

RESEARCH REPORT

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(E)RACING RACE, ERASING ACCESS 2004 - 2005 CAPAA FINDINGS

African American students who aspire to college in California — particularly to the state's most competitive public institutions — face an uncertain future. Since Proposition 209 was passed by the voters in 1996, which made it illegal to consider race for admissions to state-funded institutions, a reactionary political climate has intensified in the state. Concerns for equity and access have been replaced by a rigid reliance on supposedly objective and "colorblind" indicators of merit, while K-12 inequities that disadvantage African American students throughout the state have been allowed to fester.

The College Access Project for African Americans (CAPAA) is a research project of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA. In 2002, the Ford Foundation awarded the center a five-year grant stemming from discussions about the Center's concerns with the repeal of Affirmative Action in California's public institutions via the passage of Proposition 209, and the subsequent decline in African American admissions to the University of California (UC) system, particularly Berkeley and Los Angeles. As part of its commitment to the development of research and the kinds of political and educational strategies necessary to overcome constraints imposed by the elimination of race-conscious access policies, CAPAA aims to examine the current status of. challenges to, and strategies for increasing opportunity in higher education in California for African Americans and other underrepresented minorities.

This report discusses four distinct themes emerging from CAPAA-initiated research to date:

- 1. The precipitous decline in Black freshmen student enrollment to UC flagship campuses since 1997 is the joint product of four factors: the ban on affirmative action; an over-reliance on traditional indicators of merit; continuing inequalities in K-12 education in the state; and losing highly qualified Black students who were rejected while receiving admission to selective institutions nationwide.
- 2. Surprisingly little information is available about the particulars of admissions practices across UC campuses, practices that collectively have worked to channel African American students away from the more competitive campuses and toward the less-competitive ones;
- Collaborative efforts among community-based organizations, scholars, and policy-makers are essential if Black students in California are to have increased access to opportunities in higher education;
- 4. Research on the barriers to access must be packaged in ways that make it accessible to

the general public, policy makers, and movements for social change.

In a year in which we have witnessed the worst proportional and numerical representation of African Americans among admitted students at UCLA since the passage of Proposition 209, engagement with these themes become all the more imperative.

<u>Declining Black Student Admissions to UC</u> <u>Flagship Campuses</u>

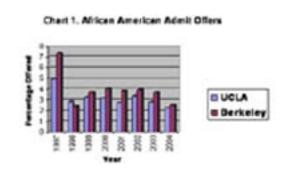
After the Supreme Court ordered the nation to integrate educational institutions with the landmark Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision, it took twenty years before any noteworthy progress was made toward this end. One catalyst for improvement was race-based affirmative action. Unfortunately, in recent years affirmative action has come under serious attack across the country. With the Supreme Court's endorsement of race-conscious admissions practices in the twin cases at the University of Michigan, California remained the only state to hold a legal ban on affirmative action. As such, California serves as a preview of the nation's future absent race-conscious policies - a future that is characterized by resegregation and exclusion.

The defeat of affirmative action in California began with the elimination of race-conscious admissions policies in the University of California system in 1995 and was solidified with a statewide ban on the consideration of race in all programs (e.g., university, healthcare, etc.) with the passage of Proposition 209 in 1996. Other types of "affirmative action" or special considerations remain intact (e.g., legacy, chancellor's discretion, athletic recruitment, special talents). While we know that the relatively low number of Black students gaining admission to the UC system was a concern prior to the passage of Proposition 209, the urgency surrounding this issue has intensified as we have witnessed precipitous declines in their admission in recent years.

The UC system's race-neutral policy initially took effect in graduate programs with the fall 1997 entering class. At this time one of the country's most prestigious law schools, Berkeley's Boalt Hall Law School saw a 66 percent drop in underrepresented minority admits, from 162 to 55 students. The most egregious impact fell on African Americans in particular, with an 81 percent decline in admits, from 75 to only 14 students. The entering class that year in Boalt Hall Law School had no African American students; of the few that were admitted, perhaps

due to the unwelcoming climate created by this controversy, none chose to enroll (Guerrero, 2002). For Latinos there was a 50 percent decline in admits; of the 55 minority students admitted only seven enrolled. The consequence of prohibiting the use of race in admissions in other law and professional schools in California mirrors the case of Boalt Hall.

