

BACKGROUND PAPER  
THE JOINT CENTER HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE

**BLACK MALE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITIES IN THE U.S.  
STATUS, TRENDS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

**SHAUN R. HARPER**



**DELLUMS COMMISSION**

**BETTER HEALTH THROUGH  
STRONGER COMMUNITIES:  
PUBLIC POLICY REFORM TO  
EXPAND LIFE PATHS OF YOUNG  
MEN OF COLOR**

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**JOINT CENTER FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES**  
**HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

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## PREFACE

During the past twenty-five years, a series of public policies have had a negative impact upon young men from communities of color. These policies, which have been enacted and often amended incrementally, are numerous. They include the abandonment of rehabilitation and treatment for drug users in favor of interdiction and criminal sanctions in the 1980s, state policies to divert youthful offenders to adult criminal systems, and the imposition of zero tolerance policies to exclude youth with problems from public schools in the 1990s. These policies have had a cumulative and hardening effect of limiting life options for young men of color. High school dropout rates and declining enrollment in postsecondary education, at the same time that rates of incarceration increase, are explained, to a significant degree, by these policies.

The Dellums Commission, chaired by former Congressman Ron Dellums, was formed by the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to analyze policies that affect the physical, emotional, and social health of young men of color and their communities and to develop an action plan to alter those public policies that limit life paths for young men of color. To understand the issues more fully and to inform its deliberations in formulating an ambitious but realistic action plan, the Dellums Commission asked experts in various fields to prepare background papers on specific issues. These background papers serve to inform the Dellums Commission's recommendations.

This background paper focuses on the status of black male students in higher education in the U.S. It examines public flagship universities in each of the 50 states, providing stark evidence of racial disparities in public higher education, particularly for black males. Its statistical analysis of college access, graduation rates, degree attainment, and black student-athletes illustrates the extent of these disparities across the nation and "the need to strengthen the social contract between public institutions of higher education and black male citizens" through various reforms. This paper complements and reinforces the conclusions of other Dellums Commission background papers on education, health, criminal and juvenile justice, recidivism, the child welfare system, the media, and community well-being.

The work of the Dellums Commission is part of a larger effort by the Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) to ignite a "Fair Health" movement that gives people of color the inalienable right to equal opportunity for healthy lives. In igniting such a movement, HPI seeks to help communities of color identify short- and long-term policy objectives and related activities that:

- Address the economic, social, environmental, and behavioral determinants of health;
- Allocate resources for the prevention and effective treatment of chronic illness;
- Reduce infant mortality and improve child and maternal health;
- Reduce risk factors and support healthy behaviors among children and youth;
- Improve mental health and reduce factors that promote violence;
- Optimize access to quality health care; and
- Create conditions for healthy aging and the improvement of the quality of life for seniors.

We are grateful to Shaun Harper for preparing this paper and to those Joint Center staff members who have contributed to the work of the Health Policy Institute and to the preparation, editing, design, and publication of this paper and the other background papers. Most of all, we are grateful to Congressman Dellums, the members of the Commission, and Dr. Gail C. Christopher, director of the Health Policy Institute, for their dedication and commitment to improving life options for young men of color across the United States.

*Margaret C. Simms*  
*Interim President and CEO*  
*Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In *The Future of the Public University in America*, James Duderstadt and Farris Womack contend that public institutions of higher education are among our nation's most significant social establishments.<sup>1</sup> They argue that public colleges and universities have been chiefly responsible for democratizing and extending higher education to "all citizens." They also suggest that the missions of these institutions reflect one of society's most cherished goals: access to equal opportunity through education. Throughout the book, Duderstadt and Womack describe a social contract between public higher education and the citizens it is intended to serve. Similarly, other scholars have characterized higher education as a public good with widespread social benefits through which individual participation yields positive outcomes for the larger society—crime and poverty reduction, increased civic engagement, social cooperation and cohesion, the ability of college-educated persons to create and adapt to new technologies, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

Most agree that public universities can and should uphold the social contract by offering equitable access and distributing resources to ensure success among diverse groups of American citizens. As evidenced throughout this report, the social contract as it relates to access and equity for black men at public colleges and universities has been breached. This report reviews the status of black men in higher education, with an emphasis on public flagship universities in each of the 50 states. Analysis of multiple data sources reveals the following national trends and disparities:

- In 2002, black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the same as in 1976.
- Across all racial/ethnic groups, gender gaps in enrollment are widest among black students, with black women outnumbering their male counterparts by 27.2 percentage points.
- Between 1977 and 2003, black male degree attainment increased by an average of 0.2 percentage points. The most significant gains were at the associate's degree level. Only 147 more doctorates were awarded to black men in 2003 than in 1977.
- Across all degree levels, white men earned more than ten times the number of degrees awarded to their black male counterparts.

- Nationally, more than two-thirds (67.6 percent) of black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education.
- In 2004, 10.4 percent of male undergraduates in higher education were black. Yet, black men represented 30.5 percent of all male student-athletes in Division I sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's highest level of competition. They comprised 54.6 percent of football teams and 60.8 percent of men's basketball teams at Division I institutions.
- Across four cohorts of college student-athletes, 47 percent of black men graduated within six years, compared to 60 percent of white males and 62 percent of student-athletes overall. The averages across four cohorts of basketball players were 39 percent and 52 percent for black men and white men, respectively. Forty-seven percent of black male football players graduated within six years, compared to 63 percent of their white teammates.

In each section of this report, these inequities are examined more closely within the context of public flagship universities in each state. Some key findings include the following:

- In 2000, black men represented 7.9 percent of the 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. population. Across the 50 flagship universities examined in this report, they comprised 2.8 percent of undergraduate student enrollments in 2004.
- In 44 states, there were disparities between the enrollments of black males at the public flagship institutions and their representation among 18- to 24-year-old citizens within those states.
- In 2004, 30 of the 50 flagship universities each enrolled less than 500 black male undergraduates.
- The mean six-year graduation rate for black men at flagship universities was 44.3 percent in 2004, compared to 61.4 percent for white men and 53.2 percent for black women.
- At 21 flagship institutions, more than one out of every five black men on campus was a student-athlete in 2004. At 42 institutions, more than one of every three football players was black. Fifty percent or more of the basketball teams were comprised of black men at 38 public flagship



institutions. Only at three universities did black male student-athletes comprise less than 20 percent of the men's basketball teams.

