



## WHY RACE?

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREGROUNDING RACE AND ETHNICITY IN  
ACHIEVING EQUITY ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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*Cheryl D. Ching*

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*Why Race?* is a resource designed for practitioners who, in looking at issues of equity, are confronted with the question of why equity should be understood in terms of race rather than income. This resource aims to provide participants with responses to common questions regarding the focus on racial equity. It features a vignette between a college president and a Center for Urban Education Equity Scorecard™ team member, highlighting the conversations that can occur between higher education practitioners.

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## PREFACE

For more than a decade the Center for Urban Education (CUE) has been developing the Equity Scorecard™, a groundbreaking action research and inquiry process, which has been conducted in over eighty colleges and universities in ten states. We've had the privilege of interacting with dedicated change agents—program staff who work directly with students, faculty and academic deans, college presidents and chancellors, and system leaders—on those campuses as they have engaged in inquiry to reduce inequities in college participation and outcomes among racial/ethnic groups.

One question we've been asked many times is “Why focus on race?” This question is posed by some who feel uncomfortable talking about issues of race and equity in higher education and by others who point to issues of equity among income groups as the main issue for concern. It is also posed by many who feel that colleges and universities have not done enough to address racial discrimination in higher education and struggle to express their point of view without eliciting a defensive response.

We are pleased that Cheryl Ching, a CUE-affiliated doctoral student in the Rossier School of Education's PhD program in Urban Education Policy, has written this report to serve as a resource for communication among college and university practitioners as they grapple with the question of “Why race?” We believe that the prevailing norms of “race muteness” and “color blindness” are a central part of the problem creating the educational inequities so many change agents wish to address. Without discussions of race and racism, equity cannot be achieved.

We invite you to share this report with colleagues to begin, inform, or renew discussions about race and equity that you may be engaged in at your institution. It is available for download from our web site at: [cue.usc.edu/research/briefs\\_reports\\_papers.html](http://cue.usc.edu/research/briefs_reports_papers.html).

For other resources from CUE on issues of race and equity, please refer to our web site at [cue.usc.edu](http://cue.usc.edu) or email us at [rsocue@usc.edu](mailto:rsocue@usc.edu).

Sincerely,

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Co-Director, Center for Urban Education



## INTRODUCTION: WHY RACE?

Practitioners working to address equity, such as Equity Scorecard participants, including Evidence Team members, are often confronted with the question: “Why race?” Related to that question is another query which is sometimes explicitly asked, other times implicitly inferred: “Why not focus on income?” If one understands the phrase “equity in higher education” as creating opportunities for the equal access and success of historically underrepresented students, then low-income students, as well as racial and ethnic minorities, would comprise the target population.

This report outlines the **historical and social contexts that make race a vital part of any equity discussion**. These points, outlined below, are discussed in greater detail later in the report and are examined through the lens of a conversation between an equity-minded practitioner (Bensimon, 2007) and someone bringing a “color-blind” approach to equity. For more information and case studies of equity-minded inquiry on college campuses see Bensimon and Malcom (2012).

### *WHY RACE MUST BE PART OF EQUITY DISCUSSIONS*

- *Race is visible.*
- *Racial and ethnic minorities have been legally prohibited from attending colleges and universities—low income students have not.*
- *Financial aid policies exist to remove barriers to admission for low-income students; no similar policy specifically targets students of color.*
- *Class- or socioeconomic-status based affirmative action favors low-income White students.*
- *Race impacts the development of social capital crucial for educational opportunity.*
- *Not focusing on race makes it more difficult to fully understand the impact of race on educational opportunity.*

Some policymakers and institutional leaders are reluctant to adopt equity indicators such as race or ethnicity because they seem inconsistent with the “color-blindness” and “equal treatment” models operating in today’s higher education system (Bensimon & Bishop, 2012). Yet the populations most impacted by inequalities in higher education are racial and ethnic



minorities. College completion data show that African American, Latina/o, and American Indian students are the least likely to attain a bachelor's degree. As shown in Figure 1, African American males who start a four-year degree finish in six years at a rate of 48%. The rate for Latino males is 46% compared to 69% for White male students (Ross et al., 2012, p. 184).

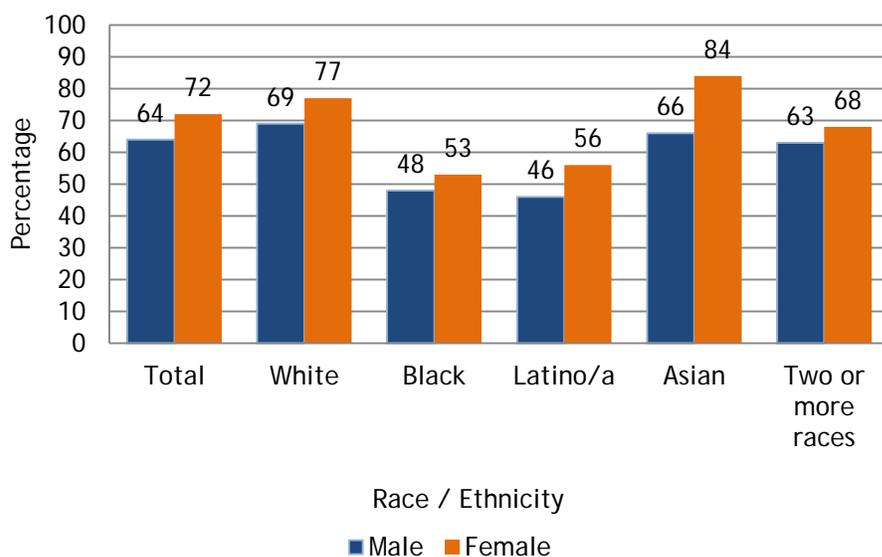


Figure 1. Percentage of 2003-04 full-time, beginning postsecondary students who first attended a 4-year institution and attained a bachelor's degree by June 2009, by race/ethnicity and sex: 2009<sup>1</sup>.