One year after race-neutral admissions took effect at the graduate level, the story repeated itself at the undergraduate level as admissions decisions were made without race-based affirmative action for the fall 1998 entering class. Signs of resegregation are evident at the two most competitive campuses in the UC system - UCLA and UC Berkeley. For example, at UCLA, only 2.3% of 2005 undergraduate admission offers went to African Americans, the lowest since affirmative action was banned. In 2005, only 2.9% of Berkeley admission offers to Californians went to African Americans. This represents a decline of one-fifth compared to 2003 (3.7%), and it undermines the modest progress made in the years since 1998 (2.4%) (Chart 1). To put these numbers in context, note that Berkeley had an acceptance rate of 7.3% for African Americans before affirmative action was banned.



In May 2004, a UCLA Professor and CAPAA Core Researcher, Dr. Belinda Tucker² addressed the declining admission rates of Black undergraduate students in a letter to Robert Dynes, President of the University of California. Specifically, she referred to the incongruity of highly qualified Black students being rejected by the UC system but receiving admissions to selective institutions nationwide. In his August 2004 response, President Dynes³ stated that "the trend of declining admissions and enrollment of African Americans at UC, particularly at our most selective campuses, represents a crisis³." President Dynes pointed to the elimination of race-conscious

policies and lack of high school academic preparation as primary factors for this crisis, coupled with the need to advance our knowledge on admission patterns that impact Black students. Conveying similar sentiments, a 2004 article in the LA Times4 reports that the steady decline of Black undergraduate students and particularly black male students at UCLA and the UC system has reached crisis proportions (Table 2). The author calls for a public agenda that (1) reduces the reliance on SAT scores; (2) removes the governor's proposed budget cuts to outreach programs; and (3) increases the availability and quality of college prep courses in high schools with large, minority student bodies. Indeed, public discussion on factors that impede or facilitate college access to the University of California system for Black students continues to receive ardent responses that speak to an inadequate educational system.

Supporters of race-neutral admissions processes continue to push for more stringent policies even with the low percentage of Black and Latino students. Kidder, Serrano, and Ancheta (2004) provide a recent example involving John J. Moores. the former chairman of the University of California Board of Regents. In the fall of 2003, Moores made public a report⁵ containing preliminary analysis of admissions to UC Berkeley in 2002. In a Forbes magazine article⁶, Moores accused the UC Berkeley campus of using race as an "unstated factor" in violation of Proposition 209 and further claimed that the university system was "discriminating so blatantly against Asians." Moores contends that "under-qualified" undergraduate students were being admitted to Berkeley with SAT scores lower than 1000, while many applicants who scored above 1400, mainly Asian Americans, were being rejected. Moores states that Black and Latino applicants were the majority of admits with the low SAT scores. Later, he insinuates that Berkeley favors only these particular minority students through veiled racial identifiers, such as low family income. Kidder and colleagues (2004) describe the tactic used by Moores as "racial mascotting" which occurs when the interests of Asian American people are supported by conservatives in order to legitimize their own political agenda and preserve the dominant culture. As such, Moores' argument that Asian American students are being discriminated against is his recent ploy to dismantle the University of California's "comprehensive review" admissions process, by which all applicants are evaluated not only on test scores and grades, but also on leadership, motivation, and achievement in light of their experiences and circumstances. Despite attacks on Berkeley's admission process that, according to Moores' analysis, gives unfair advantages to lower credentialed students, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*⁸ and *Oakland Tribune*⁹ reported that analysis of the Berkeley admissions process revealed that "race and ethnicity are playing virtually no role in admissions." On the contrary, the highly controversial decline in admissions for Black students to the most competitive UC campuses is both an example of the disastrous effects that the elimination of race-conscious policies in admissions has had on college access and also suggests that constructive use of admissions research perhaps can affect decisions made in public establishments and/or sway public opinion.

