

Review: Black American Males in Higher Education: Diminishing Proportions

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Diversity in Higher Education, Volume 6, examines critical issues that are affecting the success (e.g., persistence, retention, achievement, graduation) of Black males in higher education. The text is composed of 14 chapters which explore the history, education, and economic development of Black males. Several themes were evident throughout this text, including issues surrounding: incarceration, stereotypes of Black men, underachievement in education, financial issues, and underemployment.

In chapter one, Cuyjet discussed the importance of efforts designed to increase the matriculation and graduation of collegiate African American men. This chapter examined significant underlying factors affecting the status of African American men on college campuses, including their disproportionate underrepresentation and corresponding 'invisibility' in the campus community. Cuyjet explored some of the ramifications and consequences of underrepresentation, focusing on the disproportion of Black men in comparison to Black women. He noted that there is a 2 to 1 ratio of Black females to males on campus; as a result, some Black females are considering non-same race and gender alternatives to meet their relationship needs. The author suggests that the lack of Black males on campus is hurting diversity on many campuses. This in turn prevents students from other races in having the opportunity to interact with, get to know, and reject negative portrayal of Black men often seen in the media. The author articulated four themes which depict the invisibility of African American men on many predominantly White institutions (PWI) including: 'masking', 'hiding in plain sight', 'marginalized', and failing to recognize and accommodate the variety of backgrounds of Black men.

In chapter two, Gavin discussed the historical barriers which have faced Black males in American society. From slavery to Jim Crow to today, Gavin depicts how challenges of each era have served to facilitate generational barriers for Black males. During the age of segregation,

African Americans were subjugated by the 'separate but equal' racial caste system which segregated African Americans from Whites with respect to marriage, schooling, and employment. Gavin emphasizes the importance of familial support in aiding Black youth in overcoming barriers posed by each respective era. In chapter three, Evans provided a historical view of African American males and their participation in higher education. This article discussed the contribution of key Black community leaders, noting their educational attainment. The history was recorded into three waves: antebellum aspiration, the ebb and flow of reconstruction, and Jim Crow. Each of these waves highlights an educational researcher who has contributed to scholarship on African Americans in education. The article also discusses the importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in providing access to higher education for Black students, especially since few postsecondary options outside of HBCUs were available.

In Chapter four, Verdugo and Henderson provided a demographic analysis which evidenced a gender gap in African American enrollment in postsecondary education. Their analysis suggests that African American males do not enroll in higher education at the same rate as African American females. Enrollment differences are primarily a byproduct of slower growth among Black males. The authors describe possible factors that may cause this gap, including: educational (lack of attainment; dropout rates, retention rates, educational experiences) and non-educational factors (financial support, incarceration). Within-group differences (among Black males) were also discussed. These differences illustrate that males from low-income backgrounds have higher levels of enrollment than males for higher income backgrounds.

Chapter five written by Jipguep, Harrison and Bonner discussed the proportions of Black females to males in American higher education. The article projected that by 2010, the ratio of men to women enrolled in college would be about 41 to 59 percent. One interesting point raised in this chapter is that women are attaining higher levels of education in all the countries in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development). Thus, this pattern is part of a world-wide trend where males are falling behind. It is also interesting to note that the gap between White and Black male attainment in higher education has decreased while the gap between Black men and women's attainment has increased. The authors suggested that the gender gap in rates of college enrollment and completion among African Americans is consistent with gaps evident among all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

In Chapter six, Garibaldi provided an assessment of the educational attainment of African American males from the 1990's to the early 2000's. Using a random survey of 500 teachers, Garibaldi found that almost six out of every ten teachers did not believe that Black males would go to college. However, 80 percent of parents who responded to the survey believed that their sons would attend college; this result was nearly twice that of the college-going expectations for Black males held by teachers. In comparing performance rates among Black male and female students, the author noted that while Black males have higher SAT scores, they experience lower rates of high school diploma attainment and collegiate enrollment. Chapter seven, by Brown, Kouyate and Hopson discussed the decreasing representation of African American males in higher education, noting that many challenges (e.g., social, cultural, economic) prevent them from obtaining the 'American Dream'. The most important contribution of this chapter was its explication of the primary deficit assumptions of Black males, these include the notions that Black men are: a) cognitively inferior but physically superior; b) unconcerned with academic matters; c) hyper-sexual; and d) overly aggressive. The ramifications of each stereotype were

discussed, as was their relationship to generating a self-fulfilling prophecy in the educational realm.

Chapter eight authored by Sharpe and Darity evaluated alternatives (e.g., incarceration, employment, potential wages) that may serve to reduce the number of Black men completing a college degree. Data regarding 18-24 year old Black males suggests that while the number of Black men who are incarcerated has increased, greater increases have been seen in Black college enrollment. The authors suggest that this disproves extant theories which suggest that more Black men are in prison than in college. Data regarding labor force trends was also presented. This data indicates that the percentage of Black men (ages 18 to 24) who are 'at work' decreased from 1990 to 2007. Given the current economic climate, this trend may have worsened.

In Chapter nine, Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones and Allen discuss characteristics of African American males from years 1971 to 2004. The authors divided the findings into three categories, academic achievement, motivation, and socioeconomic background. In terms of academic achievement, substantial data is provided which evidences Black male grade point averages in college. The authors tout the importance of HBCUs in curbing achievement issues by providing a supporting and affirming environment conducive to student success. With respect to motivation, the authors discuss the detriment of deficit-frameworks which suggest that Black male underachievement is a result of these students and their families. The authors suggest that Black males are much more motivated and interested in school than popularly depicted. Data on socioeconomic status presented in this chapter illustrates that income is strongly correlated with achievement, college enrollment, and scholarship receipt.