The gap in bachelor degree attainment is an important indicator of racial and ethnic inequality. Inequalities in higher education have a negative impact on the economic and social fabric of our nation in matters such as unemployment rates, welfare costs, voter turnout, income levels, and healthcare. Additionally, inequalities jeopardize our nation's ability to produce the degrees that secure our position in a global economy. By not focusing

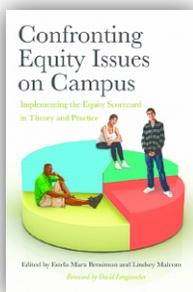
<sup>1</sup> Reproduced by permission from Ross et al., *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), figure 37.1. Note: Total includes other racial and ethnic groups not shown separately in the figure. Estimates include students enrolled in Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Reporting standards for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and American Indians/Alaska Natives were not met; therefore, data for these groups are not shown in the figure. Data weighted by WTA000. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/06/09).



on race and ethnicity in college access, retention, and graduation, we run the risk of further exacerbating the already grave inequalities in our society.

An important part of any equity process, including the Equity Scorecard™, is to ensure that all campus constituents agree on the goal of achieving equitable student outcomes. Practice has shown that there may be some who believe that a “color-blind” or “equal treatment” approach is more appropriate than a focus on race.

*ON THE NEXT PAGE IS A SHORT VIGNETTE WHICH MODELS THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN A COLLEGE PRESIDENT AND A MEMBER OF AN EQUITY SCORECARD TEAM. THROUGHOUT THE STORY THERE ARE ENDNOTE-STYLE NUMBERS, WHICH LINK TO DETAILED EXPLANATIONS AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE ABOUT THE POINT THAT IS MADE.*



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## *Additional Resources from the Center for Urban Education*

### *Confronting Equity Issues: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and Practice*

A presentation of the underlying concepts and race-conscious expertise that informs the Equity Scorecard process. Available from Stylus Publishing.

### *We Have Goals: Now What?*

Article in the December 2012 Issue of Change Magazine. Access it at [cue.usc.edu/research/briefs\\_reports\\_papers.html](http://cue.usc.edu/research/briefs_reports_papers.html)

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## FOR FURTHER READING

- Dowd, A. C., Sawatzky, M., & Korn, R. (2011). Theoretical foundations and a research agenda to validate measures of intercultural effort. *Review of Higher Education*, 35(1), 17-44.
- Dowd, A. C., Sawatzky, M., Rall, R. M., & Bensimon, E. M. (2012). Action research: An essential practice for Twenty-First Century assessment. In R. T. Palmer, D. C. Maramba & M. Gasman (Eds.), *Fostering success of ethnic and racial minorities in STEM: The role of Minority Serving Institutions*. New York: Routledge.
- Witham, K., & Bensimon, E. M. (2012). Creating a culture of inquiry around equity and student success. In S. D. Museus & U. M. Jayakumar (Eds.), *Creating campus cultures: Fostering success among racially diverse student populations* (pp. 46-67). New York: Routledge.



## UNDERSTANDING WHY EQUITY REQUIRES A FOCUS ON RACE

*Maria Turner is the president of Los Angeles College. David Anderson is a faculty member in the English department and one of the two Equity Scorecard Evidence Team leaders. Maria receives updates on the project from the chair of the English department, who is also on the team, but this is the first time Maria and David are meeting specifically to discuss the equity work.*

Maria and David meet in Maria's office to discuss the inquiry findings of the Equity Scorecard. The meeting is prompted by comments that several administrators and department heads have made to Maria about the project's focus on race and ethnicity.

"There have been questions from people who aren't on the Evidence Team as to why the college is doing the Equity Scorecard. In particular, they want to know why we are using a process that privileges race over other indicators, such as income. It seems that those who are questioning the Equity Scorecard process are concerned that the college is not treating all students equally. Wouldn't a 'color-blind' approach be fairer?"

"I can see where those questions are coming from as they emerged in discussions among Equity Scorecard participants, too," David replies. "Some team members felt that income would be a better indicator to focus on since they felt that low-income students are for the most part racial minorities."

"That seems reasonable, and would also ensure that we don't overlook White low-income students."

"Reasonable, yes, but as it turns out, not entirely correct. Blacks and Latinos are minorities and so, by definition, they make up a minority of most population subgroups, including low-income youth [7]." (see page 16 for further explanation)

David explains that the economist Thomas Kane conducted a study of race in college admissions. Using data on high school graduates in 1992, he showed that students from families with incomes of less than \$20,000 are 47% Black and Hispanic<sup>2</sup> and 53% White or non-Hispanic.