<u>College Admissions Practices and Racial</u> <u>Inequities</u>

CAPAA continues to research the obstacles aspiring African American students face through existing literature and the facilitation of studies on UC policies and practices concerning college admissions, matriculation, and graduation. Most recently, the college admission process has been a source of heated legal, political, and social debate, with much of the attention focused on the UC system. CAPAA's research agenda sought to acquire and examine a comprehensive dataset from the University of California Office of the President (UCOP), including variables and indicators that are used for admission decisions. While we know that since the elimination of race-conscious admissions policies, the proportional representation of African Americans among admitted students continues to decline, we do not yet fully understand the strengths and limitations of the current tools that the various institutions within the UC system are employing to address this inequity nor the specific implications for the admission of African American students. Despite UCOP's efforts to provide the public with information regarding this problematic issue, there continues to be a serious data gap that constrains our ability to correlate the various factors that work in concert to reduce access to higher education institutions. As such, this lack of information limits our ability to propose viable recommendations or lend to the development of more efficient and equitable policy solutions that may improve this crisis.

CAPAA focused on the policies and processes that guide UC admission. The lessons learned as we engage in this difficult and yet important work can be meaningful to other public institutions of higher education that are grappling with the effects of the elimination of race-conscious policies in the admissions process. For example, CAPAA's research agenda prompted a meeting with Susan Wilbur, Admission Director for the UC system, and other UCOP representatives to discuss and share preliminary eligibility and admission/entry data and various analyses on the probability of admission by raceethnicity to the most selective UC campuses. CAPAA will continue to analyze recent UCOP data in order to not only identify the discrepancies, but also to scrutinize the validity of the assumptions that underlie expected levels of Black access in a truly "colorblind" environment.

Collaborative Efforts: Empowering the Black Community

In 2005, CAPAA participated in several meetings and outreach efforts to address the increasing lack of access for African Americans in higher education, specifically at the UC. The *Thomas Spiegel* Family Foundation Educational Workshop Conference provided a space for scholars, communitybased organizations, and other advocates from California to explore the ways in which they and their affiliates might more effectively work to address implications of Proposition 209. Among other community advocates, CAPAA representatives, Darnell Hunt and Eddie Comeaux, gave presentations addressing the persistence of racial inequalities in California's educational system and the subsequent influence of these inequalities that leaves African Americans lagging behind Whites, Asian Americans, and Latinos in college enrollment, academic enrollment, and degree attainment.

The second half of this meeting provided a space for critical reflection. Various constituents discussed political and educational strategies for community-based organizations that could be utilized to better prepare more African Americans and minority students for competitive eligibility to selective colleges and universities. They also explored capacity building resources that would enable community-based organizations to effectively serve more students and encourage more parents to assume greater responsibility in preparing their children for college entrance. Such an approach also required community-based organizations and scholars to consider how they might collaborate across communities and institutions, including how they might be more strategic in seeking corporate sponsorship for outreach efforts in low-income communities. The meeting appeared to provide an important stepping-off point for the continued examination of these issues, as well as for the formation of a coalition that will engage in work that will ultimately ensure that these communities have access to quality educational opportunities.

In the annual conference for the Council on Black Studies in New Orleans, Eddie Comeaux represented CAPAA in a formal presentation entitled, "Explaining the Disappearance of Blacks from UCLA." This presentation provided a detailed analysis of the alarming decline of Blacks from UCLA. Specifically, Comeaux provided data that chronicled the admission crisis for Black students, discussed how current initiatives and processes guide college access, and what political and educational strategies ensure that colleges and universities are diverse, equitable communities. His research shows that critical components of this crisis include (1) increases in demographics for Latinos; (2) increases in admission for White and Asian students; (3) decline in faculty of color; (4) the channeling of Blacks toward sport, while undervaluing their academic pursuit; and (5) the failure of UCLA to expand opportunities for college access to match the increasing demands.

