Why the Shortage of Black Professors?


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Faculties at American institutions of higher education have become convinced that a broadly based and diverse student body will produce superior education, but the same concept seldom occurs to faculty when viewing themselves.

Here, leading scholars, educational administrators, and social commentators express their views on why blacks are vastly underrepresented on the faculties of American institutions of higher education.

THREE DECADES AFTER the enactment of equal employment opportunity legislation, blacks still make up a tiny percentage of the faculties of American higher educational institutions. Despite strong affirmative-action plans instituted by many colleges and universities during the 1960s and 1970s, the percentage of black faculty has changed very little in recent years. In many of the nation’s most prestigious colleges and universities, there has been little or no progress in 20 years. Since about half of all black faculty teach at historically black colleges and universities, the odds that a student will see a black face at the front of the classroom at the thousands of predominantly white institutions are about 50 to 1.

The editors of The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education asked a select group of scholars and commentators for their opinions as to why there are so few blacks teaching at colleges and universities in the United States. Also, we asked the following questions:

• To what extent are black professors still subject to discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions?

• Are hiring and tenure decisions still controlled by people who feel that blacks do not have the capacity to teach or do serious research in traditional academic subjects?

• Are affirmative-action programs flagging?

• Why do so few blacks choose to pursue careers in higher education?

• How is the situation to be remedied?

We received the following replies:

Slack Enforcement

Reginald Wilson is a senior scholar at the American Council on Education (ACE), a Washington, D.C.-based research association. Before coming to Washington to start the ACE’s Office of Minority Concerns, Wilson was the president of Wayne State University in Detroit from 1971 to 1981. Earlier, Wilson taught graduate courses in psychology and black studies at Wayne State, University of Detroit, and the University of Michigan. Wilson is the recipient of the Anthony Wayne Award and the Distinguished Service Medal of the city of Detroit.

In 1941, there were only two black, tenured faculty members at predominantly white institutions in the United States, according to a study conducted by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. The fund then put together a list of 200 blacks with Ph.D.s and 300 with master’s degrees and circulated it to all the presidents of white universities. The next year, after no blacks had been hired, the fund offered to pay the salary of the black professors if they were hired by a predominantly white institution. Two blacks were hired under these conditions: Allison Davis, the distinguished black sociologist, was hired by the University of Chicago and Cornelius Golightly, a philosopher, joined the faculty at Olivet College in Michigan.

This illustrates how the near-total exclusion of blacks from faculty positions has been a fairly recent phenomenon. By 1961, when President Kennedy signed Executive Order 110925 calling for affirmative-action efforts in education and other fields, there were still very few black faculty members at predominantly white institutions. Most of the black academics in the United States taught at the historically black colleges and universities, which by the way have always had a more racially integrated faculty than have the predominantly white institutions. Today, the faculty at historically black institutions is still, on average, 35 percent white.

After President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246 in 1965 — an affirmative-action initiative that had some real
teeth in regard to enforcement provisions — the hiring of black faculty began in earnest. During the 1960s and 1970s, black faculty at the mainly white institutions grew from near zero to over 2 percent.

With the election of Ronald Reagan and the subsequent election of George Bush, we had 12 years during which the progress in increasing the level of black faculty slowed considerably. When President Reagan announced his philosophical disagreement with the concept of affirmative action — and even went so far as to suggest he might rescind President Johnson’s executive order — colleges and universities were given a clear message that strict affirmative-action provisions would not be enforced. Thus we had a 12-year period of limited or no progress in the hiring of black faculty. In 1979, blacks made up 4.3 percent of all the full-time faculty at American institutions of higher education including the historically black colleges and universities. By 1985, the black percentage of the total shrank to 4.1 percent and rebounded slightly to 4.5 percent in 1989. This slowdown in the hiring of more black faculty was due directly to a lack of enforcement of affirmative-action provisions by the federal government.

**African Americans Want to Teach**

I do not give weight to the argument one hears all over the nation that there just are not enough qualified blacks to fill teaching posts at institutions of higher education. The National Science Foundation conducts a survey each year of all Ph.D. graduates in the United States asking what the degree earner plans to do for a career. Each year, by far, the largest percentage of the respondents who say they want to go into teaching are African Americans.

