

Increasing Access to Highly Selective Institutions for African Americans: Implementing Race- and Income-Based Affirmative Action Admissions Policies

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Abstract

This paper examines the lack of access that African Americans have to highly selective colleges and universities and how the implementation of race- and income-based affirmative action admission policies can ensure equal access to these institutions. The studies examined in this paper reveal that though race and class are very different factors, their frequent overlaps result in negative effects when determining the postsecondary outcomes of African Americans. Research shows that compared to their White counterparts, African American students are frequently underrepresented at highly selective institutions and also suffer from class-based disadvantages. By implementing race-based affirmative action policies, and having income-based admissions preferences, institutions can ensure African Americans are given equal access to highly selective colleges and universities.

Where a student attends college has become significantly more important throughout the years. As the need for a college education continues to increase in the job market, competition among students for access to the nation's most selective colleges and universities has increased as well. Simultaneously, racial polarization and income stratification among those attending higher education has grown, specifically at highly selective institutions. In other words, research shows that among the traditional college-age population, African American low-income students

are significantly underrepresented on the campuses of selective institutions and overrepresented on community college campuses and at non-selective schools.

In the past, affirmative action laws assisted in lessening the disparity in higher education between White and African American students and between low- and high-income students. However, with the increasingly common passing of legislation that bans such policies, these disparities continue to exist today. Research shows that, though race and class are very important separate factors, their frequent overlaps result in negative effects when determining the postsecondary outcomes of African American students. The implementation of race- and income-based affirmative action admission policies can ensure equal access to these institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses an interdisciplinary approach incorporating scholarly perspectives from law, sociology, history, and ethnic studies in order to examine the intersectionality of race, law, and power in American society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). It provides a lens through which to question, critique, and challenge how race and White supremacy have shaped and undermined policy efforts for African American students in higher education (Harper et al., 2009). While there is no single definition that exists for CRT, many scholars can agree on the seven basic tenets by which the theory is guided:

1. Racism is a normal part of American life that usually goes unacknowledged and thus is difficult to eliminate and address (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Harper et al., 2009).
2. Colorblindness leads to misconceptions regarding racial equality in institutions and “creates a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and the privileges of Whiteness can be maintained without any personal accountability” (Harper & Patton, 2007, p. 3).

3. Experiential knowledge of people of color is critical to understanding and educating others about racial inequalities in the field of education. Counter-narratives are used as a way to “highlight discrimination, offer racially different interpretations of policy, and challenge the universality of assumptions made about people of color” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 391).
4. The eradication of racism has produced minimal results due to interest-convergence, the process by which the White power structure will tolerate racism in order to advance and promote the interests of White elites (Harper et al., 2009).
5. Revisionist history suggests that American history should be closely analyzed and not accepted at face value (Harper et al., 2009).
6. The importance of racial realists, individuals who see race as a social construct and recognize the hierarchy of racial privileges and the context in which those privileges are granted, cannot be overemphasized (Harper et al., 2009).
7. Three central beliefs of mainstream culture that have to be continuously challenged are (a) that blindness to race will eliminate racism, (b) racism is an individual act and not a matter of systems, and (c) one can fight racism and ignore other forms of oppression and injustice.

Critical Race Theory is specifically useful when examining policies affecting African American students in higher education because racial subordination is one of the factors responsible for the continued production of racial disparities and opportunity gaps (Harper et al., 2009).

History of Affirmative Action in Higher Education

Since their beginning, the purpose of implementing affirmative action policies has been to improve the problems of exclusionary practices and unfair treatment and provide equal opportunities for racial minorities and women in all aspects of American life, including housing, business, government, and employment (Harper et al., 2009). In addition, these policies have significantly increased higher educational opportunities for racial minorities, specifically for African Americans.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racially segregated educational facilities were unequal and therefore violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The decision overturned the previous

ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and mandated the desegregation of all public schools in the country. However, this was not an immediate victory for African Americans, as many Whites were not receptive to the court's ruling, and thus desegregation in higher education was not seen until one decade later with the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brown, 2001).

