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Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy

Volume 0 *National Center Proceedings 2019* Article 41

April 2019

Panel: Racial and Economic Equity in Higher Education

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Demos

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Recommended Citation
Huelsman, Mark (2019) "Panel: Racial and Economic Equity in Higher Education," *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*: Vol. 0 , Article 41.
Available at: https://thekeep.eiu.edu/jcba/vol0/iss14/41

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SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The State of State U for Black Students

by MARK HUELSMAN

About Dēmos and Acknowledgements

Dēmos is a public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy. Our name means "the people." It is the root word of democracy, and it reminds us that in America, the true source of our greatness is the diversity of our people. Our nation's highest challenge is to create a democracy that truly empowers people of all backgrounds, so that we all have a say in setting the policies that shape opportunity and provide for our common future. To help America meet that challenge, Dēmos is working to reduce both political and economic inequality, deploying original research, advocacy, litigation, and strategic communications to create the America the people deserve.

Dēmos is deeply grateful to the Joyce Foundation for funding this research and for their commitment to economic and educational opportunity and racial equity. Many thanks to Connie Razza, Dēmos Vice President of Policy & Research, and Anand Swaminathan, Dēmos research intern, for their insights and contribution to this project.

About Dēmos' Social Exclusion Series

Dēmos' Social Exclusion series explores the relationship between individual instances of hostility towards people of color in the United States, and how that hostility is powered by our policy choices. "Social exclusion" refers to a set of decisions and actions by the economically and politically powerful to deploy racist ideas in order to further concentrate their wealth and power, and how those ideas reinforce social deprivation, economic disadvantage, and the inability to have a voice in our democracy.

Introduction and Selected Findings

By now, the images and stories are familiar.

In April 2018, just as they were setting off on a campus tour at Colorado State University, Thomas Kanewakeron Gray and Lloyd Skanahwati Gray (two young men of Mohawk descent; 19 and 17 years old, respectively) found themselves being questioned by police who were summoned when the parent of another prospective student felt "nervous" about their "presence."[1]

In May 2018, Lolade Siyonbola, a black graduate student at Yale University, was accosted by a white student, who called campus police when she found Siyonbola asleep in the common room of her dorm.[2] This was not the first time the white student, Sarah Braach, had called the cops on a fellow black student for simply being in the same dorm.[3]

Later, in July, Oumou Kanoute, a black student and teaching assistant at Smith College, was reading and eating lunch in a common room when she suddenly found herself answering questions from a police officer. The officer was called by a university employee who found Kanoute's presence "suspicious" and "out of place."[4] The employee had not interacted with Kanoute or spoken with her.

Then, in September, police at UMass-Amherst received an anonymous call about a "black male" entering a campus administration building at 7:45 am.[5] Police found and questioned the man, a university employee named Reginald Andrade who worked in the Disability Services office. This was a near-daily routine for Andrade, who would go to the gym in the Whitmore administration building before walking to his office. Andrade had worked at the school for 14 years.

These stories, and countless untold others, follow a familiar pattern. A student of color behaves as millions of other students have—finding a quiet campus space to eat, napping while studying, attending a party, queueing in line for a campus tour. Passers-by and, in some cases, law enforcement officers who carry with them the capacity for lethal force, subject this behavior to extra scrutiny.

These students and employees posed no threat to safety and were not causing any disturbance. In fact, most of them were sitting in solitude before being interrupted by law enforcement. But other students or employees view these students with suspicion precisely because they do not see these students as a typical or ordinary part of their campus experience. They are not the image many people—including their peers—conjure when they think of the American college student. They are black or brown, Native American and immigrants, and their very existence in an elite academic setting makes others incredulous.

These incidents are easy to dismiss as one-off examples of a student or campus employee being too sensitive. Surely, the thinking goes, most other students would not call the cops on a student for simply being in a space. This is a comforting thought, but it is misguided, discredited by a country in which videos of African-Americans getting accosted and forcibly removed from public spaces have been produced at a breakneck pace.

Leafy college campuses have not been immune from the re-emergence of open white supremacist anger and racist hate crimes. In 2017 alone, the Southern Poverty Law Center found over 300 instances of racist flyers and other materials distributed on college campuses.[6] And of course, one of the crown jewels of American public higher education, the University of Virginia, was the gathering ground for far-right white supremacists and neo-Nazis who descended onto campus in August 2017. One of the men who espoused neo-Nazi beliefs murdered 32-year-old Heather Heyer with his car.

Elite American higher education—comprising those colleges with selective admissions criteria, in which a large portion of students live on campus—is often considered a bubble. It is a bubble, but perhaps not in the way that many people think. It is a bubble because it is not open to or representative of the most diverse generation of students in our history. It has excluded people of color, and black people specifically, because elite higher education is reflective of an American society that has overpoliced communities of color, allowed racial wealth disparities to grow unabated, and ensured that the halls of power (in politics, business, education, and more) are occupied mainly by white people.

It is no surprise that students of color are socially excluded on campuses, or that the very existence of students of color invites awkward attention. Individual incidents on campus shine a light on this broad systemic exclusion of students of color. Despite a bipartisan recognition that education beyond high school is increasingly crucial, we have done little to ensure that an influential corner of our system of colleges and universities accommodates black and brown students, or even guarantees their safety.

This exclusion is true even for elite public institutions, which still have a basic responsibility to be representative of and responsive to the needs of their state populations and economies. It goes without saying that each state's flagship campus and other selective institutions have a great deal of political power and cultural cachet. Thus, it is worth interrogating how they are doing at increasing the enrollment of black students, 50 years after the civil rights movement, at a time when higher education is more important than ever to achieving a stable life. We all benefit when these institutions are affordable, accessible, welcoming, and safe for all of their state's students.

This brief takes a look at whether selective public colleges have made progress toward these basic goals. **We find that, unfortunately, most states have very far to go in making their selective public institutions representative, and thus truly public. In many cases, institutions are less representative than they were a generation ago:**

In the 2015-16 school year, African-American students comprised nearly 1 in 6, or 16 percent, of high school graduates across the country. And yet, black students made up less than 5 percent of the students enrolled in large, selective public colleges.[7] At public flagship institutions, white students made up 63 percent of all students enrolled in the fall of 2016, despite comprising only 52 percent of all high school graduates the previous spring.

- The largest disparities between the black share of high school graduates and black enrollment at flagship colleges are in the Deep South, but Midwestern and Mid-Atlantic states enroll disproportionately few black students as well.

- Even as black high school graduation rates have improved dramatically, and the total percentage of 18-24 year-olds who are black has slightly increased, enrollment of African-American students at elite public colleges has remained stagnant or declined in many states.