- At 43 public flagship universities, six-year graduation rates were higher for white male student-athletes than for their black male teammates. The average gap was 18.9 percentage points.
- Only 12 flagship universities graduated more than half of their black male student-athletes within six years; 13 institutions graduated less than one-third of these students.

A more elaborate presentation of these findings is offered throughout this report. Several statistics will confirm that higher education is a public good that benefits far too few black men in America. Moreover, the need to strengthen the social contract between public institutions of higher education and black male citizens will be made painstakingly clear. It seems important to emphasize that this is a status report. Thus, historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical explanations for the trends and inequities reported herein, though important, are beyond the scope and intended purposes of this document.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, much attention has been devoted to investigating various aspects of the black student experience on predominantly white college and university campuses. While some studies have focused on improving black student access to higher education,<sup>3</sup> others highlight and continually confirm the often adversarial relationships that these students have with the predominantly white institutions (PWIs) they attend.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, researchers have found that many black students must contend with feelings of alienation and isolation, racism and discrimination, and environmental incompatibility at PWIs. It should be noted that in 2002, 87.5 percent of all black students enrolled in higher education attended PWIs.<sup>5</sup> Among the more than 844,000 respondents to the National Survey of Student Engagement, black students were the group least satisfied with their college experiences.<sup>6</sup> Despite a 91.6 percent increase in black student enrollments between 1976 and 2002, many of these students still report being the only (or one of few) non-white students in most of their classes on predominantly white campuses. This is especially true at major flagship universities, where several thousand students are enrolled and large classes are commonplace. In this report, attention is devoted to 50 of the largest and most publicized PWIs in the country.

Although many researchers have studied black students on white campuses, few have independently examined trends, outcomes, and the experiences of black male and female collegians. That is, black students have long been treated as a monolithic group and data are not disaggregated by gender in most published research. Three empirical studies in the 1970s and 1980s focused on differences between black male and female students,<sup>7</sup> but few have since considered gender-specific trends and issues.<sup>8</sup> Instead of exploring variations within the race, most contemporary researchers have opted to compare black students at PWIs to their same-race counterparts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, while troublesome outcomes among and challenges faced by black males in K-12 schools have been explored and consistently documented,<sup>10</sup> it has only been in recent years that emphasis has been placed on black male college students.

In 1997, University of Louisville Professor Michael J. Cuyjet edited a monograph in which the experiences of black male collegians were highlighted and discussed.<sup>11</sup> Although few policy recommendations were offered, the publication ignited much conversation among college administrators and concern was heightened for improving the status of black males in higher education. In 2001, a special theme issue of the publication formerly known as *Black Issues in Higher Education* (now *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*) focused on gender disparities among black men and women. The

question, “How much does higher education matter to black males?” was printed on the cover and explored through multiple articles in the magazine. In that issue, writer Ronald Roach suggested that “brothers are not keeping up” and further claimed:

*What particularly alarms African American leaders and higher education officials is that while black women are scoring big [quantitative] gains in education, particularly at the college level, the progress for black men has either stagnated or increased only slightly from year to year over the past decade.<sup>12</sup>*

Released in 2006, the book *African American Men in College* calls further attention to the challenges faced by black men in postsecondary education, and the authors offer practical solutions to addressing the issues noted therein.<sup>13</sup> Most chapters focus on engaging and retaining black male undergraduates, and aggregate data regarding national trends that disadvantage black men are also reported.

In 2006, the Schott Foundation for Public Education published the second edition of its report, *Public Education and Black Male Students: A State Report Card*.<sup>14</sup> The report highlights disparities in high school graduation rates between black males and their same-sex counterparts. Despite the consistent provision of empirical evidence regarding the status of black male students in K-12 education, a similar effort to analyze and document trends, issues, and inequities in public postsecondary educational institutions across the 50 states has not been undertaken. Most of the media attention and published considerations of the crisis concerning black male collegians have been based on anecdotal reports and studies confirming what could be referred to as black male student disengagement in higher education. Until now, there have been no previous comprehensive reports or published studies that explicitly examine educational inequities or the overall status of black males in public higher education; hence the need for this report.

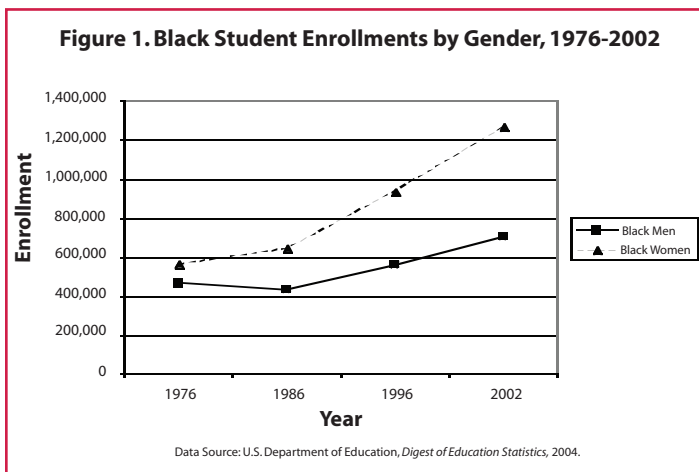
Racial and gender disparities in access and participation, degree attainment, athletic participation, and graduation rates at 50 public flagship universities (one in each state) are examined and discussed in the sections that follow. National trend data regarding the status of black males in postsecondary education are also reported, usually as a preface to the presentation of data from the 50 institutions. Implications for policy and practice are offered at the end of the report. Unless otherwise indicated, findings presented herein are based on analyses of data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the 2004 *Digest of Education Statistics*, and the 2005 National Collegiate Athletic Association’s *Federal Graduation Rates Reports*.

**COLLEGE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION**

Higher education has experienced a perceptible gender shift in student enrollments. Thirty years ago, men comprised 52.8 percent of all students enrolled at colleges and universities. At that time, black men represented 45.5 percent of black students across all degree levels. Between 1976 and 2002, the enrollment of women gradually surpassed that of their male counterparts on college and university campuses. By 2002, male enrollments dropped to 43.4 percent overall, and black men comprised only 35.8 percent of black student enrollments. While these trends have created gender inequities across all racial/ethnic groups and most degree levels, the gaps are most pronounced among black students. For example, 11.2 percentage points separated white female and male undergraduate enrollments in 2002, compared to a 27.2 percentage point gap between black women and men.