Together, the civil rights movement, President Kennedy's vision of equality, and President Johnson's war on poverty in the mid-1960s inspired a movement for the nation to offer equal access to education, housing, and other resources (Alger et al., 2000). On March 6, 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925, which created the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity and prohibited government contractors from "[discriminating] against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin." During his commencement address at Howard University in June 1965, President Johnson outlined his philosophy of affirmative action:

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.... This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result. For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness.

Johnson reinforced his philosophy in September of that year when he introduced Executive Order No. 11246, which required contractors to "take affirmative action to ensure that equal opportunity is provided in all aspects of their employment" (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d., para. 3).

The affirmative action policies of the mid-1960s opened many doors for African American students by affording them the opportunity to matriculate into universities that were

virtually inaccessible previously (Harper et al., 2009). Colleges and universities across the nation began to recruit minority students as part of their educational missions, which consequently led them to consider race a factor in admissions decisions (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). Despite its momentum, attempts to eliminate affirmative action at postsecondary institutions began just a few years later with the landmark Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978).

Allen Bakke, a White medical school applicant, filed a lawsuit claiming he was wrongfully denied admission to the University of California, Davis, because affirmative action policies made room for less-qualified minority applicants, thus believing that if it were not for these policies, he would have been admitted (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004; Harper et al., 2009). At the time of his application, UC Davis offered two types of admission to the medical school: regular and special admission. Regular admission denied applicants whose grade point average (GPA) fell below 2.5. Special admission, which did not require a minimum GPA, granted 16 “disadvantaged” applicants admission on a case-by-case basis (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the use of racial quotas to determine admission violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; however, universities could still consider race as one factor among many in the admissions process (*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 1978). The ruling set the parameters of affirmative action in postsecondary institutions and opened the flood gates for many lawsuits and anti-affirmative action policies to come.

In July 1995, the University of California Board of Regents adopted two resolutions that drastically changed their admissions, hiring, and contracting policies. Special Policy-1 (SP-1) and Special Policy-2 (SP-2) eliminated the consideration of race, religion, sex, color, ethnicity, and

national origin. SP-1 specifically addressed admission to the universities in the state system or any program of study, while SP-2 focused on hiring and contracting practices (“A Brief History of Affirmative Action,” 2010). In May 2001, the Board of Regents rescinded SP-1 and SP-2 by approving RE-28, which acknowledged that the universities in the state system would now be governed by Proposition 209.

Proposition 209 had devastating effects on the nation’s largest public university system. California law school admissions among African Americans dropped nearly 72%, and African American admissions at UC Berkeley were cut in half (American Civil Liberties Union, 2000). Soon after, in 1998, Washington passed Initiative 200 (I-200) and became the second state to ban state affirmative action. One year later, Governor Jeb Bush of Florida issued Executive Order 99-281, which ended affirmative action in higher education in his state as well (American Civil Liberties Union, 2000).

Affirmative action came under attack again in 1996 with the U.S. Court of Appeals ruling in *Hopwood v. Texas*, which found that race could not be used to give preferential treatment to minority applicants (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Cheryl Hopwood and three other White law school applicants at The University of Texas at Austin challenged the school’s affirmative action admissions policies, claiming that they were rejected because of unfair preferential treatment toward less-qualified African American and Latino applicants (Scanlan, 1996). Until this time, the university had placed African American and Latino applicants in separate admissions pools and accepted members of those groups over their White counterparts (Scanlan, 1996). As a result, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit banned the university’s affirmative action admissions policy, deeming it unconstitutional, and ruled that the university could not use race as a factor in admissions (Scanlan, 1996). In addition, the ruling overthrew the

1978 *Bakke* decision, which allowed institutions to use race as one factor among many in admissions decisions. Between 1988 and 1996, prior to the *Hopwood* ruling, the African American student body at The University of Texas at Austin was between 4.1 and 5.6% of the total student population. In the fall of 1997, the semester following the ruling, African Americans made up just 2.7% of first-time freshmen (Southern Education Foundation, 1998). What is more, within a year of the ruling, African American and Latino admissions to the School of Law plummeted by 88% and 64%, respectively (American Civil Liberties Union, 2000).