- This exclusion perpetuates the dedication of more resources toward overwhelmingly white institutions at the expense of colleges that enroll higher numbers of black and brown students. In 2015, public flagship colleges received nearly $14,000 per student in state and local appropriations. This compares to slightly over $9,000 for non-flagship 4-year colleges, $7,686 for public 2-year colleges, and a little more than $10,000 per student at public Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

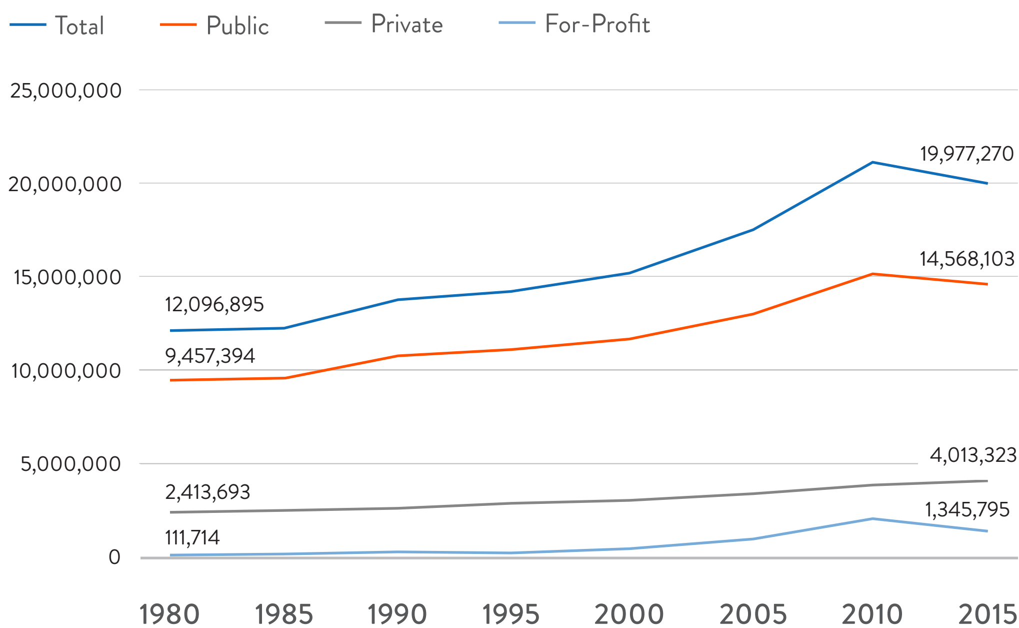
This report also discusses many of the dynamics driving social exclusion, from the black-white wealth gap and institutional funding disparities, to various social stigma and suspicion faced by black students on campus. Finally, it offers a framework of social solidarity and inclusion that can both repair harm done to African-American students and build a system that serves the interests of all students.

Elite Public Higher Education is Not Representative

As college has become increasingly viewed as a necessary step in achieving a decent quality of life, the share of people going to college has risen steadily over the past several decades. Public colleges in particular enroll 5 million more students than they did in 1980, as **Figure 1** shows.

FIGURE 1.

Total Fall Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, 1980-2015



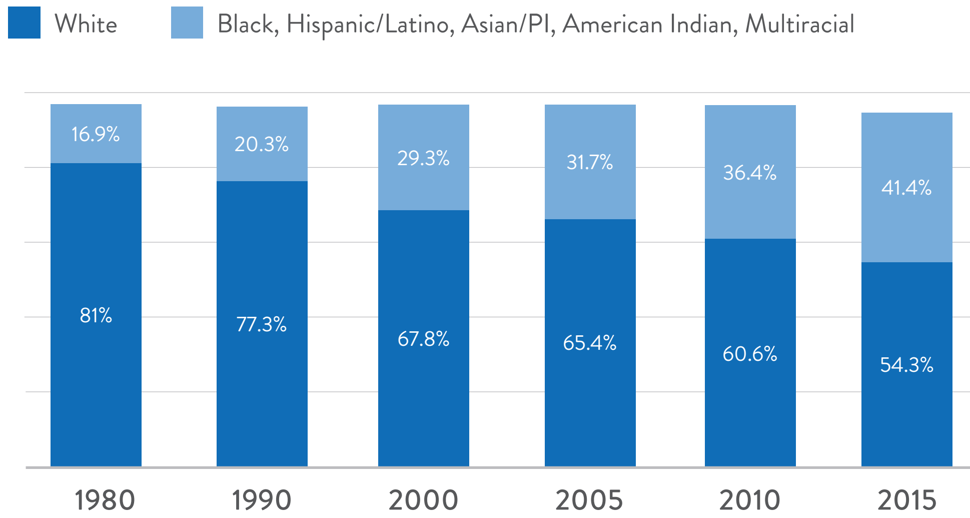
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

As college access has grown, the share of students of color at public colleges has also grown. In 1980, white students made up 4 out of every 5 public college students. As **Figure 2** illustrates, they now comprise a little more than 1 in 2. As the demography of America has changed, so too has public higher education.

Some of this is surely driven by an increase in the percentage of black students graduating from high school[8] over a relatively short period of time. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of all students graduating from high school increased from 79 percent in 2010-11 to 84 percent in 2015-16.[9] Black students experienced substantial gains: Their graduation rate increased from 67 percent to 76 percent over the same time. And in many states, black students increased their graduation rate by double-digit percentage points (see **Figure 3**).

FIGURE 2.

The Share of Public College Students of Color is Growing



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

FIGURE 3.

Across the Country, Black High School Graduation Rates Have Risen

Black HS Graduation Rate 2010-2011 Black HS Graduation Rate 2015-2016

Source: U.S. Department of Education Ed Data Express. Data for Idaho, Kentucky, and Oklahoma not available for 2010-11

100% 90% 80% 70% 60% 50% 40% 30% 20% 10% 0%

Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, **United States**

And yet, we find that many selective public institutions—the colleges that receive the most public and private resources within a state, whose alumni often become titans of industry or politics—are not driving this diversity. As **Table 1** shows, black students are continually underrepresented at nearly all public flagship colleges and other selective public colleges.

TABLE 1.

Black Enrollment at Public Flagships vs. Black Share of State High School Graduates