"Well, that's close to 50-50," Maria said. "Isn't that an argument for a low-income focus?"

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2 The terms Hispanic and Latino/a are used in this report to retain the original language from the research studies cited.



David shakes his head. “If you don’t investigate further, perhaps. Among students who place in the top tenth of their high school class only 17.3% are Black and Hispanic, while 82.7% are White. That means that if a college has an applicant pool of low-income students who were in the top tenth of their class, only 1 in 6 will be Black or Hispanic.”

“Interesting, though we don’t typically recruit students from the top tenth of their high school graduating class, so that conclusion doesn’t exactly hold for us.”

“Fair enough,” David agrees, “but we use SAT scores in our admissions process and research has repeatedly shown that SATs are more stratified by race than by income.”

David cites data from 1992, which show the average SAT score for Black students with family income of greater than \$70,000 per year was 854, while the SAT scores for White students with family income of less than \$20,000 was 879 [7].

“It is astonishing that low-income White students score higher than middle-income Black students on the SATs,” David says. “That signals to me that race is a greater disadvantage than income. Another study shows differences ranging from 40 to 80 SAT points between Blacks, Asians, and Whites who belong to the same socioeconomic class [3].”

“That is interesting.” Maria pauses to consider, but then shakes her head. “There are some pretty loud voices on our campus, at our peer institutions, and at national policy organizations that are calling for class-based rather than race-based affirmative action.”

“Did you know that two class-based affirmative action advocates recently made a strong case for race?” David asks.

He explains that Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl at Georgetown make a strong case for keeping a focus on race. In a 2010 study published by the Century Foundation—perhaps one of the strongest advocates for class-based affirmative action—Carnevale and Strohl state that there are no good empirical reasons to get rid of race-based affirmative action. Their research demonstrates that when combined, race and socioeconomic status are associated with educational disadvantages that are hard to overcome [7].

“How, exactly, did Carnevale and Strohl empirically calculate this ‘disadvantage’?” Maria asks.

“Carnevale and Strohl call their calculation the ‘cost of disadvantage.’ They use a regression of race and income on SAT scores. They showed that students in the lowest income quartile are predicted to score 13 points less than those in the highest income quartile. Black students, however, are predicted to score 56 points less than White students. It’s quite an



interesting study, and well worth closer examination. I can email you a copy of the chapter [3].”

“Please do. In the meantime, tell me this: how have enrollments of minority students at institutions like ours changed over time?”

Los Angeles College is in the “very competitive” category of institutions with regards to admissions selectivity. Citing Carnevale and Strohl, David provides the following information about “very competitive” colleges and universities. The underrepresentation of Black students went from 5% in 1994 to 8% in 2006. For Latina/o students, the underrepresentation figures were 4% and 10% respectively. In contrast, White students were overrepresented by 11% in 1994 and 22% in 2006 [3].

Maria nods at his explanation. “Those figures make sense to me as I look at our student body. I still can’t shake the nagging feeling, however, that we lose something by focusing only on race.”

“I understand your hesitation, but my own experiences, coupled with the research I’ve done during the Equity Scorecard process, and the studies I’ve seen on national datasets, have convinced me that race needs to remain a distinct and prominent factor in admissions. We need to acknowledge that minority students, particularly those who attend schools in urban, low-income neighborhoods, have a more difficult time cultivating the relationships needed to advance their transition to college [4]. And practically speaking, we have financial aid policies and programs like Pell grants that exist precisely to remove barriers to admission for low-income students and act as affirmative action for those students. There is no well-accepted policy specifically targeting students of color [5].”

“What do you consider affirmative action?”

“As we both know, race-based affirmative action has been attacked since such policies were introduced. The Fisher case is only the latest of many legal battles, which seem to arise with more frequency. It’s only been about a decade since the cases against the University of Michigan. I do want to say that when race-based affirmative action policies are abolished, the results are not good. The state of California passed Proposition 209 in 1996, which prohibits state institutions—including the UC and CSU systems—from using race-, sex-, or ethnicity-conscious policies in employment, contracts, and education. When the UC system studied the effects of Proposition 209 on their student body, they found a significant decline in the admission of Black, Latina and Latino, and American Indian students, particularly at the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses [6].”



“OK, fine. But I’ve also heard the argument that affirmative action does a disservice to minority students whose SAT scores and high school GPAs are—how shall I put it—not up to snuff. That when the students are in college, they underperform and, in some cases, drop out altogether.”

“Studies have indeed shown that academic performance is stratified by race. William Bowen and Derek Bok in *The Shape of the River* demonstrates that Black and White students who enter college with the same combined SAT score do not perform at the same level in college, as measured by cumulative GPA [9]. Also, the narrowing of the Black-White gap in college graduation has slowed in the last decade [10].”

“Doesn’t that prove my point?”

“It does, but realize that affirmative action serves to increase the access of students who have been traditionally underrepresented in American higher education. And not just underrepresented, but students who—because of the color of their skin—have been legally kept out of predominantly White colleges and universities like ours.”