In 2003, there were the two consecutive cases at the University of Michigan that sought to further challenge affirmative action admissions policies: *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*. In the first case, Jennifer Gratz, a White undergraduate applicant, was denied admission to the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts for fall 1995. At the time of her application, the University of Michigan used a 150-point scale to rank applicants, with 100 points needed to gain admission. The university gave minority applicants (African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans) an automatic 20 points toward their score in order to ensure campus diversity. The Supreme Court ruled that the university could not implement an admissions process that awarded points based on an applicant's race and deemed the system unconstitutional. The second case involved Barbara Grutter, a White applicant, who was ultimately denied admission to the Law School in fall 1996, claiming she was rejected because race was a factor in admission. The Grutter case ultimately questioned whether diversity was a compelling enough reason to justify race-based admissions, but the court found the policy constitutional and upheld it in a 5-4 decision (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

As a response to the *Gratz* and *Grutter v. Bollinger* cases, the Michigan Initiative, or Proposal 2, was adopted by Michigan voters in November 2006 and took effect in December of

that year. Proposal 2 was very similar to California's Proposition 209, in that it amended the Michigan Constitution to "ban public institutions from using affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes" (*The Actual Ballot Language*, n.d.). Since its passing, several attempts have been made to overturn it; however, in April 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Michigan Initiative as constitutional in the ruling of *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*.

When Proposal 2 was enacted in Michigan, the enrollment of minority students dropped dramatically. In fall 2005, African Americans accounted for 7.1% of the student body population at University of Michigan (University of Michigan, 2005). By 2012, that number had fallen to 4.1%% (University of Michigan, 2012). At Michigan State University, the African American student population was 7.9 % in fall 2005 and only 6.2% in fall 2012 (Michigan State University, 2005; 2012). Most dramatically, African American student enrollment at the University of Michigan Law School was more than cut in half, from 77 African American students enrolled in 2005 to only 36 in 2012 (University of Michigan, 2005; 2012).

Since the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, four other states, including Nebraska, Arizona, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma, have also passed legislation to ban affirmative action in higher education (Pew Research Center, 2014a). Court rulings and new legislation regarding affirmative action policies in higher education has sparked many debates and raised numerous issues among policy makers and administrative leaders. Among these is the disturbing fact that African Americans are dramatically underrepresented on the campuses of select colleges and universities throughout the nation (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). Despite efforts to diversify campuses

and increase access, gaps in college enrollment between African American and White students remain.

Enrollment Patterns of Highly Selective Postsecondary Institutions

Although colleges and universities continue to succeed in attracting and enrolling more underrepresented racial minorities, ironically, they are also becoming more racially polarized and segregated by income. In other words, there is a very small percentage of African American and low-income students enrolling in highly selective schools, and a large percentage of these students enroll in community colleges or less selective institutions. Research shows that compared to their White counterparts, African Americans are less likely to attend highly selective colleges and are especially vulnerable to class-based disadvantages because they have historically come from low-income families.

Racial Polarization among Selective Colleges and Universities

A recent study by Carnevale and Strohl (2013), focused on racial inequality and minority access to selective institutions. In the study, selectivity was based on *Barron's profiles of American colleges* (2009, 2012), which determine rankings by the institution's admissions criteria, including students' GPA, high school class ranking, and SAT scores. The 468 colleges and universities under consideration included those ranked as "most competitive," "highly competitive," and "very competitive." "Most competitive" colleges and universities require applicants to rank in the top 10–20% of their high school class, have a GPA of B+ or above, and have a median SAT score between 1310 and 1600. "Highly competitive" colleges and universities tend to accept students who are in the top 20–35% of their high school class, have a

GPA of B and above, and a median SAT score between 1240 and 1310. Finally, “very competitive” colleges and universities admit students who rank between 35 and 50% of their high school class, have a GPA of B- and higher, and have a median SAT score between 1150 and 1240.