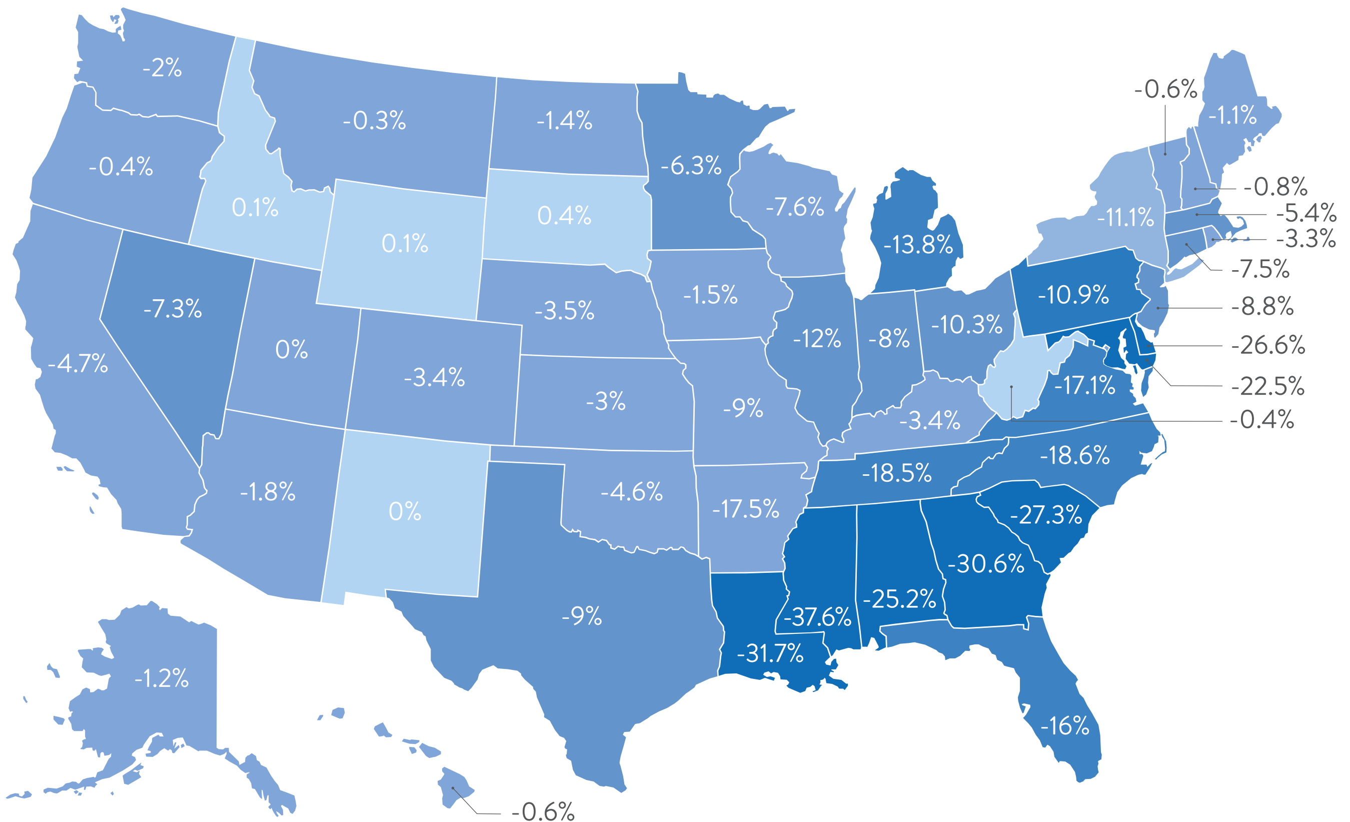
Institution	Percent Black, Fall Undergraduate Enrollment 2016	Percent Black, State HS Graduates 2015-16	Percent White, Fall Undergraduate Enrollment 2016	Percent White, State HS Grads 2015-16	Black HS/ Flagship Enrollment Disparity, 2016
University of Mississippi	12.9%	50.5%	77.2%	45.4%	-37.6%
Louisiana State University	12.2%	44.0%	72.3%	48.7%	-31.7%
University of Georgia	7.6%	38.2%	70.1%	43.8%	-30.6%
University of South Carolina-Columbia	9.0%	36.3%	76.1%	55.2%	-27.3%
University of Delaware	5.9%	32.5%	72.4%	49.7%	-26.6%
University of Alabama	10.4%	35.6%	78.0%	56.5%	-25.2%
University of Maryland-College Park	12.9%	35.4%	50.3%	42.4%	-22.5%
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	8.0%	26.6%	62.8%	53.3%	-18.6%
University of Tennessee-Knoxville	6.6%	25.1%	78.5%	66.2%	-18.5%
University of Arkansas	4.8%	22.3%	76.3%	62.6%	-17.5%
University of Virginia	6.5%	23.6%	59.5%	53.6%	-17.1%
University of Florida	6.2%	22.2%	55.5%	42.8%	-16.0%
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	4.3%	18.2%	60.8%	69.5%	-13.8%
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	5.8%	17.8%	46.1%	52.0%	-12.0%
University at Buffalo	7.3%	18.5%	47.7%	49.0%	-11.1%
Pennsylvania State University	4.2%	15.0%	67.2%	70.3%	-10.9%
Ohio State University	5.5%	15.8%	69.3%	74.3%	-10.3%
University of Missouri-Columbia	7.7%	16.7%	78.3%	74.0%	-9.0%
University of Texas at Austin	4.2%	13.2%	42.5%	31.2%	-9.0%
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	7.5%	16.4%	40.0%	51.7%	-8.8%
Indiana University-Bloomington	4.2%	12.2%	70.8%	73.1%	-8.0%
University of Wisconsin-Madison	2.2%	9.7%	74.0%	74.1%	-7.6%
University of Connecticut	5.8%	13.3%	59.5%	59.9%	-7.5%
University of Nevada-Reno	3.3%	10.6%	58.5%	36.2%	-7.3%
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	4.2%	10.5%	67.0%	73.5%	-6.3%
University of Massachusetts-Amherst	3.8%	9.2%	65.1%	66.7%	-5.4%
University of California-Berkeley	2.0%	6.7%	26.3%	25.8%	-4.7%
University of Oklahoma	4.8%	9.4%	60.6%	53.0%	-4.6%
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	2.8%	6.3%	76.0%	71.2%	-3.5%
University of Colorado-Boulder	1.6%	5.1%	68.7%	56.2%	-3.4%
University of Kentucky	7.8%	11.2%	75.4%	81.0%	-3.4%
University of Rhode Island	5.1%	8.4%	70.8%	61.0%	-3.3%
University of Kansas	4.1%	7.2%	70.9%	67.7%	-3.0%
University of Washington	2.6%	4.6%	41.1%	60.4%	-2.0%
University of Arizona	3.9%	5.7%	51.2%	41.5%	-1.8%
University of Iowa	3.3%	4.9%	68.6%	81.4%	-1.5%
University of North Dakota	2.4%	3.8%	79.9%	81.9%	-1.4%
University of Alaska-Fairbanks	2.1%	3.2%	45.3%	50.4%	-1.2%
University of Maine	2.0%	3.1%	80.8%	91.5%	-1.1%
University of New Hampshire	1.3%	2.1%	80.7%	88.5%	-0.8%
University of Hawaii at Manoa	1.5%	2.0%	17.3%	12.1%	-0.6%
University of Vermont	1.3%	1.9%	80.3%	90.9%	-0.6%
University of Oregon	2.0%	2.5%	58.7%	65.6%	-0.4%
West Virginia University	4.7%	5.0%	79.6%	91.8%	-0.4%
University of Montana	0.9%	1.2%	74.5%	81.8%	-0.3%
University of New Mexico	2.4%	2.4%	34.5%	25.9%	0.0%
University of Utah	1.3%	1.4%	68.5%	75.3%	0.0%
University of Idaho	1.4%	1.3%	71.8%	77.5%	0.1%
University of Wyoming	1.1%	1.1%	73.3%	80.6%	0.1%
University of South Dakota	3.1%	2.7%	84.0%	78.8%	0.4%

Sources: Author's calculations from U.S. Department of Education data. College enrollment data calculated from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. High school graduation data calculated from the U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express.