In Chapter ten, Baldwin, Fisler and Patton highlighted factors that negatively affect Black male achievement in higher education. In doing so, they overviewed literature on stereotypes of Black men in society, lack of financial stability, and culturally disengaging environments. The author stated that despite the increased access to higher education since the 1980's, African American males are not enrolling or graduating from institutions of higher education at the rates comparable to those of their female counterparts. The chapter recommended strategies to improve these trends, such as mentorship, increasing Black faculty representation, enhancing student involvement, and improving faculty-student communication styles. Chapter 11, written by Hrabowski and Maton, presented a refreshing overview of the Meyerhoff program, an innovative initiative that is facilitating the success of Black men in college. The Meyerhoff program provides support to students in numerous ways, such as: financial aid, study groups, the development of a scholarly community, personal advising, counseling, tutoring, summer research internships among many other benefits. An interesting focus of this chapter was its articulation of struggles facing gifted African American male students. One such struggle is the identity conflict experienced by some gifted students where their academic and social identities collide.

Chapter 12, written by Freeman and Huggans, begins the books transition to examining the experiences of Black males in the community college. In this chapter, the authors discussed the importance of identifying factors which affect the persistence and retention of African American males in the field of engineering. In laying the foundations for discussing these factors, the chapter examines how community college students face barriers academically and socially. In particular, the authors discuss the discouragement they receive from faculty. This discouragement is heightened given the competitive nature of engineering programming and coursework. The highlight of this chapter is a research-based framework of factors impacting the persistence of community college students. This framework features nine constructs (e.g., demographic background, pre-college skills and achievement, educational aspirations,

institutional commitment, environmental pull, financial concerns, academic integration, social integration, academic and intellectual development) with multiple variables within each construct. This model is suggested as guide to better understand the factors impacting student persistence for all students, including Black males in engineering.

In Chapter 13, Bush, Bush and Wilcoxson highlight three initiatives designed to facilitate the success of Black males in California community college. These programs are Umoja Community, Men of Ujima Manhood Development program, and the African American Male Educational Network and Development (A2Mend). While each program has different operations, they have a unified purpose of promoting academics success, leadership, and professional development in African American males. Umoja Community was established in 2006. The program provides numerous instructional and support services to students, including: learning communities, mathematics courses, Black-centered courses, cultural activities, mentoring, workshops, financial aid. The program itself is organized around Afrocentric principles which strive to build community and unity among Black men on campus. The next program examined was the Men of Ujima (MOU). MOU is based upon a rites of passage model, and features programming designed to enhance spiritual maturity (recognition of the Creator and ancestors), understanding of Black history, and a balanced focus on mind, body, and soul. The final program examined was the African American Male Education Network and Development (A²MEND). A2Mend facilitates a very large mentoring program that requires Black male faculty and administrators in the community college to mentor an African American male student. The mentoring requirement for the programming requires a two year commitment from both parties. All three of the programs examined in the chapter featured mentoring as an important aspect of their programming. This provides participants with the opportunity to develop a lifelong bond with mentors who are committed to the success of young African American male students.

Chapter 14, by Ray, Carley and Brown, followed a similar pattern with the previous chapter by focusing on the need for an effective mentoring program in community colleges. The authors suggest that mentoring is an integral tool in supporting the academic success for African American males. The chapter outlines numerous issues facing African American male student (e.g., self-concept, negative experiences in the classroom, social isolation) persistence and retention. With this in mind, the authors stated that mentoring programs give the institution the ability to work holistically with students, simultaneously addressing a wide range of issues through one medium. The chapter concluded with an overview of some mentoring programs, including: The Collegiate 100, Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), and My Brother's Keeper (MBK). The goal of each program is to provide strong role models to help mold the next generation of Black males.

This volume adhered to its titled, addressing the diminishing proportions of Black men in higher education. While this text illuminated important data regarding the status of Black men in higher education, it seemed overly problem-focused. In fact, the portion of the text was somewhat a 'blast from the past', reminiscent of works from the 1980's and 1990's which focused solely on problems associated with Black males. Throughout this volume it became increasingly clear that if something greater is not done for African American males, then the gender-achievement gap will continue to increase. This gap will continue to affect the dynamics of the African American families and communities. This text could have been improved in two ways. First, the text could have prefaced the problem-focused theme by noting the inherent strengths (e.g., resilience, socio-emotional functioning) that many African American males have. In doing so, they could have highlighted data which balanced the issues posed with evident

assets of Black males. Second, the volume would have been greatly improved with strong sections (in each chapter) which addressed recommendations for policy and practice. While many authors described suggestions for future research, as readers, we were left wondering about next steps. What can a teacher, faculty, policymaker, administrator, or concerned community member do with the information presented? How can it inform their daily practice? How can the information conveyed serve to improve the livelihoods and outcomes of Black males? While some chapters included implications for practice and features innovative programs, others did not. Fortunately, the next volume in this series (volume seven) addresses some of these concerns. Thus, we suggest that both volumes six (discussed here) and seven (not included in this review) be used in tandem. Taken together, these texts serve as foundational reading for those concerned with the status of Black males in postsecondary education.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

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