Carnevale and Strohl (2013) found that since 1995, 82% of new White enrollments have been among these 468 most selective colleges, while 68% of new African American enrollments have been in two- and four-year open-access schools—colleges that have acceptance rates of 85% or higher. Racial polarization in postsecondary education can be seen when comparing White and African American enrollment rates to their respective traditional college-age populations, ages 18 to 24. For example, in 1995, Whites accounted for 68% of the total college-age population. However, when looking at the total enrollment at selective universities, they accounted for 77%, a 9% advantage above their overall population rate (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). In that same year, African Americans made up 14% of the college-age population, but only accounted for a mere 6% of the total enrollment at selective colleges and universities (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

By 2009, the college-age population was 62% White and 15% African American. Yet at the top 468 colleges, White enrollment was 75%, a 13% advantage. At the same time, African American enrollment barely reached 7%, an 8% deficit (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). What is more, while White enrollment at open-access, two- and four-year institutions has declined, the enrollment of African Americans at these same institutions has increased. This suggests that over time, it has become more challenging for African American students to gain access to highly selective colleges and universities, and thus they have been forced to enroll into open-access schools. In 1995, there was a balance between open-access college enrollment and the college-

age population between both racial groups. However, by 2009, the African American share of enrollment in open-access institutions had significantly increased relative to their college-age population (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). In 2009, African Americans accounted for 15% of the total college-age population, but 20% of the enrollment at open-access institutions, a 5% increase relative to their college-age population (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

Racial polarization in higher education has increased over the decades, and even with White freshman enrollment dropping from 73% to 63%, there has been no significant decline at top-tier colleges, leaving little room for African American advancement (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). As White students continue to secure the majority of the spaces at the 468 most selective institutions, reinforcing their overrepresentation in the nation's best schools, African Americans have been tracked into overcrowded and underfunded open-access institutions. However, while racial polarization plays a major role in postsecondary inequalities, class or socioeconomic status (SES) also has a unique negative effect on access to highly selective institutions.

Income Stratification among Highly Selective and Less Selective Institutions

Studies on the effect that income has on access to postsecondary education have shown that African Americans are especially vulnerable to class-based disadvantages because they are highly concentrated among low-income groups (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Carnevale and Strohl (2010) revealed that high-income students were overrepresented at selective colleges and universities by 45%, while low-income students were underrepresented by 20%. In a previous study, Carnevale and Strohl (2004) showed that 74% of the students at selective institutions came from families in the top quarter of the SES scale, while only 3% come from the bottom quartile. Consistent with these findings, Reardon, Baker, and Klasik (2012) found that low-

income students are extremely underrepresented on the campuses of the most selective colleges. Data from their research, which analyzed three longitudinal studies, showed that students from high-income families, i.e., those with an income greater than \$75,000, are seven to eight times more likely to enroll in a top-tier school than students from low-income families, i.e., those with an income less than \$25,000.

Wyner, Bridgeland, and DiIulio (2007) further highlighted the educational inequality between high-achieving low- and high-income students, finding that only 19% of low-income students attended the nation's most selective colleges and universities, as compared to 29% of high-income students. Moreover, 21% of students from low-income families attended one of the 429 least selective colleges, compared with only 14% of students from high-income families. Wyner, Bridgeland, and DiIulio also reported that at least 24% of low-income students attended community colleges, as compared to 16% of high-income students. Perhaps the most disturbing finding revealed that for low-income students, the graduation rate is only 59% at any college or university, and more than two-fifths of the best performing, low-income students fail to graduate.