Nationally, black people make up about 1 in 6 of the total traditional college-age (18-24) population, and currently make up a similar proportion of this age group as they did two decades ago. In the 2015-16 school year, black students comprised nearly 1 in 6, or 16 percent, of high school graduates across the country. But they made up less than 5 percent of the students enrolled in large, selective public colleges.[10] If we look only at each state's public flagship institution, as seen on **Map 1**, white students made up 63 percent of all students enrolled in the fall of 2016, despite comprising only 52 percent of all high school graduates the previous spring.

MAP 1.

Difference in Black Share of State High School Graduates and Black Enrollment at Public Flagship University (Fall 2016)



The largest disparities are in the Deep South, perhaps unsurprising due to the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow. The numbers are worth laying bare, though. In Mississippi, black students comprise over half of all high school graduates but made up only 13 percent of undergraduates at the University of Mississippi in 2016—a difference of over 37 percent. White students, a minority (45 percent) among high school graduates, made up a full 77 percent of the total undergraduate fall enrollment.

In Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee, we see a similar story—public flagship institutions with robust academic legacies, whose Southeastern Conference football games are required viewing across the region (and much of the country) on Saturday afternoons, and where the difference in black high school graduates and overall enrollment approaches 20 to 30 percent.

However, this is not a problem relegated to the Deep South. Looking at other parts of the South and Mid-Atlantic, Maryland has a 23 percent difference in the percent of African-American high school graduates and enrollment at the University of Maryland – College Park. At the Universities of Virginia and North Carolina, the disparity is 17 percent and 19 percent respectively. At the University of Buffalo, the largest campus of the vaunted State University of New York system, the disparity is 11 percent.

Among states with Big Ten schools, the Universities of Illinois, Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State University all have double-digit differences in the number of black high school graduates in their states and black fall enrollment. Ten percent of Wisconsin high school graduates are black. Yet the University of Wisconsin's undergraduate student body is only 2 percent black, in total.

Even more troubling, we have seen very little movement in campus diversity over time across a number of large, selective public colleges, including flagship campuses and schools like Clemson, Georgia Tech, and UCLA. In 2016, 32 out of the 67 selective public colleges listed below enrolled a smaller percentage of black students than they did 20 years ago. Only SUNY at Albany saw a marked improvement in the share of African American students during this period: In 1996, 1 in 12 students at SUNY at Albany were black; by 2016, 1 in 7 students were black. (See **Table 2**.)

For some schools, this is an acute issue. In 2015, students at the University of Missouri began protesting a rise in bigotry on campus and inaction on the part of campus leadership in addressing it. Events in Missouri soon spawned a national conversation around free speech and race on campus, and led to the resignation of the president and chancellor. Since the episode, Missouri has struggled to enroll students across the board. But it is striking that while white freshman enrollment was down 21 percent in the ensuing fall, black freshman enrollment was down a full 42 percent.[11]

This long-term dynamic is occurring at time when selective public colleges have a greater pool of students from which they can choose. As mentioned previously, high school graduation rates for black students

TABLE 2.

At Many Large Selective Public Colleges, Black Enrollment is Declining

	Percent Black Undergraduate Fall Enrollment				Percent Black Undergraduate Fall Enrollment		
Institution	**1996**	**2016**	**Change, 1996-2016**	**Institution**	**1996**	**2016**	**Change, 1996-2016**
University of South Carolina-Columbia	18.7%	9.0%	-9.7%	Binghamton University	5.1%	5.2%	0.1%
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	8.8%	4.3%	-4.5%	University of Delaware	5.8%	5.9%	0.1%
University of Pittsburgh	9.5%	5.3%	-4.2%	University at Buffalo	7.1%	7.3%	0.2%
University of Virginia	10.2%	6.5%	-3.7%	University of Wisconsin-Madison	1.9%	2.2%	0.2%
University of California-Berkeley	5.6%	2.0%	-3.6%	Indiana University-Bloomington	3.7%	4.2%	0.5%
Stony Brook University	10.0%	6.5%	-3.6%	University of Oregon	1.5%	2.0%	0.6%
University of California-Los Angeles	6.0%	3.2%	-2.8%	The University of Montana	0.4%	0.9%	0.6%
Georgia Institute of Technology	9.5%	6.7%	-2.7%	University of Idaho	0.8%	1.4%	0.6%
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	10.7%	8.0%	-2.7%	University of New Hampshire (Main Campus)	0.6%	1.3%	0.7%
University of Oklahoma-Norman	6.9%	4.8%	-2.1%	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	3.5%	4.2%	0.7%
Ohio State University (Main Campus)	7.3%	5.5%	-1.7%	University of Vermont	0.6%	1.3%	0.7%
University of California-Riverside	5.7%	4.1%	-1.6%	University of Utah	0.6%	1.3%	0.7%
University of Arkansas	6.3%	4.8%	-1.5%	University of Georgia	6.8%	7.6%	0.8%
The University of Alabama	11.8%	10.4%	-1.4%	University of Hawaii at Manoa	0.7%	1.5%	0.8%
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	7.1%	5.8%	-1.3%	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	1.8%	2.8%	1.0%
Clemson University	8.0%	6.8%	-1.2%	University of Iowa	2.2%	3.3%	1.1%
University of California-Davis	3.3%	2.3%	-1.1%	College of William and Mary	6.0%	7.1%	1.1%
University of Maryland-College Park	13.9%	12.9%	-1.0%	West Virginia University	3.6%	4.7%	1.1%
University of Washington-Seattle Campus	3.4%	2.6%	-0.8%	Pennsylvania State University (Main Campus)	3.0%	4.2%	1.2%
The College of New Jersey	6.3%	5.6%	-0.7%	University of Kansas	2.9%	4.1%	1.2%
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	8.2%	7.5%	-0.7%	University of Maine	0.8%	2.0%	1.2%
University of California-San Diego	2.0%	1.5%	-0.6%	University of Arizona	2.6%	3.9%	1.3%
University of Massachusetts-Amherst	4.4%	3.8%	-0.6%	University of Connecticut	4.5%	5.8%	1.3%
University of Alaska Fairbanks	2.6%	2.1%	-0.5%	University of Nevada-Reno	1.7%	3.3%	1.6%
University of California-Santa Barbara	2.6%	2.1%	-0.5%	University of North Dakota	0.8%	2.4%	1.7%
University of California-Santa Cruz	2.5%	2.0%	-0.5%	University of Rhode Island	3.3%	5.1%	1.8%
University of California-Irvine	2.4%	1.9%	-0.4%	University of Missouri-Columbia	5.9%	7.7%	1.8%
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	4.4%	4.0%	-0.4%	The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	4.5%	6.6%	2.1%
University of Colorado Boulder	2.0%	1.6%	-0.3%	University of South Dakota	0.8%	3.1%	2.3%
University of New Mexico (Main Campus)	2.8%	2.4%	-0.3%	University of Kentucky	5.3%	7.8%	2.5%
University of Florida	6.5%	6.2%	-0.3%	University of Mississippi	10.3%	12.9%	2.6%
Texas A & M University-College Station	3.3%	3.1%	-0.2%	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	8.8%	12.2%	3.4%
University of Wyoming	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%				
The University of Texas at Austin	4.1%	4.2%	0.0%	SUNY at Albany	8.2%	17.0%	8.8%

Source: Calculations from U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Percentages are fall enrollment of all undergraduates.

have risen dramatically across the country in a short period of time. And yet in many states, that has had little impact on enrollment at the flagship campus, as **Table 3** shows.

