



Till Victory is Won

The African American Struggle for Higher Education in California

By

Walter R. Allen, Ph.D., Uma M. Jayakumar, Ph.D., and Ray Franke, M.A.

Executive Summary

In California and across the United States, the underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education is a stubbornly persistent problem. There are significant changes in California: demographic shifts in an era of anti-affirmative action legislation; disparate expenditures on public elementary education compared to other states and to expenditures on prison industry; and the paucity of Black and minority students/graduates from California's most prestigious colleges and universities. These changes signal ongoing challenges for African American efforts to gain access and success in California institutions of higher education.

California is a major player on the national and world stages. As a key U.S. gateway to Latin America and the Pacific Rim, a thriving media capital, a global financial center and home to one in eight Americans, California deserves special attention. The California Master Plan for public higher education provided a model emulated by states across the nation. It is reasonable—indeed imperative—to ask, “How has public higher education in California weathered the challenges of shifting demographic and economic tides at the beginning of a new millennium?”

In particular, “How have African Americans fared in the California system of higher education?” Historically, African Americans have been at the center of debates and efforts to broaden educational opportuni-

ties in the U.S. The empirical record shows dramatic gains for Blacks in educational access and achievement since slavery and Jim Crow segregation. However, the same record reveals persistent racial inequality in educational opportunities and achievement across the nation.

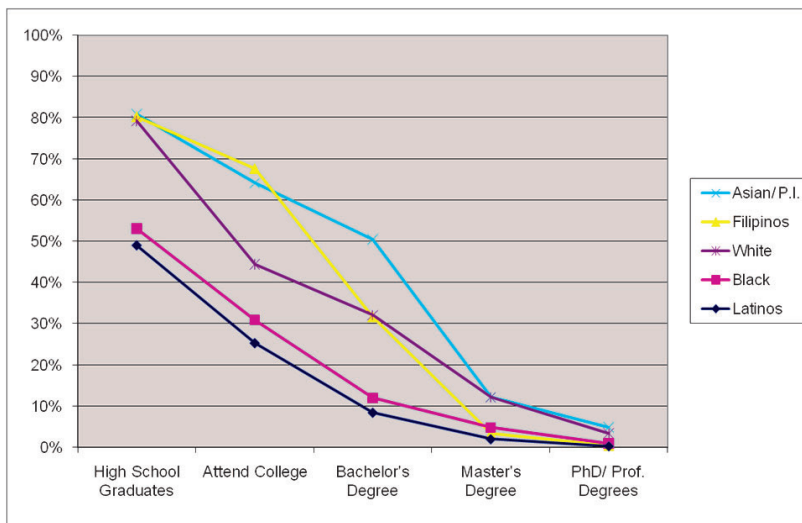
Our examination of the status of African Americans in California higher education opens broader dialogue related to educational equity, student access and achievement. High school graduates are increasingly diverse by race and ethnicity, however the K-16 system has not changed sufficiently to address educational needs of students with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and academic abilities. California continues to lose far too many students from the academic

pipeline connecting K-12 to higher education. Moreover, Black, Latino, Native American, male, immigrant and poor students are overrepresented among those whose dreams for a better life are dashed upon the shores of lost opportunity.¹

A major question is, “How do

we improve Black student access and success at critical points along the academic pipeline?” History shows African Americans are disproportionately excluded or underserved by California's higher education system. At the same time, Blacks are overrepresented among the state's poor and incarcerated. The affirmative action policies that were previously so successful in

Educational Pipeline Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity in California, 2004



¹ This is true for certain Asian subgroup populations as well, but because the data could not be disaggregated, we were unable to shed light on their experiences. For more on this topic see “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Facts, Not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight.” National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, and The College Board, 2008.

improving representation of Blacks and other disadvantaged students are now dismantled or greatly restricted. Stunning declines in African American student enrollment, post SP-1 and Proposition 209, signal reversal of the substantial progress Blacks made in California higher education after the Civil Rights Movement and hard-fought court battles for access and equity.

It is a cruel irony—and testament to the changing yet constant contours of race and inequity in American society—that African Americans, who were at the forefront of the successful struggle to open America’s colleges and universities to broader, more diverse participation, now face exclusion from California’s and the nation’s most prestigious institutions. Although White women and Asian Americans have been the nation’s main beneficiaries of affirmative action policies, the discourse of the anti-affirmative action movement continues to focus primarily on Blacks and Latinos. Moreover, there is continued silence about other commonly practiced forms of affirmative action in higher education (e.g., legacies, athletic recruitment, discretionary admits, Veterans’ preferences, special-talent admits), left unchallenged and unchanged by the anti-affirmative action movement. Most striking is the pronounced dominance and overrepresentation of Whites across the board, rooted in this society’s history of White supremacy, which remains largely unchanged and essentially uncontested. The extreme racial advantages accruing to White men—and increasingly to White women—in California’s system of higher education persist even as the state’s racial demography undergoes profound changes.