Over 28 percent of all African-American Ph.D.s are employed in fields outside the disciplines in which they received their doctorates. The number one reason why they say this is so is that they were not offered full-time teaching posts in their chosen fields. The number of black doctorates fluctuates from year to year but we see no increase in recruitment efforts in years where there are a large number of black Ph.D. graduates. The argument used by university recruiters that they just can’t find qualified blacks remains an excuse to maintain the status quo.

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**No Wave of a Wand**

**Walter Gelhorn**, a professor from the law school of Columbia University, is one of the nation’s leading scholars of constitutional and administrative law. Gelhorn is a graduate of Amherst College and earned law degrees at Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania. He is the recipient of a number of academic awards including the Learned Hand medal. Professor Gelhorn believes progress is being made, albeit slowly, and that steps must be taken to expand the number of blacks who aspire to careers in academia.

Why are there so few blacks teaching in American universities? I have no doubt that in times past that question would have been answered largely by reference to discriminatory hiring policies and institutional insensitivity. Today, those same obstacles need to be surmounted in many universities. In numerous other institutions, however, policies have vastly changed for the better and discrimination has been substantially lessened. Yet blacks are, numerically, not a large element of university faculties as a whole.

The existence of improper academic motivations in some — perhaps in many — instances is undeniable, even today. My own past experience, however, leads me (a now retired university professor and a former college trustee) to doubt that these are the main causes of black underemployment in American faculties at present. The number of young African Americans who aspire to academic careers in various fields is unknown. I assume it to be substantially less than would be suggested by population studies based on gross census figures.

Many who, I am confident, would be thoroughly capable of undertaking the extensive studies leading to a graduate degree and to an academic job may lack financing for acquiring the needed credentials. Others, when and if they have acquired those marks of professional accomplishment, may, in some instances, find themselves in demand for employment in the private sector at a salary level above what is commonplace in even the more affluent of American universities, let alone the generality. Especially when they have incurred heavy debts while completing their educational training, some promising university graduates (whether black or white) may understandably choose immediately advantageous private employment rather than the long-term uncertainties of an academic career.

Yet a number do choose the latter. Opportunities do exist — and some are seized. A 1992-1993 directory of fully accredited American law schools, for example, lists 1,223 minority law teachers — predominantly black — among the faculty members of those institutions. The minority law teachers were, plainly, in the minority, but far more than a mere minority — and certainly a very significantly larger
minority than could be found in professorial posts in times not long past.

In my belief, progress toward equal opportunity is going to occur in larger and larger measure — but not by a wave of the wand.

The first step must be taken at the high school level. The graduation rate among black males is disastrously low, far lower than it is among their white counterparts or among black female students. Encouraging commitment to academic achievement and discouraging self-limitation as a result of becoming a dropout will not be easy or cheap. But unless the pool of male, as well as female, black graduates of universities and professional schools can be enlarged, the applicant pool of black aspirants for faculty appointments will remain small.

Not every person who desires a faculty appointment will satisfy a particular institution's needs and quality expectations. The white appointees to desirable university posts constitute a small percentage of those who sought the jobs; the successful white applicants were drawn from an applicant pool that contained relatively few blacks. Until the black element of that pool reaches larger size, the faculty recruiters who seek candidates worthy of appointment will find their range of choice limited. I repeat, the necessary first step is to expand the number (and, in doing so, the variety and range of interests) of blacks who go through secondary school and on to college and yet farther, to graduate, professional studies.

SLOW PACE OF CHANGE

If that were accomplished, would the academic doors open wide, instantly, throughout the nation? I doubt it. But the presence of larger numbers of indubitably qualified blacks who manifested interest in academic careers would certainly add to the pressure on those doors. Employment practices, even in traditionally aloof university faculties, are by no means immutable.

Not long ago, discriminatory personnel policies that affected Jews were widespread. Those policies changed as they came to be recognized for what they were and as the presence of qualified Jewish aspirants became too abundantly evident to be ignored. Somewhat similarly, women in various elements of the universities' professional schools were few until very recently; all-male faculties often resisted female additions. Then, suddenly, the number of well-qualified women who sought professional careers grew. The applicant pool began to expand. Today, women faculty members are numerous.