TABLE 3.

Rising Black High School Grad Rates, Declining Black Public Flagship Enrollment

	2011	2016	Change
Florida			
Black High School Graduation Rate	59.0%	72.3%	13.3%
Black Enrollment at University of Florida	8.7%	6.2%	-2.5%
Mississippi			
Black High School Graduation Rate	68.0%	78.9%	10.9%
Black Enrollment at University of Mississippi	16.9%	12.9%	-3.9%
Michigan			
Black High School Graduation Rate	57.0%	67.0%	10.4%
Black Enrollment at University of Michigan Ann Arbor	4.4%	4.3%	-0.1%
Ohio			
Black High School Graduation Rate	59.0%	67.0%	8.3%
Black Enrollment at Ohio State University	5.9%	5.5%	-0.3%

Calculations from U.S. Department of Education (IPEDS and ED Data Express)

Exclusion at Elite Colleges, Less Support at HBCUs and Community Colleges

Segregation in public higher education is nothing new. For instance, the rise of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) was a direct response to systematic discrimination and exclusion of students of color at other institutions. Most American college students do not attend selective colleges, and there are many other institutions, particularly within the public sector, that provide students with high-value credentials. In fact, many such colleges, from the California State Colleges, the City University of New York system, the University of Texas – El Paso, and others, are exceedingly successful at both enrolling working-class students and ensuring that those students are upwardly mobile.[12]

But the institutions with some of the most cultural and political power across their respective states fail to make meaningful headway in ensuring access to black students. This contributes to a two- or three-tiered public college system, in which the public research institutions that receive the greatest public support per-student are also enrolling a disproportionate number of white and wealthy students, while less selective 4-year colleges and community colleges do greater work with fewer resources at their disposal.

While per-student state support for all types of public institutions has declined over a number of decades,[13] public flagship colleges do receive thousands of dollars more on a per-student basis from state and local policymakers. In 2015, public flagship colleges received nearly $14,000 per student in state and local appropriations. This compares to slightly over $9,000 for non-flagship 4-year colleges, $7,686 for public 2-year colleges, and a little more than $10,000 per student at public Historically Black Colleges and Universities. (See **Table 4.**)

TABLE 4.

Public Flagship Institutions Receive More State Support than Non-Flagships, 2-Year Schools, and HBCUs

	State and Local Support* per student, 2015
Public Flagship Institutions	**$13,810**
Public HBCU	$10,104
Public 4-Year Non-Flagship	$9,125
Public 2-Year Colleges	$7,686

Source: Author's calculations from Delta Cost Project data. *Includes state and local appropriations and revenue from state grants and contracts. 2015 Data from the University of Illinois and University of Massachusetts Amherst were unavailable and thus not included in the flagship calculation.

In some states, as **Table 5** shows, the difference in support for flagships and certain HBCUs is vast. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for example, receives $16,000 more per student from state sources than North Carolina A&T University. The University of Georgia takes in over $10,000 more per-student than Savannah State University. And the University of Maryland – College Park gets over $8,700 more per-student than Bowie State University.

TABLE 5.

In Some States, Stark Disparities between State Support for Flagships and HBCUs

	State and Local Support per student, 2015
North Carolina	
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	$26,539
North Carolina A & T State University	$10,603
Georgia	
University of Georgia	$14,443
Savannah State University	$4,369
Maryland	
University of Maryland - College Park	$17,789
Bowie State University	$9,000

Source: Author's calculations from Delta Cost Project data. State and local support includes state and local appropriations and revenue from state grants and contracts.

The state of Maryland, in fact, has been home to a decade-long legal battle between HBCUs and the state over the state's disinvestment in HBCUs.[14] The lawsuit alleges that while Bowie State, Morgan State University, Coppin State University, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore have been underfunded relative to predominately-white institutions, other state colleges have been allowed to duplicate HBCUs' most successful academic programs, thereby putting them at a competitive disadvantage. But even the remedies sought in this high-profile lawsuit are more likely to focus on how academic programs are created and grouped between institutions, than on the funding disparities themselves.

Public Funding, the Racial Wealth Gap, and the Abandonment of Accountability

The case here is by no means that elite public colleges are receiving more support than they need. As **Table 6** indicates, budget cuts over several decades, and especially amidst the Great Recession, hit public flagships hard, often resulting in rising tuition, a change in academic offerings, or deferred maintenance.

TABLE 6.

After the Great Recession, Public Funding Declined for All Colleges

Institution Type	Public Funding per Full-Time Student, 2013	Public Funding per Full-Time Student, 2007	Change, 2007-2013
Public Research Universities	$15,499	**$18,447**	**-16%**
Public Master's	$7,687	$9,560	-20%
Public Bachelor's	$9,071	$11,048	-18%
Community Colleges	$7,907	$9,453	-16%

Source: Author's calculations from the Delta Cost Project. Public funding is defined as state and local appropriations as well as state, federal, and local grants and contracts.

And yet, the public institutions where most students, including most black students, are more likely to enroll have fewer resources to do their jobs. With greater resources, these institutions could invest in academic and student supports, lowering the price and increasing aid for those who struggle to afford college, or on retaining high-quality faculty or expanding academic programs.

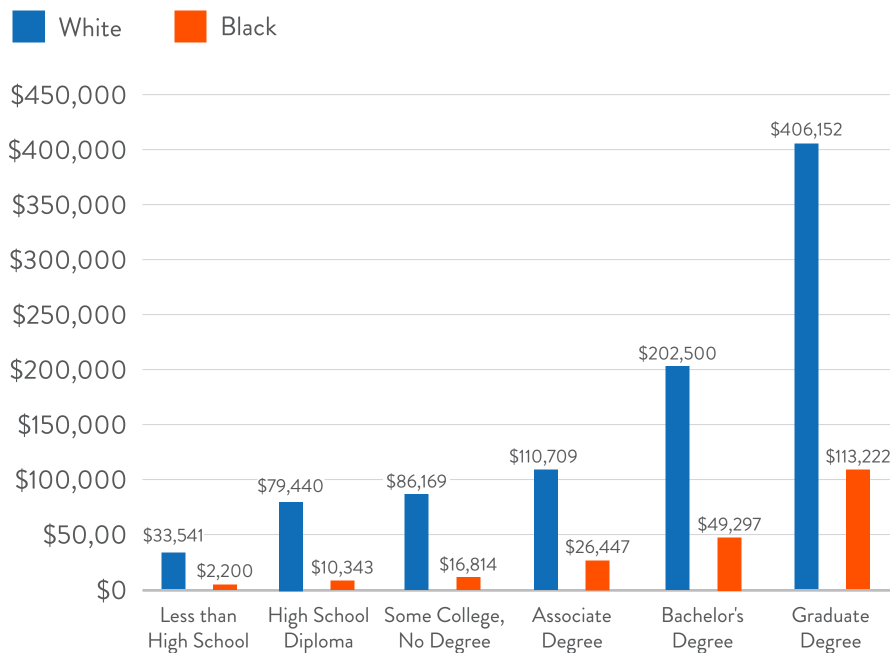
A well-funded and inclusive system of public higher education that improves attainment and keeps prices low for students requires putting far more resources into the system overall. And it must ensure that much of those resources go to the colleges enrolling the students who most stand to benefit, particularly if selective institutions continue to enroll very few black and brown students.