In most states, black men, in comparison to their same-race female counterparts and their white male peers, remain strikingly underrepresented among college goers. More alarmingly, black men represented a meager 4.3 percent of all students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 2002, the same as in 1976. Although many initiatives have been launched to eradicate inequitable access to higher education, black male enrollments are essentially the same now as they were 30 years ago. In contrast, black women increasingly comprise a larger share of college enrollments, particularly at the undergraduate level.

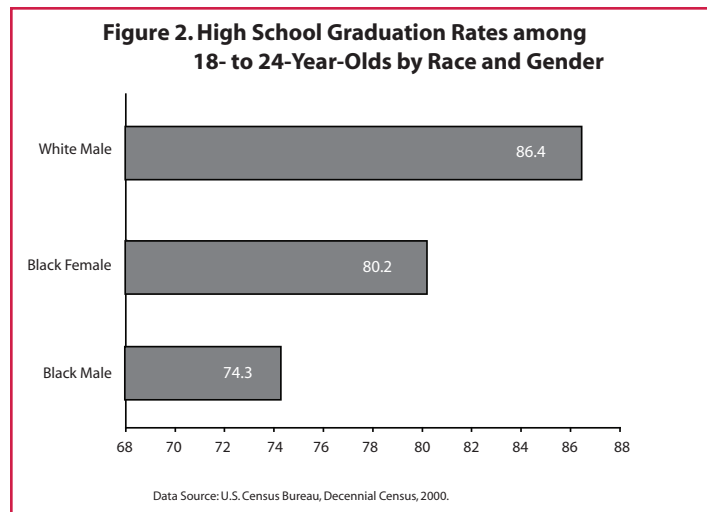
As depicted in Figure 1, only a small gap existed between the two sexes in 1976. Disparities worsened over the 30-year period. Black female enrollments increased by 126 percent between 1976 and 2002, compared to a 51 percent increase for black men. Despite the popular misconception that racial/ethnic minority student enrollment gains have occurred at the expense of white students, it should be noted that white male and female enrollments were not negatively affected by the expansion of access for black students. In



fact, white men experienced a two percent increase during the 30-year period, not a decline as many would erroneously assume.

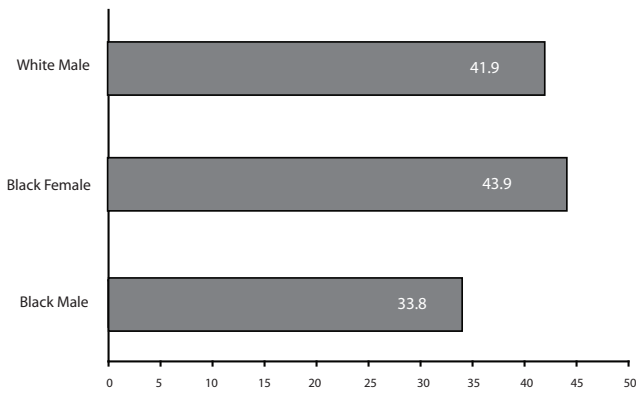
**High School Graduation Rates**

A portion of black male underrepresentation in higher education is explained by inequities in high school graduation rates. According to the 2000 Census, 74.3 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old black males in the U.S. population were high school graduates, compared to 86.4 percent of white men and 80.2 percent of black women in the same age group (see Figure 2). In its 2006 report, the Schott Foundation for Public Education notes that on average, 58 percent of black male high school students do not graduate in four years. Reportedly, New York, South Dakota, and Wisconsin graduated less than one-third of their black male high school students on schedule in 2002. In ten other states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, and South Carolina—fewer than 58 percent of black male students graduated from high school with peers in their cohort. In contrast, the Schott Foundation reported that 71 percent of white male students graduated from high school in four years. These four-year high school graduation rates are important because students who do not finish with their cohort groups are at significantly higher risk of ultimately dropping out or pursuing the GED as an alternative to high school graduation. These students are also less likely to seek or gain admission to four-year colleges and universities.



The college enrollments of 18- to 24-year-old high school graduates in 2000 are shown in Figure 3. This is another area where black male access and participation rates are low. Among those who graduated from high school, just over a third matriculated into a postsecondary institution. More than ten percentage points separated black women and black men, and the college enrollment rates of white male high school graduates surpassed that of their black male counterparts. While the college matriculation rates of black

**Figure 3. College Enrollments of 18- to 24-Year-Old High School Graduates**



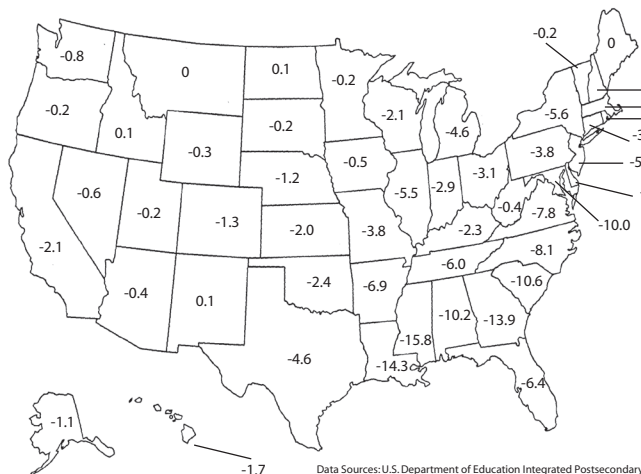
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2000.

female high school graduates are two percentage points higher than that of white males, it should be reinforced that women across all racial/ethnic groups outnumbered men.

**Inequities across the 50 States**

In 2000, there were nearly 1.9 million 18- to 24-year-old black men in the U.S. population—they comprised 7.9 percent of Americans in that age group.<sup>15</sup> Yet, black men accounted for no more than 5.2 percent of the undergraduate student enrollments at any of the 50 public flagship universities. In fact, the average black male enrollment rate at these institutions was 2.8 percent in 2004—5.1 percentage points lower than their representation among 18- to 24-year-olds in the general population. As shown in Figure 4, enrollment disparities at these universities existed in 44 of the 50 states in 2000. That is, black male enrollments were lower than their representation among 18- to 24-year-olds in those 44 states. Black males were only marginally overrepresented (by a combined 0.3 percentage points) in Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota. Combined, these three states only had 3,514 black male 18- to 24-year-old residents in 2000—0.1

**Figure 4. 18- to 24-Year-Old Black Male Population vs. Undergraduate Enrollment Inequity**



Data Sources: U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2000.

percent of the total black male 18- to 24-year-old population in America. Their flagship universities enrolled a combined total of 417 black male students in 2004.