David explains that while low-income students may have been effectively barred from going to college because of inability to pay, there have never been any laws against the admission of students based on income. Journalist Ted Gup says that higher education needs affirmative action so that colleges and universities can, as he says, “fully catch up with the rest of society.” What Gup means is that institutions of higher education have the dual responsibility of reflecting the diverse makeup of society and preparing students to engage comfortably in a diverse world [2].

“Well, preparing students for the world is certainly part of the mission of our college,” Maria says.

David adds, “I think it is also critically important to add that while affirmative action addresses the issue of access, it is not designed to guarantee the academic performance of the students it benefits.” David informs Maria that the Equity Scorecard Evidence Team is currently looking at college access from an equity perspective, but in the second year of the process, will look at retention, completion, and academic excellence. “In fact, admitting students, on whatever grounds, does not guarantee high achievement. We know that. That is where we come in. It is our job to serve all our students in an equitable manner so that all of them have the opportunity and ability to succeed.”

Maria agrees. “That’s a good point. We do want to serve all our students well, regardless of their race or socioeconomic background. This is why we are doing the Equity Scorecard.”



David continues, “And we must also consider the fact that if the number of minority students in higher education declines, so will the number of minorities in leadership positions, academia, government, business, and other fields. You know, William Bowen and Neil Rudenstine, in the Mellon Foundation’s 2002 annual report, note that the American Bar Association, American Medical Association, and industrial leaders like GM, Microsoft, and American Airlines, endorsed affirmative action policies in colleges and universities [11].”

“We definitely want all our students to be prepared for the workforce.” Maria takes time to consider what they’ve talked about. “Thank you, David, for speaking with me and for bringing all this information to my attention.”

“I want to make two final points to the question of why we should focus on race. First, race—unlike income—is visible to the eye. And whether we like it or not, we make judgments—consciously or unconsciously—based on what we see. Legal scholar Patricia Williams recalls an incident on the train from New York to DC when she was traveling with two other Black colleagues and one White colleague. She says that the conductor did not believe that the passenger who had yet to offer her ticket was the White colleague. He kept on insisting that it must be one of the Black people in the group. Mind you, the four were all lawyers on their way to a conference [1].”

“It is incredible that such acts of discrimination continue to happen in everyday life.”

“They do, and we can’t forget that. The final point I want to make comes out of an ethnographic study of a low-income, racially mixed high school in California. The researcher found that not focusing on race makes it difficult to understand the impact it has on educational opportunity. She recounts an interview with a teacher who described his advanced class as comprising mainly of Chinese and Filipinos, but very few Latinos, African Americans, or Samoans. At the time of the interview, the school was not tracking course-taking by ethnicity, but the teacher wanted to do just that. It was unacceptable to him that Latinos, African Americans, or Samoans were not taking advanced classes [8].”

“Again, it strikes me that our college is right to undertake the Equity Scorecard process. Please keep me in the loop as the work unfolds.”

*TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DETAILS DESCRIBED IN THE STORY AND COMPLETE ACCOUNTS OF THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS THAT MAKE RACE VITAL TO THE EQUITY DISCUSSION.*



## RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE FOCUS ON RACE



**RACE IS VISIBLE; INCOME IS A "STATUS" THAT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT TO THE EYE**

Patricia Williams (1997) writes:

I was riding the train from New York to Washington, D.C., some years ago on my way to some lawyers' conference or other; I was accompanied by two black colleagues. An hour into the trip, the train stopped in the city of Philadelphia. A young white woman got on whom my colleagues knew. She was also a lawyer, headed to the same conference. She joined us, sitting among us in a double row of seats that faced each other. A little while later, the conductor came along. The new woman held up her ticket, but the conductor did not seem to see her. He saw four of us seated and only three ticket stubs.

"One of you hasn't paid," he said, staring at me, then at each of my two black friends. ...

"Which one of you hasn't paid?" he asked again. Two of us kept on saying, "Our receipts, see?" and the white woman, speaking *very* clearly said, "Here. I am trying to give you my ticket."

The conductor was scowling. He still did not hear. ...

It was the longest time before the conductor stopped staring in all the wrong directions. It was the longest time before he heard the new woman, pressing her ticket upon him, her voice reaching him finally as though from a great distance, passing through light-years of understanding as if from another universe. The realization that finally lit his face was like the dawning of a great surprise" (pp. 14-15).



**RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES HAVE BEEN LEGALLY PROHIBITED FROM ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

***NO SUCH LEGAL BARRIER HAS EVER EXISTED FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS***

The Postbellum period saw Jim Crow laws and the "separate, but equal" doctrine that justified racial segregation. The expansion of the Morrill Act in 1890, which supported the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), effectively instituted



the “separate, but equal” doctrine in American higher education by giving states the choice to admit students without regard to race or to create separate institutions for non-White students. The Morrill Act states:

Provided, That no money shall be paid out under this act to all State and Territory for the support and maintenance of a college where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students, but the establishment and maintenance of such colleges separately for white and colored students shall be held to be a compliance with the provisions of this act if the funds received in such State or Territory be equitably divided as hereinafter set forth: Provided, That in any State in which there has been one college established in pursuance of the act of July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and also in which an educational institution of like character has been established, or may be hereafter established, and is now aided by such State from its own revenue for the education of colored students in agriculture and the mechanic arts, however named or styled, or whether or not it has received money heretofore under the act to which this act is an amendment, the legislature of such a State may propose and report to the Secretary of the Interior a just and equitable division of the fund to be received under this act between one college for white students and one institution for colored students established as aforesaid, which shall be divided into two parts and paid accordingly, and thereupon such institution for colored students shall be entitled to the benefits of this act and subject to its provisions, as much as it would have been if it had been included under the act of eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and the fulfillment of the foregoing provisions shall be taken as a compliance with the provision in reference to separate colleges for white and colored students (as cited in Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2012, p. 13).