I do not suggest contentment with the pace of change as it may affect the presence of blacks in faculties of American higher educational institutions. I do suggest that change has already occurred and will occur yet further. It will not cause faculty appointments to be handed out on a silver platter, as it were, by way of apology for objectionable academic behavior in the past. In my belief, however, the current of faculty opinion today runs ever more strongly in the direction of diversity and against exclusionary recruitment. Those of us who wish for an enlarged black professoriate must be mindful of the need to stimulate black interest in gaining qualifications as well as of the need to recognize qualifications that may already exist. And all of American society must be ever mindful, too, that for many elements of the population the doors of opportunity remain closed because family incomes are insufficient to nudge them ajar. That is an unhappy reality in the lives of many black families. Those who are somewhat more fortunate must concern themselves with the roots of underprivilege as well as with its consequences.

One final word. Even after the color barrier has been broken by appointing qualified men and women without reference to their pigmentation, ugly racism may still infect intra-institutional relationships. Subtle — sometimes subtle — differences in relationships and attitudes may yet subject junior faculty of color to stressful disadvantages their white contemporaries may not share. In short, gaining a faculty appointment does not assure a contented career. It is, however, a valued beginning, a beginning I believe to be increasingly realizable in fact as well as in theory — and much to be hoped for.

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Small Pool From Which to Choose

Theodore M. Hesburgh, a clergyman and president emeritus of Notre Dame, led the distinguished university from 1952 to 1987. Hesburgh, one of the foremost authorities on American education, has served in the United States Navy, as chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and as an ambassador to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology Development. Author of many books and the recipient of over 120 honorary degrees, Hesburgh has been a member of the board of the United Negro College Fund and was the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This past summer, Hesburgh celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination into the priesthood.

Until blacks enter graduate school for doctoral degrees across the board, there will be very few black professors because there will be such a small pool from which to choose them. I know of no higher educational institutions that are not looking for black professors, but the pool is practically nonexistent.

We have been successful in enrolling many more black undergraduates across the spectrum of universities in this country. However, when it comes to graduate school, law and business seem to be the great attractions. I can understand this, but it won't help our problem of getting more blacks across the spectrum of our facilities.
### College and Graduate Degrees Awarded African Americans by the Nation's Leading Universities - 1990

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**Note:** This survey is limited to the 25 most prestigious national universities as identified in a poll of college presidents and other senior administrators conducted by *U.S. News & World Report* in 1993.

**Sources:** U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

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**Strong Corrective Measures Needed**

*Amitai Etzioni*, University Professor at George Washington University, is one of the country's most innovative social commentators. Born in Germany, Dr. Etzioni studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and received master's and doctorate degrees in sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. Author of numerous books and articles, *Etzioni is also the editor of The Responsive Community.*

Why are so few black Americans teaching in our universities? Four hundred years of prejudice and discrimination have left deep marks. To imply otherwise is to make light of the incredible indignities and deprivations white males have imposed on others over a very long period of time and are deeply built into social institutions, culture, and psychology.

Although important reforms have been made, the effects of the long past are still highly visible all around us. People who have lived in disadvantaged neighborhoods and hence attended poor primary and secondary schools — assuming they did not drop out — are not well prepared for higher education.

**Encompassing Solutions**

It follows that those committed to making academic teaching equally open to one and all must take on all the facets of society and change those rather than limit themselves to recruitment processes. Recently, for instance, Head Start has come under attack because its effects last only three years after a child has completed its run. This shows that one has to start earlier, stay longer, and deal with housing and public safety and numerous other factors for Head Start to lead all the way to professorship. In short, the correction for discrimination must be as encompassing as discrimination used to be.

Last but not least, individual responsibility must be enhanced. One should not engage in victimology, using adverse factors to minimize what one can do to advance in life.