Equity was reached at universities in three other states—Maine, Montana, and New Hampshire—which had a combined total of 1,669 black male residents in 2000 (.08 percent of the total black male 18- to 24-year-old population in America) and 179 black male undergraduates enrolled at their public flagship universities. Inequities were the most severe in Southern states—Mississippi had the widest gap (-15.8 percentage points).

**Enrollment Inequities**

The 12 states with the largest disparities were Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Some might argue that black men are so underrepresented at the flagship universities in these states because they are enrolled instead at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In 2004, the 27 public HBCUs in those 12 states enrolled a combined total of 44,997 black male undergraduates, which is 5.2 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old black male population in those states. The fact that fewer than 50,000 black male students were enrolled at public HBCUs in the 12 states does very little to explain the disproportionate underrepresentation of black men at public flagship universities. Interestingly, across the 50 institutions, there was almost exact parity for white males, who comprised 40 percent of undergraduate enrollments and 39.6 percent of the 18- to 24-year-olds across the 50 states.

In Table 1 (following page), the number and percent of black male undergraduates at each of the 50 institutions are reported alongside the percentage of black male 18- to 24-year-olds in each state’s population. Across all 50 institutions, black men comprised 2.8 percent of undergraduate enrollments—only 14 institutions had black male enrollments above this national average. Moreover, 30 of the 50 universities enrolled less than 500 black male undergraduate students. This is noteworthy because these are among the largest universities in America.

Lastly, there was no evidence of gender inequities in black student enrollments across the 50 institutions. Although nearly two-thirds of all black collegians across the country are women, men represented 49.4 percent of black students at the 50 public flagship universities in 2004. Only four institutions—the Universities of Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina—had black male undergraduate enrollments below the national average (36.4 percent among black students).

**Table 1. Black Male Undergraduate Enrollments and In-State Representation**

Institution	Black Male Undergraduate Representation		Black Men among 18- to 24-Year-Olds in State
	n	%	%
University of Alabama	767	4.6	14.8
University of Alaska	245	1.6	2.7
Arizona State University	603	1.5	1.9
University of Arkansas	355	2.6	9.5
University of California	306	1.3	3.4
University of Colorado	250	0.9	2.2
University of Connecticut	365	2.3	6.2
University of Delaware	455	2.6	10.6
University of Florida	1104	3.3	9.7
University of Georgia	409	1.6	15.5
University of Hawaii	77	0.5	2.2
Idaho State University	61	0.5	0.4
University of Illinois	780	2.6	8.1
Indiana University	513	1.7	4.6
University of Iowa	224	1.1	1.6
University of Kansas	343	1.6	3.6
University of Kentucky	430	2.3	4.6
Louisiana State University	930	3.5	17.8
University of Maine	56	0.6	0.6
University of Maryland	1303	5.2	15.2
University of Massachusetts	380	2.0	3.3
University of Michigan	753	3.0	7.6
University of Minnesota	676	2.1	2.3
University of Mississippi	552	4.7	20.5
University of Missouri	471	2.3	6.1
University of Montana	45	0.4	0.4
University of Nebraska	201	1.2	2.4
University of Nevada	700	3.2	3.8
University of New Hampshire	78	0.7	0.7
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	876	3.3	8.3
University of New Mexico	253	1.4	1.3
The State University of New York	534	3.0	8.6
University of North Carolina	558	3.4	11.5
North Dakota State University	103	1.0	0.9
The Ohio State University	1150	3.1	6.2
University of Oklahoma	521	2.5	4.9
University of Oregon	149	0.9	1.1
The Pennsylvania State University	653	1.9	5.7
University of Rhode Island	245	2.1	3.2
University of South Carolina	913	5.2	15.8
South Dakota State University	44	0.5	0.7
University of Tennessee	663	3.4	9.4
University of Texas	568	1.5	6.1
University of Utah	63	0.3	0.5
University of Vermont	40	0.4	0.6
University of Virginia	458	3.2	11.0
University of Washington	362	1.3	2.1
West Virginia University	385	2.1	2.5
University of Wisconsin	339	1.2	3.3
University of Wyoming	61	0.6	0.9

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) and U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

**DISPELLING THE MYTH OF SELECTIVITY**

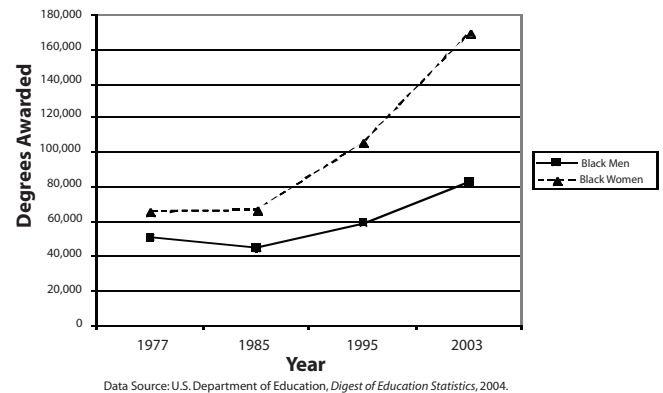
Given their reputations for producing cutting-edge research and preparing students who assume meaningful roles in society, it might be assumed that access to the 50 public flagship universities examined in this report is reserved for only the brightest and most competitive applicants. Further, some may attribute at least a portion of black male underrepresentation to their inability to penetrate the highly selective admissions processes of these institutions. According to U.S. Department of Education data, however, 27 public flagship universities accepted more than three-fourths of the students who applied in 2004. Forty-five institutions offered admission to at least half of their applicants. On average, 71.1 percent of applicants were admitted to the 50 flagship universities. Only five institutions—the Universities of California, Delaware, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—accepted fewer than 50 percent of those who applied.