Not until *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954 was the “separate, but equal” doctrine legally overturned. Since then, American colleges and universities have had to confront a past of racial segregation, discrimination, and quotas. Journalist Ted Gup (2012, para. 9-12) writes:

We live in a diverse society and are better for it. We seek diversity not merely to right old wrongs or balance the ledger of our collective conscience, but also because it is an integral part of the process of building great institutions of higher learning. ...The arguments against reverse discrimination, taken out of context, are indeed compelling. But the truth is that the admissions process is, by definition, an act of discrimination, as well it should be. If by bias we mean deliberately creating an environment to maximize the educational experience and to create a community that will ultimately serve the nation and world at large, then yes, that is what we should



be about. ...[T]he composition of a class and a campus is a critical part of institutional excellence, no less than the choice of texts or curriculum. ...I do not pretend to know how much diversity is enough. What I do know is that in 2012, our colleges have yet to fully catch up with the rest of society, to reflect its true breadth, to prepare students to be comfortable in a nation that is diverse ethnically, racially, politically, and economically. In moving from prejudice to preference, we are simply acknowledging the arc of history and embracing a change that has already embraced America.



## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IS NOT COLOR-BLIND

Together, socioeconomic status and race are associated with an increased level of disadvantage. Improving socioeconomic status is correlated with an increase in test scores, but gaps persist between Black and White students. Black students in families who move from low- to middle-income status continue to be more disadvantaged than White middle-class students (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010).

- Case 1: SAT scores are more stratified by race than socioeconomic class.
  - Citing Takagi (1995), Tierney (1997) points out that “class is not a proxy for race or gender ... racism and sexism still exist.... [T]here are differences that ranged from 40 to 80 points on the SAT among Blacks, Asians, and Whites of the same socioeconomic class... [I]f we substitute class for race, then more Whites will be admitted than Blacks, Asians, or Hispanics” (p. 190).
  - Carnevale and Strohl (2010) calculate the “cost of disadvantage” using OLS regressions of race and income on SAT scores. In their model, students in the lowest income quartile are predicted to score 13 points less than those in the highest income quartile. Black students are predicted to score 56 points less than White students (pp. 170-171).
- Case 2: Access to college is more stratified by race than by socioeconomic class.
  - Using data from Bastedo and Jacquette (2009), Carnevale and Strohl (2010) show that the overrepresentation of White students at competitive institutions has increased from 1994 to 2006 while the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students at those same institutions has increased during the same time period.



	Most / Highly competitive		Very competitive		Competitive		Less / Non-competitive	
	1994	2006	1994	2006	1994	2006	1994	2006
Black	-7%	-9%	-5%	-8%	+3%	0%	-1%	+14%
Hispanic	-5%	-9%	-4%	-10%	-6%	-8%	-4%	-6%
White	+6%	+15%	+11%	+22%	+5%	+13%	7%	-1%

Figure 2. Summary of Carnevale and Strohl (2010), figures 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13. (See Appendix for figures 3.10-3.13.)



#### RACE IMPACTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL CRUCIAL FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Teranishi and Briscoe (2006) examine the ways in which minority students are able to, or hindered from, developing the social capital necessary to ease their path to college. The authors define social capital as the “set of relations among persons in a society” (p. 596) and demonstrate how race mitigates the ability of minority students to “make and maintain relationships” (p. 601) that advance their high school-to-college transition. For example, minority students’ relationship with teachers or guidance counselors tends to be defined by disciplinary action rather than college guidance. In some cases, no relationship exists since guidance counselors are simply overworked and unavailable—Fitzsimmons (1991) finds that the average counselor-to-student ratio in such schools was 1:740 (as cited in Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). Minority students are left to extract information about college from peers, siblings, or parents who may or may not have gone to college themselves, thereby limiting what these students know and understand about higher education.



## 5

FINANCIAL AID POLICIES EXIST AND ARE STRUCTURED TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO ADMISSION FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

*THERE IS NOT A SIMILAR, WELL-ACCEPTED POLICY SPECIFICALLY TARGETING STUDENTS OF COLOR*

Colleges can use well-established financial aid tools, such as Pell Grants and low-interest education loans, to remove access barriers for low-income students. Especially with affirmative action policies coming under fire and, in some states disappearing, there is no analogous policy or tool that focuses specifically on improving the access of minority students.

## 6

THE REMOVAL OF RACE-BASED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICIES HAS RESULTED IN THE DECLINE IN ADMISSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDENTS

*ESPECIALLY AT SELECTIVE INSTITUTIONS*

The passage of Proposition 209 in California prohibits state institutions from using race-, sex-, or ethnic-conscious policies in employment, contracts, and education. The University of California system conducted a study to understand the impact of Proposition 209 on its collective student body from 1995 to 2002. Results show that “race-neutral policies [led] to a substantial decline in the proportion of entering students who are African American, American Indian, and Latino.” In particular, “underrepresented students remain a substantially smaller proportion of those admitted to and enrolled at the University’s most selective campuses—UC Berkeley and UCLA—than they were before the elimination of race-conscious policies” (University of California, 2003, p. 1).