Burd (2013) examined hundreds of selective colleges and universities that required low-income students to pay a net price for their tuition—the amount a student must pay after all grant aid has been depleted—that was equal to, or even more than, their families' annual income. As he showed, selective colleges and universities were essentially closing their doors to low-income Pell Grant recipients. Burd revealed that instead of providing opportunities to low-income students, colleges were working hard to bring high-income students to their campuses by leveraging their financial aid packets—switching from need-based to merit-based aid—in order to recruit those who could already afford to attend without financial assistance. In addition, some colleges and universities also offered more affluent students generous aid awards, reasoning that

it was more profitable to offer several students scholarships than to provide one large grant to a low-income student (Burd, 2013).

Ironically, nearly 30% of public and private college admissions directors gave affluent students a “significant leg up in the admissions process”—essentially providing affirmative action to students from wealthy families (Burd, 2013, p. 4). In addition, Burd (2013) reported that even though many, if not most, of the nation’s top colleges had substantial funding for Pell Grant recipients, most chose not to disperse this money to low-income students in order to maintain or enhance their reputation and marketability. Instead, more than one-third of public and almost two-thirds of private colleges and universities engaged in “gapping”—purposely providing lower-income students with financial aid packages that were significantly less than their financial need in order to discourage them from attending (Burd, 2013).

Studies demonstrate that 62% of all African American college students receive Pell Grants, largely because African American students are more likely than others to be low income (Rawlston-Wilson, Saavedra, & Chauhan, 2014). In 2012, the average median household income of African American families was \$33,762, as compared to White households, which had an average income of \$56,565 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Examining 479 selective, private institutions, Burd (2013) revealed that nearly 90% charged students with family incomes of \$30,000 or less an average of \$10,000 or more for tuition each year. For some African American families, that means they must pay a net price that is nearly half of their total annual household income.

As has been shown, race- and income-based inequalities in postsecondary education significantly overlap among African Americans and are most devastating when experienced in combination. In many cases, the interaction between race and class limits the upward mobility of

socioeconomic status and can delay educational attainment across generations (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Unfortunately, for most African Americans, the story only gets worse.

Historically, African Americans have had limited access to prestigious colleges and universities and, as a result, have been forced to enroll into less selective, open-access, two- and four-year institutions. As compared to highly selective, prestigious universities, these open-access schools tend to be considerably overcrowded, exceedingly underfunded, and have fewer available resources, including job placement training and social capital, leaving students at a disadvantage, even after they graduate.

Racial Polarization and Income Stratification Lead to Unequal Access to Resources

In the United States, economic returns on a college education are significant and steadily rising. In fact, according to a recent Pew Research study (2014b), which included data gathered from a survey and the U.S. Census, college graduates outperform their less-educated peers in virtually every measure of economic wellbeing and career attainment. As the study showed, college graduates ages 25 to 32 who were employed full-time earned about \$17,500 more annually, as compared to those with a high school diploma (Pew Research Center, 2014b). In addition, the unemployment rate of college graduates with at least a bachelor's degree was 16.5% less than those who do not have a college education (Pew Research Center, 2014b).

It is no surprise that attending college leads to greater upward economic mobility and better employment rates; however, research also finds that attending a highly competitive university provides even greater benefits for students after they graduate (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). Often perceived as a pyramid, higher education in the United States consists of many less selective, open-access colleges at the bottom and fewer highly selective universities at

the top. Since 1995, more than 140 colleges have moved from being less selective to becoming top-tier schools according to Barron's (2009) *Profiles of American Colleges* ranking criteria—increasing the top three tiers from 326 colleges in 1995 to 468 in 2009 (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). This suggests that colleges and universities are now finding it important to improve their prestige and move into top-tier rankings by requiring applicants to have higher GPAs and SAT and ACT scores. These high-status universities spend more money on their students, offer them better networking opportunities and social connections, and tend to have higher graduation than low-status schools. Unfortunately, due to racial polarization and income stratification in postsecondary education, African Americans are consequently given unequal access to these resources and, therefore, unequal outcomes once they earn their degrees.