An inclusive system of public higher education would require state and institutional leaders to reckon with a yawning black-white wealth gap that gets larger at every education level, as **Figure 4** illustrates. As the result of systemic discrimination, wealth-stripping, and public policies that create and exploit social exclusion,[15] [16] the typical college-educated black household has less wealth than the typical white household with only a high school education.

FIGURE 4.

The Racial Wealth Gap Grows at Every Education Level

Median Household Net Worth by Education Level, 2016



The black-white wealth gap, of course, means that white families have more resources to pay for college or contend with eventual student loan debt. It also impacts social capital, or the social resources and opportunities that stem from relationships and economic status. These can take the form of business or academic connections that money can help lubricate—the type that can allow students to take on and benefit from unpaid internships or other resume-building opportunities. The disparity in social capital can prevent lower-income students and families from interacting with those familiar with how to navigate elite institutions.

As state support remains unreliable, prices go up and need-based aid becomes scarcer. This means that for those who dare to dream of attending a selective school, the prospect of extremely high student debt awaits them. Pennsylvania, which has seen some of the most draconian per-student cuts of any state, is also one of the most expensive for working-class students. At the University of Pittsburgh and Penn State University, low-income students must pay $20,000 annually, after any grant or scholarship aid, to attend school. (See **Table 7** for annual costs.)

TABLE 7.

Working-Class Students are Priced Out of Many Large Selective Public Colleges

Institution Name	Net Price for Low-Income Students, 2015-16	Institution Name	Net Price for Low-Income Students, 2015-16
University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	$21,581	University of Mississippi	$10,478
Pennsylvania State University (Main Campus)	$20,873	University of California-Santa Cruz	$10,290
University of Alabama	$18,686	University of Utah	$10,067
University of New Hampshire (Main Campus)	$16,750	University of California-Davis	$10,048
University of Colorado-Boulder	$15,109	University of California-Santa Barbara	$9,954
University of Kansas	$14,760	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	$9,639
University of Kentucky	$13,535	University of Hawaii at Manoa	$9,525
University of South Dakota	$13,396	University of Virginia (Main Campus)	$9,463
University of Rhode Island	$13,104	University of Wyoming	$9,423
University of Arizona	$12,914	University of California-Irvine	$9,280
Clemson University	$12,905	University of Georgia	$9,168
University of Oklahoma-Norman	$12,890	Stony Brook University	$8,954
University of Maine	$12,638	University of California-Riverside	$8,854
University of South Carolina-Columbia	$12,476	University of California-Berkeley	$8,677
University of Texas at Austin	$12,434	University of California-San Diego	$8,585
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	$12,268	Ohio State University (Main Campus)	$8,442
University of Tennessee-Knoxville	$12,091	University of Iowa	$8,259
University of Montana	$12,087	Texas A & M University-College Station	$8,037
University of Missouri-Columbia	$12,060	University of California-Los Angeles	$7,900
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	$11,998	West Virginia University	$7,769
University of Oregon	$11,964	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	$7,694
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	$11,893	University of Wisconsin-Madison	$7,667
University of New Mexico (Main Campus)	$11,790	University of Maryland-College Park	$7,645
University of Delaware	$11,750	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	$7,554
University at Buffalo	$11,637	University of Alaska-Fairbanks	$7,163
University of Connecticut	$11,626	University of Washington-Seattle Campus	$7,129
University of Arkansas	$11,501	University of Florida	$6,768
University of Nevada-Reno	$11,312	Georgia Institute of Technology (Main Campus)	$6,293
University of Idaho	$11,183	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	$5,694
Binghamton University	$11,086	Indiana University-Bloomington	$5,470
SUNY at Albany	$10,989	College of William and Mary	$4,459
University of Vermont	$10,906	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	$3,889
The College of New Jersey	$10,664	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	$2,660
University of North Dakota	$10,616		

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Low-income students defined as those from families making $0 - $30,000 who received federal financial aid.

Other colleges, like the University of Michigan, may offer a better deal for working-class families. But black working-class families might see this as cold comfort, considering Michigan has cut black enrollment rates in half over the past 20 years.

Colleges have also wrestled with lower state funding by enrolling wealthier students, out-of-state students and international students who pay more.[17] This leaves fewer spots for high-achievers from low-income backgrounds and exacerbates a self-perpetuating cycle in which students with less wealth, more need, and fewer connections do not know anyone from their peer group attending these institutions.

While states can take significant action on their own to establish education equity, a comprehensive push likely requires the federal government must step in and reverse these trends—offering a way to increase per-student support, lower skyrocketing prices and debt, and provide the proper incentives and guidance to encourage colleges and states to expand opportunities for working-class students and students of color.

The federal government also has a role to play in keeping predatory actors at bay. In the 1990s and 2000s, a group of institutions offered to massively and rapidly expand enrollment of working-class students, veterans, and students of color. These institutions were disproportionately found in the for-profit sector. Readily available federal loan dollars, along with interest from private equity firms and the growth of online education, led to booming enrollment in for-profit certificate, associate, bachelor's, and post-baccalaureate degree programs. Capitalizing on the importance of college to securing a good job, and the fact that black and brown people lacked access to good jobs across the country, many of these schools aggressively recruited and enrolled students of color, promising valuable credentials that would unlock the key to their dreams.[18]

Some of these institutions, despite receiving upwards of 90 percent of their revenue from federal loan, Pell Grant, and GI Bill dollars, left students with unpayable debts and degrees that were virtually useless in the labor market. When the Obama administration attempted to create new rules that would cut off federal funding for career programs whose graduates' debt-to-earnings ratios were too high, they were met with steep resistance from for-profit colleges as well as Congressional Republicans.[19] The Trump administration, in its first two years, has fought to keep these rules from being implemented.

So, over a several-decade period, black students have been met with declining black enrollment at elite public colleges, fewer resources at other public institutions including HBCUs, and increased risk from predatory actors filling the rest of the education system.

Cynical Attacks on Affirmative Action

In the face of overwhelming evidence that black students and other students of color pose no threat to the opportunity of white families to send their kids to a well-resourced college, a seminal project of the conservative movement has been to hamper colleges from using race as an admissions factor. These efforts have been successful: According to one study, 35 percent of selective colleges reported considering race in the admissions process in 2014, down from 60 percent in 1994.[20] Only 18 percent of "competitive" colleges—a tier that denotes selective but not elite schools—used affirmative action in 2014, down from 46 percent 20 years prior.