## 7

CLASS- OR SOCIOECONOMIC-STATUS BASED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DOES NOT GENERATE THE SAME OUTCOMES AS RACE-BASED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Low- and middle-income Black students would be disadvantaged by a “class, not race” college admissions policy (Gutmann, 1996). Hacker demonstrates that in 1992, the average SAT score for Black students with family income of greater than \$70,000 per year was 854, while the SAT scores for White students with family income of less than \$20,000 was 879 (as cited in



Rosen, 1995). Rosen (1995) argues that this discrepancy in SAT scores “suggests that need-based preferences, honestly applied, would replace middle-class black students with lower-class white students.”

“[B]lacks and Hispanics are a minority of the population and, as a result, are a minority of most subgroups of the population, including low-income youth” (Kane, 1998, p. 448-449). Using National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data on high school graduates in 1992, Kane demonstrates that students from families with incomes of less than \$20,000 are 47% Black and Hispanic (280,100 of 596,300), and 53% White or non-Hispanic (316,200 of 596,300). When considering only those students who place in the top tenth of their class, only 17.3% are Black and Hispanic (2,400 of 14,200), while 82.7% are White or non-Hispanic (11,700 of 14,200). Thus, if a college considers in their applicant pool low-income students in the top tenth of their class, only 1 in 6 will be Black or Hispanic.

While Carnevale and Strohl (2010) assert an emphasis on socioeconomic-based affirmative action, they at the same time “do not find good empirical reasons to abandon race-based or ethnically based affirmative action, either as a separate strategy or as a factor in class-based affirmative action” (p. 166). Race and socioeconomic status combine to create educational disadvantages that are especially hard to overcome. Indeed, “[a]ffirmative action based solely on socioeconomic status ignores the very real disadvantages suffered by racial minorities at all income levels” (p. 167).



## NOT FOCUSING ON RACE MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND FULLY THE IMPACT OF RACE ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

In an ethnographic study of a low-income, racially mixed high school in California, Pollock (2004) finds that implementing color-blind approaches leads to inequities broken down along ethnic lines. For example, one teacher interviewed about course-taking in his department stated that “it’s almost all Chinese and Filipinos” in the advanced classes, with “[v]ery few Latinos, African-Americans, or Samoans.” The teacher expressed a wish to track students by ethnicity in order to “have more Latinos, African-Americans, and Samoans take advanced courses” (p. 135).



Pollock suggests:

We need to take the time to analyze the details of how race actually still matters to the complex local systems of opportunity in our communities.... This will most likely require discussing how ... complexities of unequal opportunity in contemporary America play out in local inequality formations .... After clarifying the arrangement of local opportunity, we must debate when actions targeting specific groups are necessary, and when such actions oversimplify or neglect wider patterns of race, class, or language. We must also debate when discarding race analysis prematurely neglects the continuing ways in which opportunities are racially unequal (p. 216).



## ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN COLLEGE IS STRATIFIED BY RACE

Black and White students who, arguably, bring similar academic potential to college do not achieve at the same level while in college. Bowen and Bok (1998) show that Black and White students who enter college with the same combined SAT score do not perform at the same level in college, as measured by cumulative GPA. Black students with SAT scores above 1300 rank in the 36<sup>th</sup> percentile; White students with similar SAT scores rank in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. Black students with SAT scores of less than 1000 rank in the 18<sup>th</sup> percentile; White students with similar scores rank in the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile (p. 75). That is, White students with the lowest SAT scores have a mean GPA that is higher than Black students with the highest SAT scores.



## CLOSING GAPS IN COLLEGE GRADUATION HAS SLOWED IN THE LAST DECADE

Using Census data, Neal (2005) demonstrates that college graduation rates from 1960 to 2000 among men ages 26 to 35 widened from 1960 to 1980, decreased in 1990, but then increased in 2000. Among women ages 26 to 35, the gap has only increased over time (as cited in Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 17).