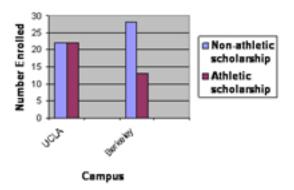
A final engagement for the academic year involved CAPAA's collaboration with EducateLA, a Los Angeles community-based organization that empowers families to support their children's educational and college preparatory needs. CAPAA prepared a grant proposal for EducateLA that will assist them in getting corporate sponsorship for a powerful web CD, The Gateway to Academic Achievement[™], designed for underserved families in Los Angeles County that helps bridge the widening "digital divide" by providing essential educational resources for K-12 students and parents, including information about the college-going process. Our primary objectives for partnering with this organization are to (1) assert influence early in the educational pipeline by providing underserved families in Los Angeles County with enhanced online literacy, a sense of empowerment, and improved access to educational resources for college competitiveness and readiness, (2) contribute to the literature on the relationship between information technology and college access, and (3) facilitate exposure to communitycentered research for graduate students in UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSEIS), who would conduct the assessment and evaluative portion of the project.

Research, Public Discourse, and Social Change

CAPAA researchers, Uma Jayakumar and Eddie Comeaux, completed a review article entitled "Education in the United States: Is it a Black Problem?"10 on John Ogbu's Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement. Ogbu's scholarship has been widely received by the public and academic community. In this book he attempts to explain the academic achievement gap among middle class Black and White students. However, Ogbu focused solely on community forces which he refers to as the beliefs and behaviors that minority students bring to school, and failed to shed light on the complexities surrounding the relationship between race and academic performance that are shaped by broader social, political, and economic forces. This leaves the reader with a picture that is incomplete and unsatisfying at best. Jayakumar and Comeaux concluded that Ogbu's book provides persuasive arguments and a methodological approach that has been and continues to be reaffirmed by many conservative and neo-liberal scholars and non-academically trained audiences. It is critical that we disrupt such narratives that blame the students themselves and the Black community, and ultimately perpetuate the notion that racism and racial barriers have seized to assert influence on students' educational experiences and opportunities.

In 2004 CAPAA offered mini grants to support short-term theoretical and empirical research that examined the strategies for increasing access and diversity in California's higher education institutions and K-12 system. Mini-grant recipient, Eddie Comeaux, in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies Education at UCLA, was funded to explore the academic experiences of African American student-athletes. Comeaux's project entitled "Unveiling Stereotypes of Nontraditional Student Groups on College Campuses: An Organizational and Critical Race Theory Analysis of Faculty Attitudes Toward African American Male and Female Student-Athletes" assessed the types and magnitude of faculty attitudes toward African American student-athletes. Since student-athletes comprise a sizable proportion of the African American representation on both the UCLA and UC Berkeley campuses (Chart 2), this study provided another perspective on their college experiences. The findings in this study provided evidence that faculty hold differential feelings toward African American and White student-athletes. The study appeared to show that faculty perceive the academic accomplishments of Whites more favorably than those of African Americans.

Chart 2. Fall 2004 Entering African American Males



Mini-grant recipients Patrick Hayashi and William Kidder from the Equal Justice Society at UC Berkeley were commissioned to study the current UC admissions policy. Their project, "Turning the Tide of Resegregation at UC: Leveraging Eligibility and Admissions Research to Improve Opportunities for African Americans", sought to partnership with the UC Board of Admissions, Relations with Schools (BOARS) and other advocates to create a new UC admissions policy agenda. Hayashi and Kidder focused on eligibility requirements, as upcoming changes to UC eligibility policy would have a huge impact on African American access to the UCs. The goal of their project was to provide policy-relevant and useful research to key stakeholders, such as Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, California Senator Kevin Murray, and Assemblywoman Lani Hancock, in hopes of leveraging increased opportunities for African American undergraduates in the UC system, particularly around eligibility and admission issues.