**GRADUATION RATES AND DEGREE ATTAINMENT**

Disparities in enrollments ultimately lead to inequities in attainment—black men are disadvantaged by both. Between 1977 and 2003, black women experienced an average gain of 2.6 percentage points per year in attainment across all degree levels. Black male attainment increased by an average of 0.2 percentage points. As shown in Table 2 (following page), black men earned 32,125 more degrees in 2003 than in 1977. For black women, degree earnings increased by 103,458 during the same period. Across the five levels (associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, professional, and doctoral), black women experienced steady gains and earned larger shares of all degrees awarded in America. In most cases, the increased share of degrees awarded to black men is barely noteworthy, and in regard to doctoral and professional degrees they actually earned smaller shares. Over the years, gender gaps in attainment have continually widened among black students. Specifically, in 1977, black men earned 43.5 percent of all degrees awarded to blacks, but only 40 percent in 1985, 36 percent in 1995, and 32.9 percent in 2003. The magnitude of these gender disparities is illustrated in Figure 5.

Between 1977 and 2003, the most significant gains in black male degree attainment occurred at the associate’s degree level (+66.8 percent), while the most modest gains were at the doctoral degree level (+147 degrees). This finding suggests that black males are not persisting to and through the latter stages of the postsecondary educational pipeline. In addition to gender inequities in attainment, analysis also revealed that across all levels, white males earned at least ten times more degrees than did their black male counterparts in 2003. This racial gap was most pronounced at the professional degree level, where whites earned 75.5 percent of all degrees awarded to men and black males earned only 5.2 percent. Nationally, the mean six-year graduation rate for black men in the 1998 cohort of first-year, first-time undergraduate students was 32.4 percent, which is the lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 5. Black Student Degree Attainment across All Levels, 1977-2003**



**Degree Completion Differences across the 50 States**

Six-year graduation rates for the 1998 cohort of first-year, first-time undergraduate students are reported for each of the 50 public flagship universities in Table 3 (following page, opposite). The mean graduation rate for black men in 2004 was 44.3 percent, compared to 61.4 percent for white men and 53.2 percent for black women. Twenty-four public flagship universities had below-average black male graduation rates. Only at four institutions—Idaho State University and the Universities of Maine, Nevada, and Vermont—were graduation rates higher for black men than for their white male counterparts. It should be noted that between these four institutions, only 23 black males were enrolled in the 1998 cohort; 13 graduated in or before 2004. At 39 institutions, black female graduation rates were higher than those of their black male counterparts.

**BLACK MALE STUDENT-ATHLETES**

Despite their underrepresentation in degree programs at all levels, black men can be easily found on most college and university intercollegiate sports teams. This is especially true in Division I athletics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) highest level of competition. In 2005, the NCAA projected \$521.1 million in revenues, mostly from television and marketing rights fees and championship games.<sup>17</sup> Approximately 70 percent of those profits were allocated back to Division I conferences and institutions for operations and expenses. In *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time*

**MISSING MENTORS: BLACK MALE FACULTY AT FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITIES**

Several scholars have noted the importance of mentoring in the retention of racial/ethnic minority students in general and black men in particular.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, it is important for black male collegians to have faculty and staff role models on campus upon whom they can rely for support, cultural validation, empowerment, and advice. For many black males attending public flagship universities, options for this type of same-race male mentoring are extremely limited—virtually unavailable in some places. On average, there were 26 black male faculty (across all ranks) at the 50 institutions—they comprised only 1.1 percent of the full-time faculty at these universities in 2004. While the University of Michigan had the largest number of black male faculty (n = 81), they still represented only 1.9 percent of the faculty on the Ann Arbor campus. With its 28 black male professors, the University of Massachusetts employed the highest percent (2.5) of black male faculty among all public flagship universities in 2004. This was one of the few institutions in which there were higher percentages of black men among the faculty than were black male students in the undergraduate population—Indiana University and the Universities of California, New Hampshire, and Vermont were the others.

**Table 2. Degree Attainment by Level**

Degree Level	Year	Black Male		White Male		Black Female	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Associate's	1977	15,300	3.8	178,236	44.0	17,829	4.4
	1985	14,184	3.3	157,278	36.6	21,607	5.0
	1995	16,727	3.1	170,251	31.6	30,340	5.6
	2003	25,518	4.0	178,959	28.3	49,912	7.9
Bachelor's	1977	25,147	2.7	438,161	47.7	33,489	3.7
	1985	23,018	2.4	405,085	41.8	34,455	3.6
	1995	31,793	2.7	417,878	36.0	55,443	4.8
	2003	41,472	3.1	430,024	31.9	82,769	6.1
Master's	1977	7,781	2.5	139,210	44.0	13,256	4.2
	1985	5,200	1.9	106,059	37.8	8,739	3.1
	1995	8,097	2.0	124,277	31.3	16,069	4.0
	2003	12,805	2.5	133,220	26.0	31,467	6.1
Professional	1977	1,761	2.8	47,777	74.7	776	1.2
	1985	1,623	2.3	42,630	60.0	1,406	2.0
	1995	2,077	2.7	36,147	47.7	2,670	3.5
	2003	2,172	2.7	31,596	39.1	3,543	4.4
Doctoral	1977	766	2.3	20,032	60.5	487	1.5
	1985	561	1.7	15,017	46.5	593	1.8
	1995	730	1.6	15,375	34.6	937	2.1
	2003	913	2.0	13,470	29.3	1,604	3.5

Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2004.

*College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education*, author Murry Sperber describes the commercialization of college athletics and the stifled outcomes that accrue for student-athletes at Division I institutions.<sup>19</sup> While his critique of the athletics/student learning paradox is extensive and substantiated by numerous examples, Sperber neglects to call attention to one major absurdity in college sports: the overrepresentation of black male student-athletes on teams in comparison to their enrollments at Division I institutions and their representation among graduating cohorts. Perhaps nowhere in higher education is the disenfranchisement of black male students more insidious than in college athletics at major universities.

In 2004, 10.4 percent of male undergraduates in higher education were black. Yet, that same year, black men represented 30.5 percent of all male student-athletes at Division I institutions. Their participation is even greater in the two major revenue-generating sports: football and men's basketball. These are the two sports programs that attract the most fans (who pay to attend the games), garner the most media attention (which also generates television contracts and corporate sponsorships), and yield the most revenue from merchandise sales (e.g., jerseys and other apparel). Across all Division I institutions, black men comprised 54.6 percent of football teams and 60.8 percent

# Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.