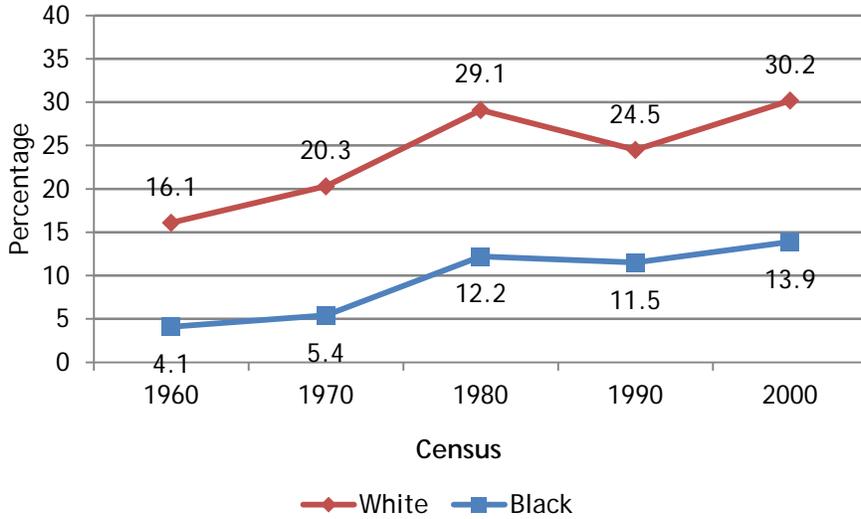


Figure 3: Male college graduation rates by race, ages 26 to 35<sup>3</sup>

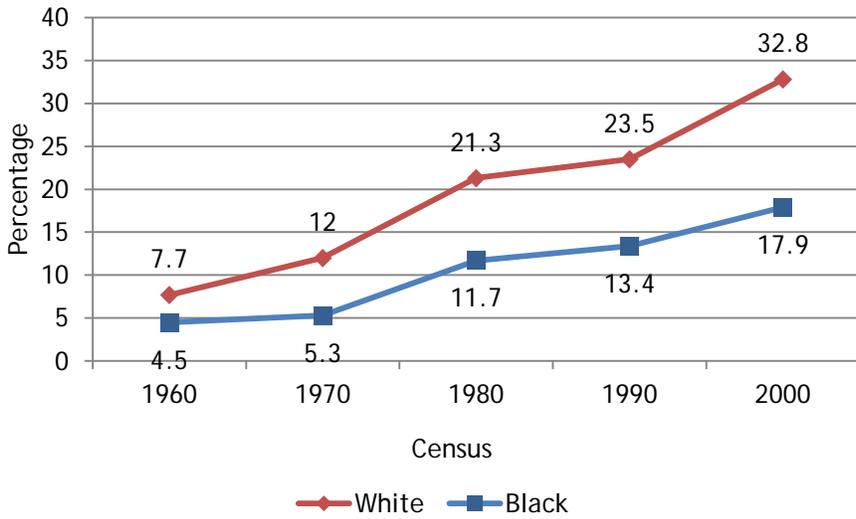


Figure 4: Female college graduation rates by race, ages 26 to 35.

<sup>3</sup> Figures 3 and 4 reproduced by permission from Paul E. Barton and Richard Coley, *The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2010), figure 9. Source: Derek Neal, *Why has Black-White skill convergence stopped?* (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005).



## DECLINING NUMBERS OF MINORITY STUDENTS MEANS FEWER MINORITIES IN ACADEMIA, GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL FIELDS

Bowen and Rudenstine (2002) argue that it is imperative for colleges and universities to educate and prepare minority students for positions of leadership, “thereby reducing somewhat the continuing disparity in access to power and responsibility that is related to race in America.” They note that “[p]rofessional groups like the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association, and businesses like General Motors, Microsoft, and American Airlines (among many others), have explicitly endorsed affirmative-action policies in higher education.” Further, “[l]eading law firms, hospitals, and businesses depend heavily on their ability to recruit broadly trained individuals from many racial backgrounds who are able to perform at the highest level in settings that are themselves increasingly diverse.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See the American Bar Association’s Amicus Curiae in Support of Defendants-Appellants in *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.* (2002); the American Medical Association’s *Diversity in Medical Education* (1999); General Motors Corporation’s Amicus Curiae in Support of Defendants in *Gratz v. Bollinger et al.* (2000); and 3M et al. Amici Curiae in Support of Defendants-Appellants in *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.* (2001).



# APPENDIX: REPRESENTATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AS COMPARED TO POPULATION SHARE<sup>5</sup>

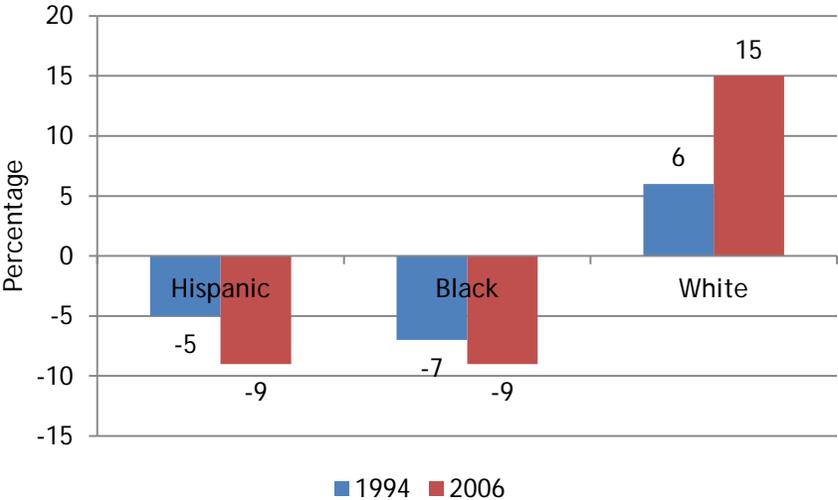


Figure 5: At “Most” and “Highly” Competitive Colleges, by Race and Ethnicity, 1994 and 2006

Source: Carnevale and Strohl (2010)