The persistent overall dominance of Whites, and the increasingly Asian and White face of the University of California, parallels the continued overrepresentation of economically affluent, privileged students on the nation’s most prestigious public campuses. Meanwhile, enrollment and graduation of economically disadvantaged students—of any race or gender—continue to decline precipitously at UC. Racial, ethnic, social, economic and educational apartheid in California higher education is further cruel irony, given that publicly supported higher education in the U.S. was mandated to expand college access and open real opportunities for

upward mobility to African Americans, the poor and other excluded groups. Paradoxically, in California the poor subsidize higher education for the rich. Poor parents work hard to pay taxes that support colleges and universities Black, Latino and poor children have little hope of ever attending. Missing from affirmative action debates over California higher education and emerging patterns of racial, ethnic and class apartheid in the state’s most prestigious institutions are questions about how this all relates to historic and present-day patterns of racial, ethnic and class privilege and inequality. Equitable educational access and opportunity to succeed is not available for all racial, ethnic, gender

and class groups in this state. The chronic, persistent underrepresentation of African Americans in California higher education—linked to Black segregation and concentration in the state’s lowest performing, lowest resourced schools—continues to vex and plague the state, providing evidence of the failed promise of true democracy and equality for all citizens.

The data used for this report are drawn from information collected by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) and the California Department of Education (CDE) on patterns and trends in California high schools, community colleges, the California State University, the University of

California, and private universities and colleges. The report describes patterns and trends in six areas: academic preparation at the secondary level, undergraduate and graduate enrollment, undergraduate and graduate degree completion, and participation in the teaching profession.

The most significant findings are:

College begins in kindergarten.

Using a river or pipeline analogy, we show the chronic underrepresentation of Blacks in California higher education is due to historical, deep, systemic and persistent racial inequities in K-12 educational opportunities, and restricted flow or access into postsecondary programs.

Blacks are a significant presence in California.

California ranks fifth—after New York, Texas, Georgia, and Florida—in the total number of African American residents. California leads the nation in the total num-

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ber of African Americans enrolled in higher education. Paradoxically, the Black proportion of the state's total population is among the lowest in the nation. The same is true for Blacks' proportion of total college enrollment in the state. Without aggressive, effective intervention, African Americans will likely continue to constitute a declining proportion of California's total college population; a trend that may even accelerate in the future.

Black high school graduates are not graduating from college at rates equal to their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers.

In 2004, 53% of all Black students initially enrolled in the 9th grade eventually graduated high school, but only 10% went on to graduate from the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), or an independent institution (AICCU). By contrast, 81% of Asian/Pacific Islander students and 79% of Whites enrolled in the 9th grade graduated high school. Of these, 50% of

Asians/Pacific Islanders and 32% of Whites went on to graduate from a California college or university. Overall, African American males and females represented 6.3% and 7.4%, respectively, of the total 2004 undergraduate enrollment in California institutions of higher education. By comparison, Black males and Black females were 7.5% of total high school graduates statewide.

Higher education in California parallels a racial apartheid system.

Whites and Asians disproportionately enroll at UC, and Blacks and Latinos most often attend CSU and California Community Colleges (CCC). The University of California system qualifies for designation as an Asian-Serving Institution, since overall system enrollment (and enrollments on 8 of 10 campuses) exceeds the threshold of 25% established to define Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Interestingly, CSU approaches the qualification as a Hispanic-Serving Institution based on almost 22% over-

all Latino enrollment across all campuses in the system in 2005. Further, 10 out of 23 CSU campuses surpassed the 25% threshold; four additional institutions had 20% or more Latino enrollment; one CSU campus can be designated as an Asian-Serving Institution; and one institution as an African American-Serving Institution.

Higher education opportunities in California reflect extreme socioeconomic inequities.

The University of California system—a system funded by taxes collected from all Californians—disproportionately enrolls the children of wealthy upper- and middle-class families (SAIRO, 2004). Student enrollment in the Community College system is disproportionately from lower income and working-class families. Paradoxically, the poor subsidize higher education for the rich.

Proposition 209, which banned consideration of race, has had a disproportionately negative effect on Black participation in California public higher education.