**Careers in Academia Not Encouraged**

Walter E. Massey, a distinguished physicist and, until recently, director of the National Science Foundation, this summer became provost at the University of California, Berkeley. Under his directorship, the National Science Foundation grew in size and importance. President Clinton recently budgeted an additional $446 million for the foundation in 1994 — the largest appropriation increase in the institution’s history.

Dr. Massey graduated from Morehouse College and received his master’s and Ph.D. degrees from Washington University. Before assuming his duties at the National Science Foundation, Massey taught at the University of Illinois, Brown University, and the University of Chicago. He is the recipient of 10 honorary Doctor of Science degrees and serves on a number of corporate boards of directors.

As a scientist and recently departed director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), I feel deeply about the vision articulated by NSF’s intellectual founder, Dr. Vannevar Bush, who wrote: “We think it is very important that every boy and girl know that, if he shows that he has what it takes, the sky is the limit.”

That vision is more pertinent today than it was when it was written over 50 years ago. And it is a vision that must be made a reality for all African Americans.

One major reason for the scarcity of black faculty in science and engineering is the underrepresentation of minorities in these fields overall. This problem becomes strikingly clear when we look at what has happened to black students moving through the educational pipeline. Statistics taken over the past two decades show that only 16 percent of black students majoring in science or engineering completed their bachelor’s degrees in those fields within five years, compared with 34 percent of white students.

These losses further shrink an already-small black student population. In 1983, 9 percent of full-time freshmen planning to major in science or engineering were black; six years later only 5 percent of the recipients of bachelor’s degrees in these fields were black. It comes as no surprise, then, that in 1990 African Americans received only 2 percent of the more than 13,600 Ph.D.s in science and engineering awarded to U.S. citizens. Without a strong doctorate base, there may be little progress in increasing the number of African-American faculty.

There are other reasons for the paucity of black faculty at American universities. These factors include sociological and other barriers, as well as the intense competition for the most qualified black faculty among predominantly minority institutions and those institutions with significant numbers of minority students. There simply are not enough talented black faculty to satisfy the demand.

Another reason, and one that influences the general public, is financial. Television, radio, and other media bombard people daily with news of the prestige and monetary rewards for persons who have careers in sports, entertainment, medicine, or law. By contrast, the science, engineering, and education communities simply are not actively stimulating interest in careers among the public or our young people. People often have little interest in understanding what a scientist or college professor does, beyond the harmful stereotypes of the “mad scientist” or “absent-minded professor.”

Black professors are probably still subject to discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions, but it is frequently difficult to prove that discrimination is the reason for not hiring or promoting blacks. Institutions that engage in these practices have become very sophisticated in their use of subtle criteria that automatically delegate black candidates to the second tier for hiring and promotion decisions.

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**Duke Takes the Initiative**

Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, historically has had a very difficult time attracting minority professors. Currently, only 2.3 percent of Duke’s full-time faculty is black.

In an effort to encourage African-American students to pursue careers in academia, the university, in conjunction with the Charles A. Dana Foundation, has initiated the Preparing Minorities for Academic Careers program (PMAC). Each summer, African-American students from six historically black colleges come to Duke to study with a university faculty member who helps guide them in their research and advises them on graduate school study. The one-on-one mentoring program affords the students a unique perspective on life in academia. Students have their expenses paid for the summer term and about eight students receive up to $10,000 in financial aid. Institutions participating in the program include Morehouse and Spelman colleges and Dillard, Xavier, Hampton, and Tuskegee universities.

“The PMAC program provides a major opportunity for Duke to assist in the recruitment of underrepresented minorities from historically black colleges into the professorate,” says Richard A. White, vice provost for education at Duke University. “We see this as both a major responsibility of a research university as well as a chance for Duke to present itself in a positive way as an option for students to pursue advanced degrees. This is a program that benefits both the students and the university.”
Looking again at the sciences, we find that blacks employed in four-year colleges and universities are less likely than their white colleagues to hold tenure or become full professors. In 1989, 49 percent of black faculty members held tenure, compared with 56 percent of whites. That same year, only 27 percent of blacks were full professors, compared with 42 percent of whites. By contrast, a higher percentage of blacks were associate professors (33 percent of blacks; 23 percent of whites) or held nontenure positions (11 percent of blacks; 9 percent of whites).