In the 468 most selective colleges analyzed by Carnevale and Strohl (2013), it was estimated that these institutions spend between two and five times more on instructional expenditures per student than less selective colleges. According to Hoxby and Avery (2013), the most competitive schools spent an average of \$27,001 per student. In contrast, less competitive institutions spent an average of \$5,359 per student, non-selective, four-year institutions spent an average of \$5,119 per student, and public two-year colleges spent an average of only \$4,991 per student (Barron's, 2012; Hoxby & Avery, 2013). As Carnevale and Strohl (2013) showed, higher spending at top schools “leads to higher persistence rates, greater access to graduate schools, and better economic outcomes,” which puts African American students who are equally qualified but attend less competitive schools at a further disadvantage (p. 7).

Persistence rates are one of the biggest disparities between race, selective and non-selective institutions, and income. When looking at race, the American Council on Education found that in 2009, only 18% of African American students ages 25 to 29 completed degrees at a

four-year college or university, compared to 36% of White students (Kim, 2011). More recently, a report from the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2014) analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education that indicated that at public institutions; only 39.7% of African Americans earned their bachelor's degrees compared to 60.2% of Whites. At private colleges and universities, the graduation rate for White students was 68.1% and only 44.5% for African Americans. The U.S. Department of Education also reported that in 2013, only 9.8% of African Americans who were age 25 and over held bachelor's degrees, compared to 14.4% of Whites (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2014). The graduation rates between those who attend selective colleges and those who do not are no better. For the 468 most selective universities, the graduation rate is 82%, compared to 49% for open-access institutions (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). What is more, for low-income students, specifically, the graduation rates drop 34% as school selectivity decreases (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

To make matters worse, students who graduate from less selective schools go on to attend graduate school far less frequently than those at selective colleges and universities. Not surprisingly, they also have lower rates of acceptance at graduate and professional schools (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007). Students, enrolled at selective colleges were admitted to graduate school at a rate of 48%, compared to 26% for students who attended an open-access, four-year college or university (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). When looking at income, only 29% of students from low-income families will receive a graduate degree, compared to 47% of students who come from higher-income families (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

The greater amount of money spent on students and higher persistence rates are not the only benefits that come with enrolling in a highly selective university. During their time as

students, they are able to interact with peers with higher levels of achievement and those who come from wealthy, highly educated, and affluent families (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). These potential networking opportunities and social connections are invaluable and significantly increase the social and cultural capital of each student (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). In addition, top financial, consulting, and law firms have been known to recruit almost exclusively at highly selective colleges, and many employers use school prestige as a key factor when screening resumes—for example, nearly half of all Fortune 500 CEOs have degrees from highly selective universities (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). What is more, the 468 most selective colleges confer more than \$2 million dollars per student in higher lifetime earnings (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Students who graduated in the class of 2013 from Princeton University, one of the most selective schools in the nation, are expected to earn a mid-career salary of \$137,000 (PayScale, 2013). However, only 7.4% of Princeton's student body is African American and a mere 12% of students receive Pell Grants (Burd, 2013; Princeton University, 2013). Graduates from 2013 at Washington University in St. Louis are expected to earn a mid-career salary of \$111,000 (PayScale, 2013). However, currently, only 6.8% of their student body is African American and just 7% of students are Pell Grant recipients (Burd, 2013; "Student Body Diversity," 2013). Students who graduate from the University of South Florida are expected to earn \$70,700 mid-career (PayScale, 2013). Ten percent of the university's student body is African American (University of South Florida, 2014) and nearly 17,000 Pell Grants were awarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Finally, graduates from Kent State University are only expected to earn a mid-career salary of about \$65,000 (PayScale, 2013). Kent State awarded nearly 17,000 Pell Grants in the 2012–13 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and 8% of the student body is African American (Kent State University, 2012).