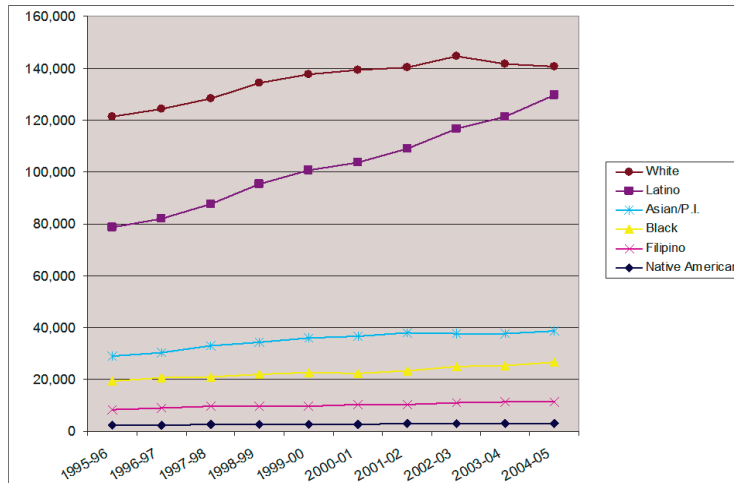
From 1990 to 1999,

the overall pattern shows increases in earned BA/BS, MA/MS and doctoral degrees for Blacks in public and independent institutions. However, since 1995 and the ban against affirmative action, Black enrollment in UC and CSU has declined. This update reveals the accuracy of the prediction made in this report's first edition, *Stony the Road We Trod* (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Teranishi, 2002), of a dramatic reversal in Black degree attainment. With the exception of baccalaureate degrees, Black degree attainment at UC has declined since 1996, and even with regard to baccalaureate attainment, growth has slowed considerably compared to other race/ethnic groups.

The California Department of Corrections incarcerates mostly poor, uneducated inmates of color.

In California, there are three times more Black men in prison than attending four-year colleges and universities. Black males are only 3% of the total state population yet comprise 29% of the prison population. The

California Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 1995–2005



annual cost per prison inmate equals college tuition for six students (California Department of Corrections, 2006). Between 1997 and 2007, state spending on criminal justice increased to \$14 billion and grew at an average annual rate of 10%. This annual growth rate outpaced total state spending and was twice the growth rate for higher education spending (California Department of Corrections, 2007).

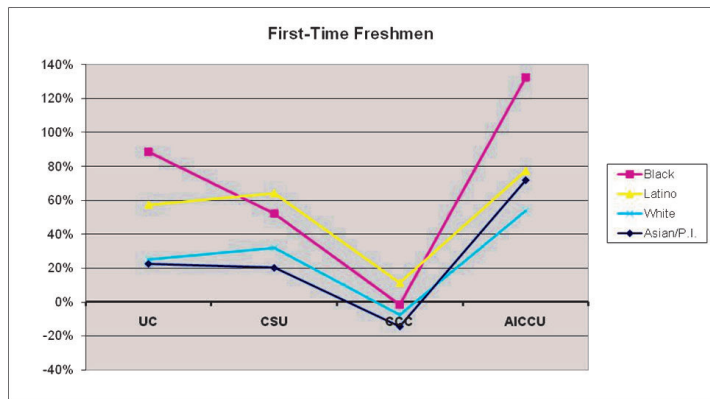
A sizeable and growing gender gap exists in California higher education.

Without exception, across all sectors of California higher education (UC, CSU, CCC), females outnumber males in college eligibility, high school graduation and college enrollment. Women also outnumber men across all racial/ethnic groups. In 2005, Black females outnumbered Black male undergraduates at UC (+63%), and CSU (+75%). In 2004, they outnumbered their male peers at independent institutions of higher education (+70%). In CCC, the numbers are closer, but Black women still outnumbered Black men by 50%.

In the past, California's meteoric economic prosperity was fueled by an excellent, accessible system of public higher education.

State spending on public higher education is a prudent investment in the development of human potential,

Gender Gaps in First-Time Freshman by Race/Ethnicity, 1995–2005



which pays sizeable economic, social and cultural dividends. Unfortunately, the response to the pressures and politics of skyrocketing demand for postsecondary education has been to erect more barriers to access. Failure to expand higher education opportunities to keep pace with skyrocketing

demand has contributed to the extreme underrepresentation of African Americans in the UC and CSU systems. The ban on race-based affirmative action greatly reduced African American student admission, enrollment and graduation in the UC and the CSU systems. Latinos, Filipinos and Native Americans were also negatively affected. The diminished, declining opportunities for Blacks and other underrepresented students of color in California higher education threaten the state's economic, democratic and cultural vibrancy.

Till Victory is Won is a joint publication of:
CHOICES: Access, Equity and Diversity in Higher Education
 and
The College Access Project for African Americans (CAPAA)
 The complete report is available online at
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 To order printed copies contact CHOICES at:
 UCLA/GSEIS
 8342 Mathematical Sciences Bldg.
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521
 Tel: 310/206-7107, Fax: 310-825-7138
 Email: wallen@ucla.edu

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 The African American Struggle for
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 A new report from:
 CHOICES
 UCLA Graduate School of Education and
 Information Studies
 PO Box. 951521
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521