In an effort to fulfill one of CAPAA's core research questions, the Equal Justice Society's research team analyzed and compared macro-level pre- and post-209 data on the UC eligibility of African Americans graduating from public high schools in California in order to identify and understand the projected impact of new UC eligibility changes (and alternatives to those changes) on African Americans

and other underrepresented minorities. The Equal Justice Society then arranged a series of meetings hosted in San Francisco by Henry Der (a former California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) commissioner), in which they used their analysis of the disparate impact of UC eligibility to leverage political opposition to restrictive changes. As a result of their meetings, they also produced a document, *Principles to Guide UC Eligibility Changes*, which coalition members used in crafting messages to the public and to UC.

The Equal Justice Society also distributed a policy brief to CPEC and reached out to individual CPEC commissioners. As a result of these diligent efforts, the CPEC retracted its draft report on UC eligibility and subsequently CPEC released a significantly toned-down report that presented a more evenhanded analysis of the adverse impact of raising SAT score cutoffs or SAT/GPA index score cutoffs. Moreover, due to public pressure, the day before the Regents were scheduled to vote on eligibility, the UC Office of the President scaled-back the proposal to lower the high school GPA requirement, from 3.1 to only 3.0. While the UC Regents did adopt some restrictive eligibility criteria, it could have been far worse. The Equal Justice Society produced policy-relevant post-209 research that had an immediate and timely impact, including helping to preserve UC eligibility for hundreds of African American freshmen in California over the next several years.

CAPAA also joined in coalition with Equal Justice Society, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, Greenlining Institute, ACLU, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Asian Law Caucus, the UC Student Association, UC Berkeley's director of Graduate Diversity, and California Teachers Association. The purpose of this alliance is to share information and stay abreast of issues related to improving access to educational opportunities for African Americans in California.

The CAPAA research team also continues to collect and maintain data and resource archives that pertain to issues of access and equity for African Americans and other underrepresented minority groups. Content areas include: secondary, postsecondary, policy and media discourse, and family/community. This comprehensive archive is one of the ways CAPAA provides the community with easy access to existing research, discourse, and resources relating to African Americans and enables researchers to more effectively plan new

research that takes into consideration our existing information. www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/capaa/capaa_overview.html

CAPAA representatives also attended the annual meeting of the 2005 American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Montreal. As a research organization, AERA provides a space to educate and inform the public about educational research, facilitating public dialogue on educational issues. While in Montreal, CAPAA representatives attended sessions and engaged in thought-provoking conversations with colleagues from across the country. This was a critical step in advancing our knowledge on the latest educational research, particularly that which explores how access (or lack thereof) to higher education impacts African Americans and other underserved groups.

Conclusions

Given the political climate in California, scarred by the elimination of Affirmative Action and the cutting of outreach, it is critical that we continue to explore avenues for improving an educational system plagued with immense racial disparities. The goal of increasing access to colleges and universities is the common thread running through each of the events, activities, and studies undertaken or sponsored as part of the College Access Project for African Americans (CAPAA) of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA.

The question we asked in our previous annual report remains in the forefront of our minds: How do we best reconcile the country's heritage of White supremacy and racial hierarchy with a new, increasing reality of racial/ethnic and cultural diversity? In facing the challenge before us, we must recognize the changing dynamics of racism, which continue to shape the realities of every citizen of this nation, whether by way of affording opportunities or through the creation and maintenance of barriers to opportunities (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonus-Hammarth, 2002; Atlbach, Lomotey, & Rivers, 2002). Over time racism has evolved from complete subordination during slavery to overt Jim Crow discrimination, to more subtle, covert forms. As Bonilla-Silva explains, the new racism is more insidious than the old fashioned kind: "post-civil rights racial ideology incorporates many of the ideas endorsed by racial minorities in the 1960s (equal opportunity for all, eradication of racist views on the general biologicalmoral character of blacks, etc.) in a hegemonic way,