## Table 3. Six-Year Graduation Rates by Race and Sex

Institution	% Black Male	% White Male	% Black Female
University of Alabama	45.7	55.2	68.0
University of Alaska	8.7	15.9	8.3
Arizona State University	39.2	52.4	55.1
University of Arkansas	30.1	49.1	44.2
University of California	70.6	86.3	77.5
University of Colorado	47.2	67.5	63.9
University of Connecticut	37.1	49.5	53.6
University of Delaware	52.4	68.2	49.0
University of Florida	67.8	87.2	73.1
University of Georgia	52.9	69.8	72.1
University of Hawaii	25.0	63.6	0
Idaho State University	28.6	20.2	20.0
University of Illinois	50.0	81.3	63.4
Indiana University	47.1	77.9	59.0
University of Iowa	44.7	68.7	42.3
University of Kansas	39.6	55.9	38.8
University of Kentucky	45.5	58.4	54.1
Louisiana State University	38.3	56.9	51.3
University of Maine	66.7	54.4	0
University of Maryland	44.7	73.5	63.4
University of Massachusetts	35.7	59.7	59.3
University of Michigan	59.1	88.5	76.5
University of Minnesota	65.4	94.7	60.0
University of Mississippi	32.5	52.9	42.4
University of Missouri	51.6	64.5	64.0
University of Montana	20.0	44.5	50.0
University of Nebraska	50.0	58.5	39.1
University of Nevada	36.4	35.6	45.5
University of New Hampshire	50.0	67.1	72.7
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	50.4	70.8	67.6
University of New Mexico	26.3	39.7	42.1
The State University of New York	44.0	57.5	54.5
University of North Carolina	62.4	81.9	74.0
North Dakota State University	25.0	43.9	0
The Ohio State University	35.0	60.2	50.6
University of Oklahoma	36.4	54.2	51.4
University of Oregon	41.2	58.5	75.0
The Pennsylvania State University	65.5	86.3	85.8
University of Rhode Island	34.2	54.2	44.1
University of South Carolina	46.6	63.5	60.9
South Dakota State University	0	52.5	0
University of Tennessee	46.4	55.2	61.7
University of Texas	55.7	71.3	79.5
University of Utah	25.0	31.6	33.3
University of Vermont	100	63.8	50.0
University of Virginia	82.8	92.4	89.6
University of Washington	51.7	74.3	68.3
West Virginia University	42.1	51.1	72.3
University of Wisconsin	43.2	78.6	60.3
University of Wyoming	20.0	50.2	71.4

Data Source: U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS).



of men's basketball teams in 2004. Unfortunately, higher representation among players does not render equitable representation of black males among graduates.

Across four incoming cohorts of college student-athletes (1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998), 47 percent of black men graduated within six years, compared to 60 percent of white males and 62 percent of student-athletes overall. Note that white male student-athlete graduation rates were nearly equal to the national average for men and women across all sports (-2 percentage points), while black male student-athlete rates were below average by 15 percentage points. The average four-cohort graduation rates for male basketball players were 39 percent and 52 percent for black men and white men, respectively. There was a 16-point percentage gap between black male football players who graduated within six years (47 percent) and their white teammates (63 percent).

### ***Student-Athletes at 50 Flagship Universities***

Demographic trends among black male student-athletes at public flagship universities are presented in Table 4. All but three of these universities are classified as Division I. As shown, at 21 institutions, more than one out of every five black men on campus was a student-athlete in 2004. Over half of the black men at seven institutions—Idaho State, North Dakota State, SUNY Buffalo, and the Universities of Maine, Montana, Tennessee, and Wyoming—played intercollegiate sports. With the exception of New York and Tennessee, it is important to acknowledge that the overrepresentation of black male student-athletes is greatest in the states where black males are least represented among 18- to 24-year-olds in the population. This suggests that those five institutions use their athletic programs to attract the few college-age black men in their states.

The participation of black men in the two major revenue-generating sports is also shown in Table 4. Black men comprised more than half of the football teams at 23 flagship universities in 2004. At 42 institutions, more than one in every three football players was black. The composition of men's basketball teams is even more striking. Fifty percent or more of the basketball teams were black at 38 public flagship institutions. Only at South Dakota State and the Universities of Hawaii and Vermont did black men comprise less than 20 percent of the basketball teams.

At 43 public flagship universities, six-year graduation rates were higher for white male student-athletes than for their black male peers. The average gap, as indicated in Table 5 (see page 10), was 18.9 percentage points. (As noted above, these data also are based on six-year graduation rates for the 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998 incoming cohorts of student-athletes.) Among all Division I institutions for which complete data across the four cohort years were available, racial disparities in graduation rates were the worst at the University of Michigan, where 38 percentage points separated white and black male student-athletes. At five institutions—Indiana University and the Universities of Delaware, Montana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico—the gap between black men and their white teammates was less than five percentage points. Black male student-athlete graduation rates exceeded those of their white male peers by an average of eight percentage points at Arizona State, Idaho State, and the Universities of South Carolina and Washington. Only 12 flagship universities graduated more than half of their black male student-athletes within six years; 13 institutions graduated less than one-third of these students.

## ***RACIAL DISPARITIES, ECONOMIC GAINS, AND THE BOWL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES***

*Each year, eight college football teams play in four major televised championship games: The FedEx Orange Bowl, the Nokia Sugar Bowl, the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, and the Rose Bowl, presented by Citi. These games comprise ABC Television's Bowl Championship Series (also known as the BCS). The BCS national championship game rotates between these bowls every four years. In 2005, \$96.2 million in revenue was generated from the four BCS games.<sup>20</sup> Each participating team earned more than \$14 million—a portion went to the university and the rest to the team's athletic conference.*

*Sixteen public flagship universities have played in BCS games over the past four years. More than half of those football teams were comprised of black players (51.7 percent). The mean six-year graduation rate across four cohorts of football players at these institutions was 40.5 percent for black men and 63.2 percent for their white teammates—a 22.7 percentage point difference. Clearly, black male student-athletes comprised the majority of players and graduated in disproportionately lower numbers, while their universities and conferences reaped the financial benefits from their performance in these bowl games.*

*Some public flagship universities have benefited from the BCS more than others. Between the two, Ohio State and the University of Oklahoma have played in six BCS games over the past four years. The two institutions have earned more than \$84 million from these bowl games; Ohio State won the national championship in 2002 and the University of Oklahoma has played in two national championship games over the past three years. In 2004, 58 percent of the football players at these two universities were black. Across four cohorts, only 35 percent and 36 percent of black male football players graduated within six years from Ohio State and the University of Oklahoma, respectively. By contrast, 54 percent of white male football players graduated from the two universities within six years.*

## Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.

