take into consideration not only the tuition expenses of the college that the student is attending, but also the personal needs of the student. It is unrealistic to provide the same amount of financial aid to a student still living with his or her parents or to a single mother living independently who wants to complete her college education and expect that both students may receive the same benefits from the available financial resources.
- Increased availability of paid internships in the junior and senior years, where African-American students can obtain academic credit while working and being paid.

Institutional stereotyping

- Federally-mandated minimum resources to be spent by each school district in the nation, per student, at the primary and secondary levels. The problems of African-Americans start in kindergarten, or even before. There are great disparities among per-student expenditures at the locally-financed school boards, which translates in less resources being provided to poor districts and neighborhoods, where most African-Americans live.
- Learning accountability must be data driven, with data derived from multiple sources, including standardized test scores, ongoing classroom curriculum-based assessments, grades, professor observations and reports, and other anecdotal accounts of student development and learning. High stakes decisions determining such life-altering courses as promotion and graduation must not be based on a

single data source. Ongoing analysis of disaggregated student data at the college level – achievement data broken down by student ethnic groups, gender within groups, English language proficiency, income levels, and enrollment in educational programs is essential.

Social prejudice

- The particulars of African American life and culture: art, literature, political and social perspective, music, etc. must be presented in the mainstream curriculum of American schooling, not consigned to special days, weeks, or even months of the year, or to special-topic courses and programs aimed essentially to African-Americans. Such channeling carries the disturbing message that the material is not of general value, and, consequently, it wastes the power of this material to alter our images of the American mainstream, continuing to frustrate African American identification with it, and it excuses in whites and others a huge ignorance of their own society. The true test of democracy, Ralph Ellison said: “is... the inclusion – not assimilation of the African American man” (Steele, 1992, p. 24).
- Increased financial support of the historically black colleges and universities. Although historically black colleges and universities have been positive for African-Americans, still most of their graduates seem to be perceived by employers and the public as coming from second-rated institutions. The quality of the education provided by historically black colleges and universities is perceived as being substantially lower than at most predominantly white colleges and universities, although no serious studies have been made to corroborate these argu-

ments. However, students attending those colleges pay, on average, almost half of the tuition paid by students attending traditionally white institutions (Barton, 2003, p. 3). It is unlikely that with such low tuition black institutions can provide the quality education that college students require to compete in the modern world. The main reason why these institutions have been so successful with this racial group is because they have provided a positive, favorable, unthreatening environment for African-American students, and this strength of such institutions should be preserved and improved by providing these institutions with the necessary funding to compete with comparable white institutions.

In 1992, in the famous case *U.S. v. Fordice*, the Supreme Court held that historically black colleges and universities were a vestige of segregation, and that state legislatures must either eliminate them, or find a compelling educational justification for their continued existence. The courts were concerned that such historically black colleges and universities encourage an unequal system of higher education. The court basically recognized that those institutions provided an inferior education to African-Americans. However, the court did not suggest as a potential alternative that those institutions, which so much have benefited African-Americans throughout the years, could be maintained and improved by getting the necessary financing to provide a high quality education to African American students.

- Develop strong networking linkages among the historically black colleges and institutions, mixed-race colleges, and predominantly white colleges, especially in academic and research areas, including exchange of professors and students.

- Increased efforts by white colleges and universities to attract and retain African-Americans. A recent College Board report (1999) found that only one-third of colleges and universities have launched outreach efforts and programs aimed at recruiting and retaining disadvantaged students. White colleges should provide a more socially cohesive environment for all minority students, but especially for African-Americans, as they are the largest minority. White colleges and universities should provide an education that is more culturally sensitive to the needs of African-Americans. They should emphasize and require diversity and multicultural training in all colleges and for all students. In addition, college instructors should attend a minimum of 8 hours of multicultural sensitivity training every year as a condition of their employment, regardless of tenure.

Further Research

- Obviously, further research is extremely important to deepen our knowledge of each of the main barriers faced by African-American college students as well as about potential interventions that could be made to reduce or completely eliminate such barriers.

Concluding Comments

Over the past four decades African-American college students have been more in the spotlight than any other American students. This is because they are not just college students; they are a cutting edge in the country's efforts to integrate itself in the thirty-eight years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. These students have borne much of the burden for our national experiment in racial integration, and to a significant degree the success of the experiment will be determined by their success, and this has not been yet achieved.

It is still clear that, regardless of all the efforts made and laws passed, African-American students are underrepresented in the total college student population. African-Americans are also underrepresented among college graduates. While some improvement in attendance rates and graduation rates is apparent in the last five years, this improvement has not been sufficient to close the gap between blacks and whites to an appreciable degree. African-Americans confront problems getting admitted to college, and once admitted they face academic, social, and financial problems which hinder their possibilities of success. While some institutions have made efforts to expand access to African-American students, the support they receive once admitted is still limited.

It is also important to note that historically black colleges and universities continue to attract a substantial percentage of all African-American college students, which has remained relatively unchanged for more than a decade, within 14 and 16%. This situation, of course, makes more difficult for white colleges and universities to reflect the mix in their populations and be considered diverse. Isaacs (2002) has mentioned that to be considered diverse, a college or university needs to have at least 17% of its student population to be non-white (Isaacs, 2002, p. 1).

If education leaders are to make substantial progress toward building, sustaining, and replicating effective programs for African-American college students, they need to understand the many dimensions of institutional racism. It is necessary to nurture new and existing local successes to prevent them from being undermined or discontinued. Removing the barriers that prevent African-American students from accessing a high-quality public education is an essential first step in achieving access to the economic, social, and political resources that are needed to support strong families and a truly democratic society.

Diverse cultural styles and worldviews have a profound influence on how people relate to one another. However, high-quality relationships between teachers and students built on a foundation of mutual knowledge, understanding, trust, and respect are fundamental to an effective educational program. The critical first steps on this journey for college instructors who are seeking to acquire skills in culturally relevant pedagogy are to understand more about the concept of culture in general and then to explore their own cultural backgrounds, including how their own cultural experiences have worked to shape their belief systems about other people and their own worldviews. In a society in which assimilation and acculturation were the mainstay experience for large groups of America's early European immigrants, this becomes an especially difficult task, because many of the cultural rituals, practices, and belief systems of those early groups have been lost. The result is that many of today's descendants of northern European ethnic and cultural groups have been left without important knowledge about the intrinsic value of culture, in general, and their own ethnic and cultural heritages, in particular. However, to become more effective at meeting the learning needs of African-American college students, educators must commit to becoming more culturally knowledgeable and aware and specifically to gaining authentic knowledge of the African-American experience in America and the life experiences of their African-American college students.

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