<sup>5</sup> Reproduced by permission from Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl, "How Increasing College Access Is Increasing Inequality, and What to Do about It," in *Rewarding Strivers: Helping Low-Income Students Succeed in College*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2010), figures 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, © The Century Foundation, Inc. Source: Authors’ calculations; Barron’s Selectivity Rankings, various years; National Education Longitudinal Study: Base Year through Fourth Follow-Up, 1988–2000 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center For Education Statistics, 2000); Educational Longitudinal Study: Base Year to Second Follow-Up, 2002–2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

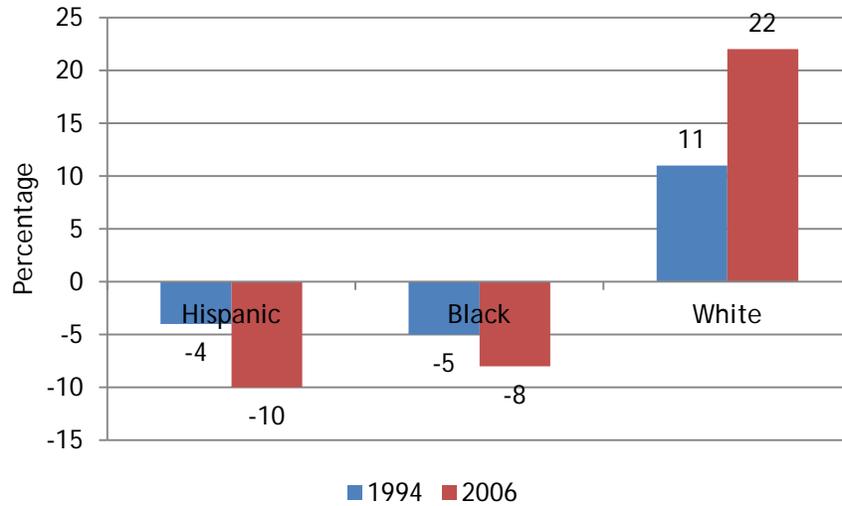


Figure 6: At "Very" Competitive Colleges, by Race and Ethnicity, 1994 and 2006.

Source: Carnevale and Strohl (2010)

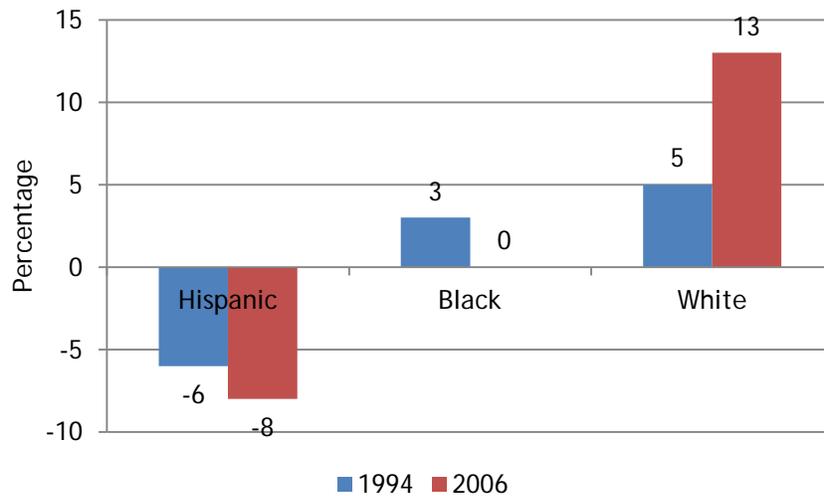


Figure 7: At "Competitive" Colleges, by Race and Ethnicity, 1994 and 2006.

Source: Carnevale and Strohl (2010)

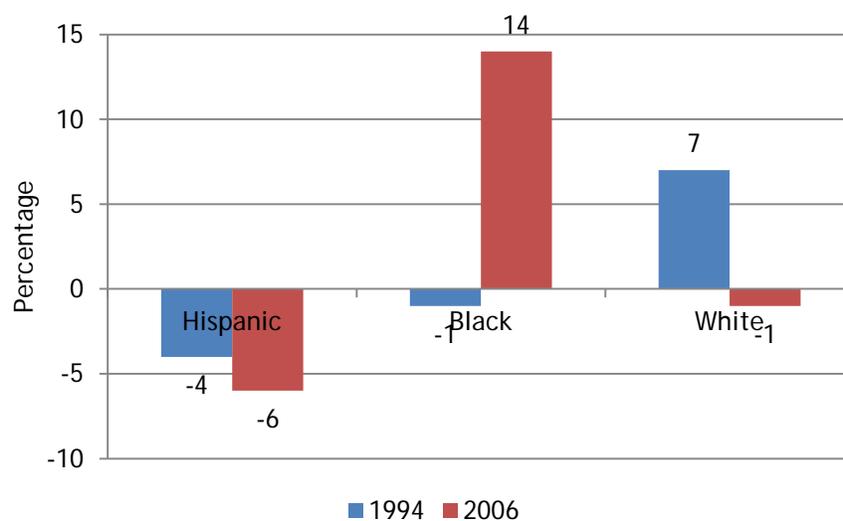


Figure 8: At “Less” and “Non-Competitive” Colleges, by Race and Ethnicity, 1994 and 2006.

Source: Carnevale and Strohl (2010)



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