Are affirmative-action programs flagging? Probably yes, although the quality of the programs have very little to do with this. People somehow become immune to the intent of affirmative-action programs over time. I believe that we must personally rededicate ourselves to the task of increasing the number of minorities in academia. It is up to us to use various strategies to keep the issue of underrepresentation alive before college and university administrators as well as Congress and the public.

**Possible Solutions**

How is the situation to be remedied? My own career benefited immeasurably from the patient and dedicated commitment of my mentors. Based on my experience, I am now convinced that increasing the participation of minorities in academia, science, and engineering will require far more than a desire or willingness for change — it will require our firm and unwavering commitment to make this change happen. This commitment must be strong and mutually reinforced among our universities, public and private sectors, and most of all, among individual teachers, scientists, friends, and family members.

I have been fortunate to lead a federal agency dedicated to making this change happen. NSF’s efforts to stimulate minority participation in the sciences and engineering mean far more than just providing money. We are requiring colleges and universities to set explicit goals for increasing the numbers of minority scientists and engineers, and we are holding those institutions accountable for meeting their goals.

Let me conclude as I began with a quote from Dr. Bush: “We think it is best that opportunity be held out to all kinds and conditions of men and women whereby they can better themselves. This is the American way; this is the way the United States has become what it is.” This is also the only way, I might add, to assure the continued strength, vitality, and success of America and its many peoples.
by senior faculty. They are most often overworked, expected to serve on committees to make certain that the minority perspective is represented, to advise undergraduate students, and to attend all institutional functions while pursuing their normal course of work.

The institutional environment is often unfriendly and in some cases hostile. African Americans do not see themselves represented in great numbers or in decision-making positions. In the case of graduate students, the residency requirement of most programs is prohibitive since many African Americans are nontraditional students and must continue to work full-time to support families while attending graduate school. A good source for recruitment of African Americans for academic careers is the administrative ranks. However, those individuals are often not looked upon as being true academics.

Some remedies such as mentoring and networking are in place. More substantial changes need to be made in programs and attitudes that support continued discrimination and lack of opportunity for African Americans. At the most basic level, kindergarten through twelfth grade, educational reform is a must.

The concepts of scholarship and research need to be overhauled and made more relevant. New methodologies and areas of interest must be embraced. The curriculum in graduate schools must be expanded to incorporate courses that are of interest to African Americans. Perspectives must be broadened about sources of recruitment of African-American graduate students and faculty. Last, there has got to be a change of attitude regarding the capabilities of African Americans.

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Blacks in Demand for Hiring

* Alexander W. Astin is the director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Astin is the author of the critically acclaimed book, Minorities in Higher Education, which discusses in detail many of the problems treated in this symposium.

The dearth of blacks on the teaching faculty of American universities is the result of a complex interplay of factors. First are the “pipeline” forces. Blacks are underrepresented in our high school graduating classes by 2 percent or 3 percent in comparison to their numbers in the age group. This underrepresentation increases dramatically at the bachelor’s degree level and becomes even greater because of the predilections of black college graduates: A disproportionate number opt for medical school and law school, therefore leaving only a trickle of candidates for graduate school.

The lack of blacks in our graduate schools has been further compounded during recent years by the flight of blacks from teaching careers. Still another factor that reduces the number of blacks at the graduate level is the disinclination of blacks to pursue undergraduate work in the sciences. This trend further exacerbates the problem of producing more black Ph.D.s.

These facts mean that we will have a shortage of candidates for college teaching careers in the foreseeable future, regardless of whatever outreach or affirmative-action efforts we might undertake. My feeling is that in many universities today, there is actually a preference for black candidates when it comes to recruiting, a phenomenon that has been reinforced by the declining pool.

Unequal Advancement

As far as tenure and promotion are concerned, on the other hand, there is probably still some differential difficulty encountered by young black professors, in part because they often focus their research efforts on issues related to ethnicity or race, topics that are often looked at with jaundiced eyes by faculty review committees.