A high-profile case, Fisher v. Texas, centered around one white student who sued the University of Texas at Austin when she was not admitted in 2008. Fisher's grades and test scores were too low to finish in the top 10 percent of her high school class, which would have guaranteed her admission—and was the criteria by which the vast majority of students received admission. Yet her case plowed ahead, focused on the school having admitted 47 students with lower grades and test scores than hers, through a mix of criteria that included service and extracurricular activities, as well as race.

Of those 47 students, 42 were white. Simultaneously, 168 black and Latino students with higher grades were denied admission in the same year. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the University of Texas' admissions policies passed constitutional muster. Fisher later graduated from Louisiana State University.

This may be considered an example of a judicial victory for racial justice, but it also reveals a strong presumption of white qualification—and black disqualification—that activists must continually combat. Attacks on affirmative action are often couched in language around fairness or qualifications, an assumption that all applicants are basically on a level playing field. Opponents do not show the same zeal around colleges enrolling wealthy out-of-state students with middling grades or showing some preference to children of alumni or donors. Opponents are also undeterred by the fact that enrollment of black students has declined at selective colleges across the country. Their belief that this is not a phantom problem is rooted in assumptions about who belongs, and who is basically qualified to succeed.

Social Stigma and Campus Safety

Worse, these attacks also create a deep social stigma: that black students are taking the seats belonging to white students, that they are only present due to some misguided government policy. White students do not face the same scrutiny. Out-of-state students are not typically showered with suspicion despite the very real evidence that many are admitted because they can pay higher tuition.[21] University administrators readily admit this: UCLA Chancellor Gene Block noted to the Washington Post that out-of-state students "pay full freight" and "bring in huge amounts of additional revenue." [22] Similarly, legacy admissions are not relentlessly attacked in the courts, despite the fact that colleges have a financial interest in enrolling the children of alumni, who will stay connected and ideally donate to the institution.

This unwarranted suspicion that only black students seem to receive is one dynamic of social exclusion. It is reflective of broader experiences facing black communities in the workplace, in wealth-building, in interactions with law enforcement and the justice system. We cannot possibly account for all the ways these dynamics play out on campus, but a few stand out.

Race and Law Enforcement

The first is how white students leverage campus (or community) police in service of their own fear. The examples at the beginning of this brief are a snapshot of this. White students' use of campus police and law enforcement to keep tabs on black students who pose no threat creates a dangerous situation for black students. It amounts to a waste of campus or public resources and attention that could be spent solving actual problems. But more importantly, it enforces exclusive expectations of who belongs at school.

Race and Assumptions of Academic Qualification

Another way social exclusion rears its head involves racist assumptions of cognitive inferiority of black students. Evidence suggests that professors in some scientific disciplines assign black and Latino students lower grades than white students, even after controlling for variables such as SAT scores.[23] Another study found that high-achieving black students are frequent targets of questions by professors around plagiarism or questions from other students about how they were admitted to school.[24] Experiencing others' stereotyped expectations induces stress and isolates black students. It can make it even more difficult to navigate predominately (and increasingly) white settings.

Experiencing discrimination can affect whether a student feels like she belongs, and it can also influence whether she stays in college altogether.[25]

The Athlete Stigma

This also manifests itself in the "athlete stigma," in which black non-athletes are often assumed to be athletes or to have only made it to campus based on an athletic scholarship. The athlete stigma is delegitimizing for several reasons. The first, obviously, is that it assumes that black students could not have gotten into a college on academic qualifications alone. This is self-reinforced by the very fact that elite colleges are enrolling fewer black students, and that college is getting more expensive for working-class students.

It also inherently assumes a hierarchy of capability, in that athletes are considered inherently underachieving or cognitively inferior to other students on campus. This is based in racialized notions of intelligence[26]; the stereotyping of black success as being dependent on physical talent and physical attributes, rather than cognitive or mental strength, has a long, ugly history dating back to slavery. It's also misguided: Many athletes' schedules include full academic course loads and practices, games, and film study that are equivalent to a full-time job. The ability to display rapid critical thinking skills, solve and diagnose complex problems, memorize dozens of playbooks, and work in team settings are all things that employers—and society writ large—seek.

This is a form of hypocrisy: Certain athletes are subject to social exclusion, but other skill-based majors from the performing arts (dancing, music, and theatre) or visual arts are not. When a music major—one who may spend many hours outside of school rehearsing, practicing, or performing—enters a math or history class, she is not likely to receive the same humiliating experience that a black female basketball player cited: On the first day of class, a professor asked student athletes to stand, singling them out by saying, "These are the people who will probably drop this class."[27]

The third reason is exploitation: most student-athletes are not black, but in the case of revenue sports such as football and men's basketball, many black student-athletes are directly responsible for generating millions of dollars in revenue for their colleges, their coaches and athletic departments, and for corporate sponsors. As athletes have begun to organize around the notion that some of that revenue should be put back into paying student-athletes, or that those same athletes should be allowed to make money off of their likeness—in the same way that

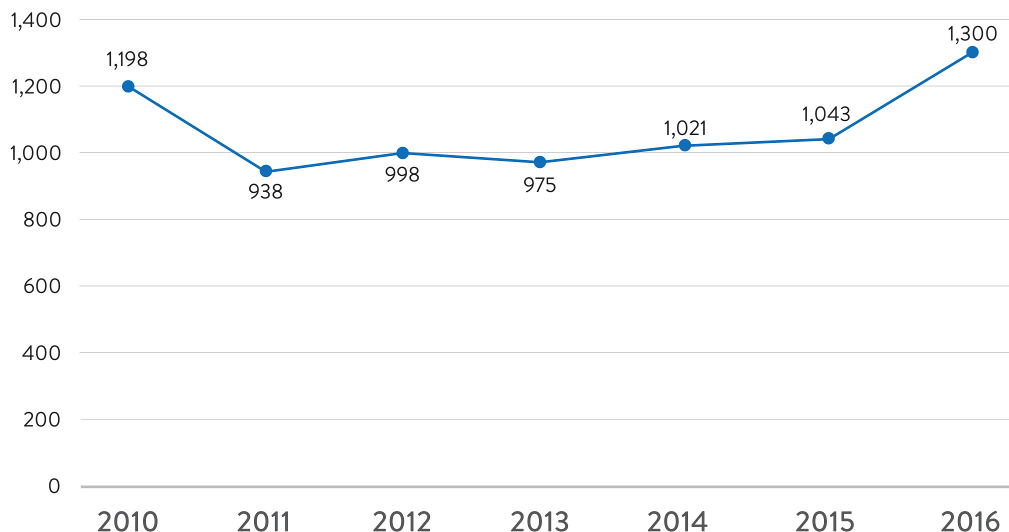
music majors can make money from playing in a band—they have faced extreme resistance from colleges, the NCAA, and their political allies. Student-athletes, we are told, are "ungrateful" and should be satisfied with their athletic scholarships and the opportunity to be on a campus on which, the implicit argument goes, they would otherwise be unwelcome.