Future Recommendations

Affirmative Action Policy Implementation: Race- and Income-Based Policies

After the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, postsecondary institutions theoretically became equally accessible to all. However, great disparities persist today between Whites and African Americans and low- and high-income students—even after the passage of Executive Order 11246. The use of race as a factor in college admissions in order to aid underrepresented and disadvantaged applicants has been, and continues to be, an exceedingly debated topic. More recently, the idea of class-based admissions preferences replacing race-based preferences is a growing area of interest, as it is more attractive politically (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Even though race and class are very different factors, they are complementary in their negative effects when determining the postsecondary outcomes of African Americans. Because of this, it is imperative that selective colleges and universities factor race and income in combination during their admissions processes.

The persistence of racial disadvantages and inequalities among African Americans is a major reason why the issue is still alive today (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Research shows that African Americans are doing substantially worse than their White counterparts in virtually every aspect of life, including annual earnings and educational attainment—the traditional channels of intergenerational mobility (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Race-based affirmative action policies are one of the ways to ensure African Americans are given equal access to highly selective colleges and universities and historically they have played a critical role in providing improved access to educational opportunities that would have otherwise been denied.

Carneval and Rose (2004) found that when race was considered, African American enrollment among selective universities rose from 4% to 12%. Other data shows that race-based affirmative action policies are also responsible for doubling the number of minority applicants to top-tier schools (Barreto & Pachon, 2003). Statistics from 1997 (pre-SP-1) show that when affirmative action policies were in place, African American acceptance rates ranged from 38.4% to 54.9% at four selective University of California campuses: UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UCLA, and UC San Diego. However, by 2002, African American acceptance rates at these institutions dramatically declined, ranging from only 19% to 36.6% (Barreto & Pachon, 2003).

The role that race plays when looking at class is crucial because race can be directly linked to annual earnings. Historically, African Americans have been vulnerable to class-based disadvantages because they are more highly concentrated in low-income groups (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). In other words, to overlook income is to essentially ignore a major factor that contributes to the unequal access African Americans have to highly selective institutions. Using income-based admissions preferences will expand the pool of qualified minority students, thereby substantially increasing the access African Americans have to highly selective institutions (Carneval & Rose, 2004). If selective institutions admitted all the minimally qualified African American applicants in the bottom half of income distribution, they would enroll at least 11,000 additional students, roughly doubling the current number (Carneval & Rose, 2004). An admissions policy that is race-blind but increases access for low-income African Americans would be more popular than a race-based criterion alone (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). However, in order to produce the same level of access for African American applicants that exists today for White applicants, at some point during the process, race must be considered (Carneval & Rose, 2004).

Lawmakers or institutions have to implement a combination of race- and income-based admissions policies where African Americans can be selected disproportionately among the qualified pool of low-income students. By doing this, the legal legitimacy and public support for improved access may increase because of the popularity of income-based admissions, coupled with the fact that low-income African American students will be chosen on the basis of several criteria rather than race alone (Carneval & Rose, 2004). If income-based admissions policies are used alone and race is not taken into account, the policy would be essentially useless. Although the majority of African American students are low-income, the majority of low-income students are White. In other words, the pool of White low-income students is substantially larger than the pool of African American students who are eligible for selective college admission (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

Conclusion

It is difficult to locate the exact point where racial inequality ends and economic deprivation begins, however research shows that the interaction between race and income creates barriers that lead to limited access to colleges and universities for low-income, African American students. Studies show that African Americans are five times less likely to enroll in a highly selective college, and even after controlling for income, African Americans are still two to three times less likely to do so (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). Thus, in combination, both race- and class-based affirmation action policies are needed to dramatically increase access to highly selective institutions for African Americans.

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