Another problem seldom mentioned is that blacks are often called upon to participate in various university committees and task forces. In addition, they are often called upon to serve as mentors for black students. These additional demands very often make it difficult for black professors to find time for the scholarly activities that they must perform in order to gain tenure and promotion.

In conclusion, we need to establish some kind of regular mechanism for monitoring the flow of blacks and other minorities through the educational pipeline. Right now we simply have no way of monitoring this kind of information so it is difficult for us to detect changes in the flows which might require some kind of remedial action. Considering the urgent need to increase the number of blacks in high-level positions not only in academia but also in other fields, this lack of a monitoring mechanism can only be considered as irresponsible on the part of our federal government.
Quota of One

“I have always wanted to be a civil rights lawyer. My father’s experience at Harvard College in 1929, as he recounted it to me, was an early lesson in the indignity and inhumanity of racism. My father was denied any financial aid on the ground that one black student had already been awarded a full scholarship. He was not allowed to live in the dormitories on the ground that no black, except the relative of a United States senator, had ever resided there. He was a victim of a racial quota, a quota of one. I have never been in favor of quotas.”

— Professor Lani Guinier after her nomination to be assistant attorney general for civil rights was withdrawn by President Clinton on June 3, 1993.

Conceptions of Academic Qualifications

Andrew Hacker, a professor of political science at Queens College, a division of the City University of New York, is the author of the recent highly praised book, Two Nations: Separate, Hostile, and Unequal, which Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called “an honest and illuminating book that deserves to be read by everyone concerned with the future of this country.” Hacker graduated from Amherst College and pursued graduate studies at Oxford and then at Princeton, where he received a Ph.D. Before going to Queens College in 1971, Hacker began his teaching career at Cornell. Hacker is the author of numerous books on a wide variety of topics and is a consultant to a number of think tanks including The Conference Board and The Brookings Institution.

Approximately 100 American colleges and universities use — and accept — the designation that they are “historically black” institutions. This leaves some 3,000 other schools which could be called “historically white.” Needless to say, they do not so describe themselves, although even brief visits to their campuses will attest to that condition. They are white in identity and culture, in logic and learning, in their conceptions of scholarly knowledge and demeanor. And until quite recently, few of these 3,000 schools had hardly any students or professors who were other than white.

Affirmative action goes as far back as 1941 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered defense plants to show that they were opening jobs to black workers. However, it was not until the 1960s that organizations of all kinds were told they could and should make efforts to display a broader racial array. And now, a generation later, every professor and administrator will protest that their institution is extending itself to sign up black faculty members. Even with budget constrictions, they say, extra funds can always be found to entice black candidates.

The reason most commonly encountered for explaining the low percentage of black professors is that there is so small a pool of black graduate students that there is often no one available to fill open positions. In 1991, the most recent year for figures, 933 black men and women received doctoral degrees, which gave them 3.8 percent of the American total. In this connection, too, we are told of persons who might have turned into promising academics, but instead chose fields such as law and medicine or business administration.

Academic Knowledge

It is only later that ruminations arise about how many black candidates are judged to be “qualified” for faculty positions and promotions. What is being conveyed here means more than having won a Ph.D., although that is obviously the expected credential. More crucial is whether one has produced the kind of research and writing deemed appropriate by those who decide on hiring and tenure within the academic world.

What may be called “academic knowledge” is a very special corpus of information and analysis. While each discipline has its peculiar canons, all demand that to be regarded as scholarly or scientific, observations and interpretations must be sifted through an established methodological matrix.

Why, then, are black scholars less likely than others to be deemed scientific or scholarly? The crucial reason, as I suggested at the outset, is that what is deemed suitable academic knowledge has a historically white cast. Nor does this merely mean that the subject matter has European antecedents, although this is all but wholly so from poetry to philosophy to physics. At least equally at issue are the modes of exposition and reasoning, of intellectual analysis and style. In fact, these standards are set long before candidates finish graduate school or are rated for retention or promotion. Simply to start, let’s look at the first hurdles set for those seeking admission to competitive schools — standardized tests intended to assess how far a person has internalized the established modes and matrices of white higher education.