**Table 4. Black Male Student-Athlete Characteristics**

Institution	% of Black Men Participating in Athletics	% of Football Team	% of Men's Basketball Team
University of Alabama	10.7	66.3	83.3
University of Alaska	8.3	-----	25.0
Arizona State University	11.9	48.8	46.2
University of Arkansas	23.2	63.5	84.6
University of California	17.3	38.7	61.5
University of Colorado	25.1	50.0	69.2
University of Connecticut	22.3	60.0	69.2
University of Delaware	12.7	35.8	53.9
University of Florida	8.5	72.9	46.2
University of Georgia	22.5	71.1	88.9
University of Hawaii	34.4	25.0	8.3
Idaho State University	69.2	33.8	21.4
University of Illinois	31.2	48.4	75.0
Indiana University	12.1	38.4	69.2
University of Iowa	28.3	50.0	25.0
University of Kansas	18.5	47.3	76.9
University of Kentucky	14.4	51.2	69.2
Louisiana State University	9.2	61.4	66.7
University of Maine	65.4	37.3	50.0
University of Maryland	6.4	67.9	58.3
University of Massachusetts	12.1	41.4	72.7
University of Michigan	9.0	46.5	80.0
University of Minnesota	10.6	48.3	63.6
University of Mississippi	18.9	77.9	90.9
University of Missouri	15.5	63.6	63.6
University of Montana	52.9	16.0	46.2
University of Nebraska	28.2	35.9	64.3
University of Nevada	10.6	44.8	70.0
University of New Hampshire	32.1	21.9	66.7
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	10.0	59.3	81.8
University of New Mexico	29.3	49.4	50.0
The State University of New York	72.6	41.9	69.2
University of North Carolina	17.3	70.3	90.9
North Dakota State University	85.7	21.1	50.0
The Ohio State University	6.3	48.9	69.2
University of Oklahoma	18.9	66.7	75.0
University of Oregon	38.6	52.6	38.5
The Pennsylvania State University	11.1	50.6	61.5
University of Rhode Island	25.6	48.5	64.3
University of South Carolina	13.2	75.3	76.9
South Dakota State University	37.0	10.8	6.3
University of Tennessee	52.7	72.3	58.3
University of Texas	14.1	64.4	50.0
University of Utah	9.4	33.3	20.0
University of Vermont	3.3	-----	8.3
University of Virginia	15.3	59.2	77.8
University of Washington	16.8	35.7	72.7
West Virginia University	14.8	57.0	63.6
University of Wisconsin	20.3	52.3	53.9
University of Wyoming	57.4	25.9	28.6

**Data Source: NCAA, Division I Federal Graduation Rates Reports.**

**Table 5. Racial Disparities in Student-Athlete Six-Year Graduation Rates<sup>1</sup>**

Institution	% Black Male Student-Athletes	% White Male Student-Athletes	% Difference
University of Alabama	35	48	-13
University of Alaska <sup>a</sup>	25	52	-27
Arizona State University	48	41	+7
University of Arkansas	19	40	-21
University of California	44	56	-12
University of Colorado	40	61	-21
University of Connecticut	46	54	-8
University of Delaware	71	76	-5
University of Florida	46	52	-6
University of Georgia	30	48	-18
University of Hawaii	21	50	-29
Idaho State University	28	22	+6
University of Illinois	52	73	-21
Indiana University	60	61	-1
University of Iowa	40	64	-24
University of Kansas	34	58	-24
University of Kentucky	31	51	-20
Louisiana State University	34	53	-19
University of Maine <sup>b</sup>	0	55	-55
University of Maryland	51	69	-18
University of Massachusetts	60	66	-6
University of Michigan	44	82	-38
University of Minnesota	24	55	-31
University of Mississippi	32	53	-21
University of Missouri	37	55	-18
University of Montana	54	57	-3
University of Nebraska	44	64	-20
University of Nevada	19	37	-18
University of New Hampshire <sup>c</sup>	-----	73	-----
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	50	64	-14
University of New Mexico	43	43	0
The State University of New York	56	64	-8
University of North Carolina	49	68	-19
North Dakota State University <sup>a</sup>	20	61	-41
The Ohio State University	36	56	-20
University of Oklahoma	42	46	-4
University of Oregon	46	72	-26
The Pennsylvania State University	69	75	-6
University of Rhode Island	53	59	-6
University of South Carolina	57	48	+9
South Dakota State University <sup>a</sup>	33	68	-35
University of Tennessee	33	49	-16
University of Texas	36	55	-19
University of Utah <sup>b</sup>	17	38	-21
University of Vermont <sup>c</sup>	-----	63	-----
University of Virginia	58	80	-22
University of Washington	64	54	+10
West Virginia University	44	57	-13
University of Wisconsin	45	63	-18
University of Wyoming	29	55	-26

<sup>1</sup> Six-year rates based on four incoming cohorts of students – 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998.

<sup>a</sup> Division II institutions.  
<sup>b</sup> Six-year rates for 1998 cohort only.  
<sup>c</sup> Complete data were not available.

Data Source: NCAA, Division I Federal Graduation Rates Reports.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Unarguably, attention and resources must be devoted to reversing the plight of the black male collegian. The extent of his underrepresentation in the general student body at public flagship universities; the magnitude of disparities between him, his same-race female peers, and his white male counterparts; and the problematic extent to which he is overrepresented among Division I student-athletes (especially football and basketball players) all signify an immediate need for institutional and external accountability. Based on the evidence of disparities presented throughout this report, several recommendations for policymakers and university administrators are offered in this section.