that is, it incorporates elements of the views of racial minorities while at the same time safeguarding systemic white privilege" (p. 66). People of color are included as "tokens" but not systematically and a racial agenda is embedded in principles of liberalism and individualism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Within a racialized social system, racial ideology becomes a means for the dominant group to justify oppression and also provides a language for the oppressed group to challenge the racial norms of the society (Allen & Solórzano, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). This ideological system perpetuates racism whether or not it is expressed by individuals through racist beliefs and intentions.

Public opinion reflects movement toward colorblind thinking. A nation that once saw the need to integrate higher education is questioning and resisting the very policies doing the work of accomplishing the goal. The notion that greater educational equity can be reached without race-based affirmative action policies is embedded in the beliefs that race no longer matters and that it no longer plays a role in the distribution of opportunities. This adherence to the myth of a colorblind society also pervades the way in which merit and equity are constructed in our society. Such thinking fails to account for disparities in access to educational resources and opportunities (e.g., A.P. courses, computers, counselors, teachers, etc.) throughout secondary schooling experience that remain intimately linked to race.

To effectively address problems facing American schools, namely low-income communities, CAPAA proposes that the state ensure that scholars and policy-makers have access to secondary and postsecondary admission and retention data to better understand how traditional measures of "merit" predict students' ability to excel within the institution. We must also discern how traditional measures of "merit" weigh in in the evaluation process such as the benchmarks—GPA and SAT scores. It has been well documented that awarding extra GPA points for higher level courses leaves some student groups (e.g., African Americans in low income communities) at a significant disadvantage in the race for competitive college entry (Chang, M.J., Witt, D., Jones, J., & Hakuta, K. 2003; Solórzano, D.G. & Ornelas, A., 2002). Given access to these data and information, policy-makers could then begin to make sound public policy decisions.

Throughout this report we have detailed the various approaches taken by CAPAA to work toward

raising awareness on important issues among policy makers and the general public, and produce empirical research that documents the shifting realities of race and continuing inequalities in California's educational system. As we embark upon the last phase of our project, we hope to continue the work of understanding the college going process for African American students on an individual level and in the policy context for the state of California, to expand our inquiry into the national context, and forge a greater understanding of the tenuous debates around affirmative action that are sure to resurface in the years to come.

Notes

- ¹ University of California Office of the President, Official Admission and Forecast Files
- ² Tucker, M. Belinda. Correspondence to President R.C. Dynes, May 29, 2004
- ³ Dynes, Robert C. Correspondence to Dr. M. Belinda Tucker, August 6, 2004.
- ⁴Franklin Gilliam, "Declining Black Student Admissions to UCs," *LA Times*, October. 6, 2004.
- ⁵ Moores, J. J. Unpublished report. It was made public in a *Los Angeles Times* article titled, "UC Probes Entry Policy," by Rebecca Trouson on October 7, 2003.
- 6 Moores, J. J. "College Capers." Forbes, March 29, 2004.
- ⁷ Cho, S. "A Theory of Racial Mascotting", paper presented at the First Annual Asian Pacific American Law Professors Conference (October 14, 1994)
- ⁸ E. Yang, "UC Study: Race Plays No Role in Admissions," San Diego Union-Tribune, May 17, 2005.
- ⁹ M. Maitre. "Cal Not Biased in Admissions", *Oakland Tribune*, May 17, 2005.
- Jayakumar, U. & Comeaux, E. "Education in the United States: Is it a Black Problem?" Under review for publication.

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About the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies

Established in 1969 as an organized research unit (ORU) of the University of California, Los Angeles, the Ralph J. Bunche Center is one of the oldest centers in the nation devoted to the study of African American life, history, and culture. For more information, please visit www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu.

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