Why is there so visible a gap between black and white scores? Here, the causes are chiefly racial, since they stem largely from the segregation that affects even black youngsters from professional homes. Simply stated, the intellectual processes black children tend to learn differ from the ways “white” minds are expected to work. While it is
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possible to be bicultural, black analytical styles are often reinforced due to the limited time spent in the company of whites. Moreover, the persistence of residential and social segregation divides blacks from others at all class levels.

To be somewhat more specific, black intellectual approaches may rely on more discursive modes of analysis, as opposed to the more schematic linear method embodied in the multiple-choice matrix and — later on — the formats expected for academic research. This is why representatives of historically white institutions lament that they cannot find, let alone develop, qualified candidates for hiring and promotion.

Put another way, black academics are seen as failing to internalize and adapt to white mental ways. This expectation also helps to explain why so few black college graduates decide to enter Ph.D. programs. In their classrooms they got a taste of how knowledge must be rarified — and reified — to pass academic tests.

Nor am I sure that adopting multicultural conceptions of knowledge would end this impasse. Even now, when black scholars write on racial matters, they are judged by whether they have set their findings and interpretations in the established formats. Affirmative action will advance by only fractions of percentage points as long as intellectual assimilation is demanded, and — even when attempted — is deemed to be inadequate.

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Lack of Commitment

Derrick A. Bell Jr. has been the foremost advocate for increasing the number of African-American faculty at institutions of higher education. Currently a visiting professor at New York University School of Law, Bell made headlines across the nation as a result of his efforts to convince the administration of Harvard Law School to hire a woman of color to a faculty post. Bell, who was a tenured professor at Harvard, took a leave of absence from his post and refused to return until an appointment of a woman of color was made. After two years of leave, Harvard decided that Bell had resigned from his post.

Bell has also served as dean of the University of Oregon’s Law School and as an attorney at the Department of Justice and for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Bell received his bachelor's degree from Duquesne University and his LL.B. from the University of Pittsburgh.

Much to the distress of the faculty at Harvard, where he has taught since 1969, Bell has contended that racism in the United States must be viewed as a permanent institution almost totally resistant to the corrective forces of law and goodwill. He believes that blacks as lawyers and legal academics are almost permanently held back by such national stereotypes as Algonquin J. Calhoun in Amos and Andy with the result that the economy and the bar still tend to treat black lawyers as uneducated, ill-prepared, untrustworthy, and more dedicated to their own interests than those of their clients.

Two dozen years ago, there was a great upheaval among the colored lowlanders who asserted that discrimination based on color must be no more and that all institutions, including even the academies that had always been white, must be all-white no more. A strong and insistent demand was made for “integration” by which those who demanded it meant full and complete access by those who, for so long, had been excluded. This demand, it was said, could not be denied.

Those in the academy were very sly. As it turns out, they won the integration battle by seeming to concede defeat. When those demanding change grew close and their clamor could no longer be ignored, many academies, rather than manning the ramparts, simply opened up the gates. They went forth and urged that the best one or two of those long excluded be brought forward. When this happened, the selected ones were taken inside. The gates were closed, the clamor subsided. Those who had made the demands claimed victory, but only the most sharp-eyed observers could see any change. In the main, the academy went on as before.

Lesley College Minority Vita Bank

Lesley College, located in Cambridge, MA, is a leader in professional education and prepares students for careers in education, human services, management and the arts. Lesley College is composed of the Undergraduate School, the Graduate School and the School of Management and offers a variety of baccalaureate Master’s degree programs on its Cambridge campus and in local, regional, and national locations.

We are committed to achieving a racially, ethnically and culturally diverse workforce and we are currently accepting resumes for submission into a vita bank for faculty and administrative positions at all levels at the college.

People of color are invited to explore career possibilities at Lesley by submitting a resume along with a letter indicating your field of interest to: Human Resources, Vita Bank, Lesley College, 29 Everett St., Cambridge, MA 02138-2790. Lesley College is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

AUTUMN 1993
More Than Good Intentions

Phillip A. Griffiths is the director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. The recipient of numerous academic prizes, Griffiths is one of the nation’s most distinguished mathematics scholars. He was a Miller Fellow at the University of California, Berkeley, and has since held professorial positions at Princeton, Harvard, and Duke, where he served as provost. He is currently chairman of the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy, a joint committee of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine.