Organizing Against Hate

The last several years have seen an increase in campus-based hate, as Figure 5 shows, and an expansion in organizing to combat it. When black students do organize around injustice, they face institutional policies and pressures that make it difficult to both meet everyday responsibilities and take the time to stand up for their rights and dignity. In taking time to protest the increase in racist activity on campus, students must skip class or work, delay studying, and in some cases miss exams, which can put much-needed financial aid in jeopardy.[28]

FIGURE 5.

Reported Hate Crimes on Campus, 2010-2016



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey. Hate crime data reported by 6,506 institutions and 11,620 total campuses.

Some colleges—including George Washington University and American University in Washington, DC—have responded to the needs of student organizers, sometimes by working with professors to accommodate schedules and request coursework and exam extensions for student activists. Some have begun to rethink ways to increase diversity and inclusion on campus.[29] Time will tell how committed colleges are to systemic change, and more importantly, whether they are willing to put in the long-term resources to enable students of color to succeed.

Social Inclusion Benefits All of Us

Addressing the underrepresentation and under-resourcing of black students in higher education is a good idea in its own right. We can also increase college attainment by providing greater public support for community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and regional 4-year institutions that educate far more students than elite, selective colleges—and moving toward a world in which no college is ever considered "under-resourced." Doing so would simply be providing the same promise to today's students that previous generations could take for granted.

But it is also the case that white students and families can benefit from social inclusion. First, there are documented effects on creativity, problem solving, innovation, and critical thinking skills when students learn together in diverse settings. Longitudinal studies reveal that students in racially and ethnically diverse environments show greater growth in academic skills and higher rates of academic engagement and motivation.[30] At a time when employers consistently demand critical thinking, nimbleness, motivation, and people skills, increasing the pool of students and graduates of color can benefit all individuals.

Perhaps more importantly, as more students of color have wanted to go to college to better themselves, state lawmakers have cut budgets with greater ease, and federal lawmakers have not seen fit to increase financial aid in a way that would make college as inexpensive as it once was. In response, colleges can raise prices, admit more wealthy students, or cut courses and services. This negatively impacts white working- and middle-class families as well.

The lack of public or institutional investment creates a situation in which financial aid is scarce and spots are competitive, breeding resentment within an institution or across society. This scarcity is an active policy choice that harms everyone; the federal government's unwillingness to stop tuition from outpacing the average or maximum Pell Grant impacts, for example, harms some low-income black students at HBCUs, but it also impacts the white community and technical college students who have to pick up extra work hours just to pay for books. Lawmakers cutting funding for non-selective colleges and community colleges is a precursor to cutting funds for public flagships, or not restoring funding after an economic downturn. When universities respond to budget pressures by increasing the enrollment of out-of-state students, they reduce opportunity and choice for local and in-state students, black and white alike. When a student or employee calls

campus police to harass black students and black university employees, they are exacerbating an already hostile environment and wasting resources that could be spent actually ensuring safety for everyone.

So, focusing on structural inclusion can build a more cohesive and powerful narrative, one that recognizes that increasing public investment in public colleges and students is good for an entire state, and that putting more resources into those that have been starved of access or asked to "do more with less" can have positive effects for everyone.

In short, equity builds opportunity, helps students innovate and become their best selves. Finally, it is based on an understanding that the dynamics of social exclusion are not inevitable—rather they are based on a series of deliberate policy choices. What was done can be undone. By recognizing the ways in which black students must navigate a hostile, expensive, and exhausting higher education experience, we can begin to repair some of the harm done in a way that puts more resources, accountability, and attention at every level of our education system so students of all backgrounds can thrive. This switch will require organizing and listening to the communities most affected by social exclusion, and it will require putting pressure on decisionmakers to listen to the voice of today's students.

What Can State Policymakers Do?

College and universities, and their systems, can first and foremost look at funding formulas and disparities across institutions. States should ensure that the least-resourced institutions are no longer the same institutions educating the bulk of a state's black population. States can and should invest in need-based financial aid programs and equitable free-college programs, and put resources into colleges that can be used for high-touch advising programs and proven strategies to help students succeed who otherwise might not.[31]

States should also work to "ban the box," or prohibit colleges from asking about a potential student's criminal history when applying to college or seeking financial aid. Due to over-policing, people of color are disproportionately likely to be arrested, particularly when it comes to drug offenses, even though white and black drug use is virtually the same; in fact, white students report higher rates of drug use in college than black students.[32] Asking about drug convictions or history simply creates an inequitable barrier to applying or being admitted to college that locks students of color out. The State University of New York system, as well as the states of Louisiana and Washington,[33] have begun to lead on this issue.

What Can Institutional Leaders Do?

Institutions that are serious about structural inclusion can address it in several ways. The first is the admissions and recruitment process. Selective public colleges can recruit across an entire state or region and can put resources into attracting students from a wide array of backgrounds. The Supreme Court has determined that race can be used as a factor in a holistic admissions process, and institutions can act accordingly, but they should also create formal commissions and processes that examine whether students of color who may be qualified to attend are not doing so because it is not a welcoming environment. As University of Missouri student Whitney Matewe told the New York Times last year, "Being 'the other' in every classroom and every situation is exhausting."[34]

The second is through the delivery of financial aid. To the extent that institutions supplement federal and state financial aid, they should move away from the trend of merit-based aid and invest in as much need-based grant aid as possible. This would lower the net price for working-class students of all backgrounds and could mean the difference between enrolling and not enrolling, or persisting and dropping out with debt. Incorporating knowledge of the racial wealth gap, and the causes of it, in financial aid policy and practice can help colleges target aid at those families who have been shut out of the ability to save for higher education.

Most importantly, these complex issues should be addressed with students at the table. Institutions should create formal processes that organize students of color around topics that those students deem most pressing or important. Building power among students and faculty of color can create a more balanced, and less reactive, dialogue around the role of police on campus, or how to address white students who use the police to harass other students. Giving space to student leaders to talk about injustice can also be beneficial, making it known that those protesting hate will be met with support by the college both in principle and in practice (by accommodating their academic and schedule demands). Institutions can lead on addressing gaps in social capital, linking students with black-owned businesses or organizations that can lead to employment or internships.

Social exclusion is deeply entrenched, and addressing the policies that expose and isolate students of color will take serious effort well beyond any single campus. But colleges are far from powerless. If the role of higher education is to help a student achieve their dreams, and to help a state become more dynamic and competitive, it's time for State U to listen to the students who are only asking for a safe, welcoming environment and an equal shot at success.

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8 These figures are based on the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, described by the Department of Education as "the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade (or the earliest high school grade), students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is 'adjusted' by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die. 2010-11 was the first year that states were required to use the regulatory cohort rate, so prior year data are not necessarily comparable to the 2010-11 rates."

9 Calculations from U.S. Department of Education, ED Data Express.

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