### *Expanding College Access and Participation*

- There is an obvious need to maintain affirmative action and race-sensitive college admissions policies. The fact that black men represent 7.9 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in America, but only 2.8 percent of undergraduates at public flagship universities confirms the continued necessity of racial intentionality in recruitment and admissions. Until equity in enrollments and in-state population representation is reached, affirmative action should be preserved not just as a policy, but also in practice.
- Public institutions, as well as state and federal policymakers, must invest more financial resources in college readiness programs and initiatives to increase black male student representation at all stages of the postsecondary educational pipeline. In addition to providing increased levels of financial support to existing programs that seek to improve college-going rates among racial/ethnic minority students (e.g., TRIO and GEAR UP), funds should be allocated to create access improvement programs specifically for black male students.
- Legislators should hold public flagship institutions more accountable for demonstrating effort and effectiveness in closing the gaps between in-state population representation and enrollments among black men. Consequences need to be articulated and consistently enforced, and rewards should be offered to high-performing public institutions that make quantifiable progress.
- Enrollment managers and college admissions officers should engage stakeholders across the campus in collaborative strategic planning processes to increase black male student enrollments. Faculty, black male undergraduate student leaders, and staff from black culture centers, multicultural affairs offices, and athletics (to name a few) should be invited to

participate in this strategic planning process. These team members could also ultimately assume leadership in executing the plan they create.

- Admissions offices should hire a full-time staff person whose primary (or perhaps even sole) responsibilities are recruiting black male students and creating pipeline initiatives in middle and high schools throughout the state.
- Using state and federal support in combination with institutional resources, public institutions should foster stronger P-16 collaborative partnerships and focus a portion of such efforts specifically on preparing young black males for college.

### *Improving Graduation Rates and Degree Attainment*

- More than two-thirds of all black men who start college do not finish—and worse yet, there is virtually no accountability for this level of institutional mediocrity. There should be accountability. Retention and graduation rates must be tied to standards by which institutional performance is assessed and used in accreditation. Those institutions that fail to graduate a certain percentage of black males (or any other groups for whom inequities exist) should be sanctioned and held accountable for creating, implementing, and documenting improvement plans.
- Public flagship institutions must take affirmative steps to hire additional black male faculty members, as black male students seek out same-race male faculty mentors who are currently missing. As previously mentioned, black men comprised only 1.1 percent of all full-time faculty members at the 50 flagship institutions in 2004. A pool of funds should be created specifically for black male faculty recruitment, and institutions should target black male scholars who are completing Ph.D. programs. To simply recruit and recycle the few who have already established careers elsewhere seems counterproductive. An institutional commitment must be made to cultivating, hiring, and retaining cohorts of black male faculty who can provide culturally desirable mentoring for students.
- More resources (financial and otherwise) should be devoted to supporting programs and student organizations that strive to engage and retain black male students. The value of these programs is discussed and examples from different institutions around the country are presented in Michael Cuyjet's (2006) edited volume, *African American Men in College*. The effectiveness and sustainability of such efforts are largely dependent upon the provision of financial resources and advisory support.

- A team of institutional stakeholders including, but not limited to, faculty, student affairs professionals, and black male student leaders, should be formed to develop campus-specific initiatives to improve black male retention and graduation rates. Similar to the aforementioned admissions team, these stakeholders should work collaboratively to construct a strategic plan for investigating, illuminating, and reversing problematic trends and inequitable outcomes.
- Flagship institutions might consider forming consortia with other large universities to collaboratively design and share innovative approaches to retaining black male undergraduates.

### *Eradicating Racial Disparities in College Athletics*

- It seems appropriate to suggest that the NCAA create a policy requiring that racial representation on any sports team should minimally correspond to a certain percentage of undergraduate student enrollments at the institution. For example, if black males comprise four percent of the undergraduate students on a campus, their representation on an intercollegiate sports team should not be permitted to exceed a certain percentage (e.g., 20 percent, which would be five times more than black men in the general student population). The introduction of this policy will surely compel university admissions officers to more aggressively recruit black male students who are not brought to the institution to play sports.
- Aligning team compositions with graduation rates is another policy the NCAA might consider. If an institution graduates 32 percent of its black male football players within six years, for example, it is reasonable to implement a rule that no more than 32 percent of the football team the following season can be comprised of black male student-athletes.
- The NCAA should insist that institutions with racial disparities in graduation rates commit a certain percentage of athletic revenues to academic enhancement initiatives for the disadvantaged group (e.g., black male student-athletes).
- Institutions with graduation rates below a certain percentage for any racial/ethnic group should not be permitted to compete in NCAA championship tournaments, BCS games, or other national championship contests. Eligibility should not be based on aggregate graduation rates for all student-athletes, but instead on rates across all racial/ethnic groups. This policy would have the greatest effects on the two largest revenue-generating sports (football and men's basketball), where black men comprise more than half of the teams, but graduate at disproportionately lower rates.

### CONCLUSION

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois argued that “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men [and women]. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the talented tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the “talented tenth” are to emerge as college-educated citizens who will lead the social, economic, and political advancement of the race—those who will use their access to higher education for the public good. As evidenced throughout this report, public flagship universities contribute minimally to the preparation of black men to assume the societal roles Du Bois envisioned. Instead, these institutions approach the recruitment and retention of black male collegians haphazardly and with little accountability. Recruiting them for athletic participation appears to be easier and a higher institutional priority than expending the energies and resources requisite for exterminating disparities in access, achievement, and attainment for black men at public universities. These institutions, like others that were not considered in this report, are doing far too little to respond to the crisis concerning black male students in higher education, let alone developing “the best of the race.”

University of Pennsylvania Professor Laura W. Perna and her colleagues explored the status of equity for black undergraduates (women and men) at public universities in southern states in America.<sup>22</sup> Consistent with their findings, evidence of persistent inequities in enrollments and degree completion rates are furnished in this report. The difference here is that while gaps appear to be widest in southern states, disparities that disadvantage black male students clearly exist all over the country. The positionality of black men at public flagship universities is clear: they are insufficiently represented and least retained, but most athletically attractive. The evidence presented in this report should compel university presidents, other administrators and educators, trustees, and legislators to initiate immediate calls for accountability and strategic efforts to reverse problematic trends and outcomes among black male students in each of the 50 states. Given the magnitude of the inequities highlighted here, continued institutional negligence and acts of nothingness would be a morally unjust contradiction to the rhetoric regarding equitable access to the public good—flagship universities and all others must be immediately moved to action.

NOTES

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