Unlike the increased participation of women and other minorities, the question of attracting talented blacks into academia, especially into the sciences, seems to fail to respond to good intentions and the usual incentives. It is always easier to put the blame “somewhere else,” but with a few notable exceptions our elementary and secondary school programs in math and science seem especially ill-suited to blacks.

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Ph.D. Education Needs Reform

Martin Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, is an economist by profession, with a wide expertise in a number of disciplines. Anderson has served in government as a special assistant to the President on policy development and on presidential advisory commissions on intelligence, economic policy, and arms control and disarmament. Anderson, who is the author of several books including his most recent, Impostors in the Temple — a critique of the American educational system — graduated from Dartmouth College and received master’s and doctorate degrees from MIT. Before going to Stanford, Anderson had held teaching positions at Dartmouth, MIT, Cambridge, and Columbia.

Why are so few blacks teaching at American universities, especially at the more elite, more powerful universities? Current wisdom seems to hold that the primary cause lies in discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions. But I suspect the answer lies deeper and is more subtle.

At the slightest hint of discrimination in connection with university faculty appointments, the immediate, confidently stated response will be: “We would like to hire more black men and women but there just aren’t enough of them receiving Ph.D.s in the areas of our interest and need.” Tough to quarrel with that reply. The hiring faculty, especially in the social sciences and humanities, are overwhelmingly left-liberal in their political orientations and, apparently, are more than willing to hire the blacks who have received their doctorates — if they could only find them.

In America there are relatively few blacks who earn their Ph.D.s each year. The raw numbers are discouraging. In 1988, for example, just 3.2 percent of the Ph.D. degrees awarded in economics — a grand total of 15 individuals — went to black Americans. In business, it was 2.8 percent, in history, 1.8 percent, engineering was only 1.5 percent, and computer science just 0.6 percent.

But the Ph.D. game may be rigged at an earlier level, rigged so that today’s faculty can vigorously and publicly protest their multicultural virtue while privately knowing there is no way they will ever have to deliver. While I was writing my last book, I came across a rather startling statistic about Ph.D. degrees. Many of us know that the time necessary to earn a Ph.D. has gradually lengthened in recent years. But do we know that after receiving a bachelor’s degree, the median time it takes to earn a Ph.D. is now 10.5 years? For women the median time to earn a Ph.D. has reached 12.5 years. The typical new Ph.D. is middle-aged before he or she even receives the degree.

But the time it takes for black Americans to earn the Ph.D. stretches out to 14.9 years. Is it any wonder that a rational black American might want to think twice, or thrice, before attempting to run that intellectual gauntlet? The cost — in the years of one’s life — is prohibitive. Black Ph.D. recipients could be in their late thirties or early forties before they even begin their academic careers. And that may be the good news. That’s the median black Ph.D. recipient. Half of those who get their degree take longer than 14.9 years.

Ph.D. Dropouts

There may be worse news to come. In 1992, a book entitled In Pursuit of the PhD was published by William Bowen, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Neil Rudenstine, president of Harvard University. One of the more startling findings in this path-breaking study of doctorate education in America is that fewer than half of all students who enter Ph.D. programs ever complete the degree. And those who drop out do not do so casually, but more likely, according to Bowen and Rudenstine, “after pursuing degrees for anywhere from six to twelve years.” The dropout rate for black Americans? Well, Bowen and Rudenstine don’t talk about that. They do note that the dropout rate for women is significantly higher than it is for men, but their curiosity did not carry them any further than that.

Unless and until the normal time to earn the Ph.D. is dramatically shortened from its current unreasonable levels of 10 to 15 years down to four or even three years, there will be a chronic shortage of black Americans at the top ranks of higher education, no matter what the promotion and hiring policies, no matter what anyone says. There are many causes for the small percentage of black Americans on the faculties of our colleges and universities but there is one that lies largely unexamined — the unconscionably long Ph.D. gauntlet to which we subject the best and brightest of our young men and women.