

**Black Women Now Hold a Large Lead Over Black Men in Enrollments at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Law Schools**

*Over the past quarter of a century, black women have been outperforming black men in almost every area of higher education.*

*In a field that once was almost exclusively reserved for men, African-American women now make up nearly two thirds of all black enrollments at the nation's highest-ranked law schools.*

Since this journal was founded in 1993, we have repeatedly addressed a persisting and highly disturbing trend in higher education. This is that in higher education black women now hold a huge advantage over black men by almost every measure of attainment. Moreover, the higher education gender gap among blacks is worsening every year. In fact, if the trend in bachelor's degree attainments over the past quarter century were to continue on a straight-line basis into the future, black men will not be earning a single degree in higher education by the year 2100.

This result, of course, is highly unlikely, yet the projection informs us of a very serious problem.

But traditionally the legal profession has told a different story. Legal education for blacks and whites has been dominated by both black men and white men. In 1873 the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case *Bradwell v. Illinois*, upheld the right of a state to prohibit a woman from practicing law. As late as the 1960s Harvard Law School admitted women, but one faculty member refused to call on them except on what he designated as Ladies Day, a class time he set aside for that purpose. In 1963 there were only 1,739 female students enrolled in law school in the United States. They made up less than 4 percent of all law school enrollments.

But during the 1970s women of all races began to attend law school in large numbers. In 1971 there

were 6,682 women enrolled in American law schools. By the end of the decade, women enrollments had increased about fivefold to more than 37,000. As late as 1980, women still made up only 12 percent of all lawyers in the United States.

Over the past 25 years women have made huge strides in legal education. Today there are more than 70,000 women enrolled in law schools in the United States, making up 48.5 percent of total enrollments. In 2003 women earned 47.6 percent of all law degrees awarded in the United States.

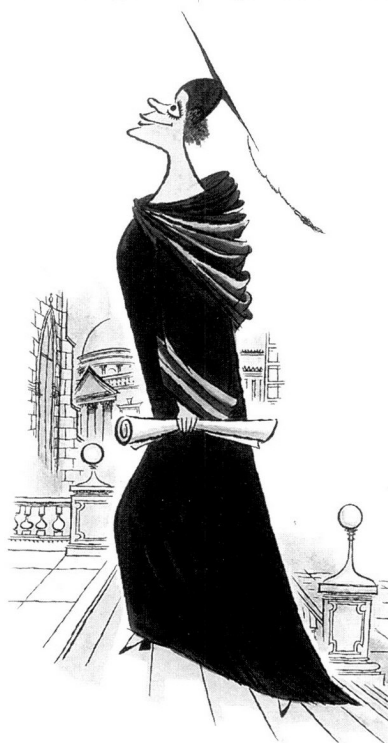
Historical statistics on black women enrollments in law school are sketchy. But we do know that it was not until 1956 that the first black woman graduated from the nation's then most highly regarded school of law, Harvard Law School. This was nearly a century after the first black man had earned a law degree at Harvard.

**Black Women at Top Law Schools Today**

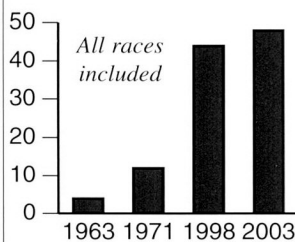
Black women now have become dominant in African-American legal education as they have in almost every area of higher education in the United States. A JBHE analysis finds that in the 2003-04 academic year black women made up 64.3 percent of the African-American enrollments at the nation's 50 highest-ranked law schools. This is more than 15 percentage points higher than for women enrollments as a whole.

*"At 47 of these 50 top-rated law schools in the 2003-04 academic year, women made up a majority of the African-American students."*

In the 2003-04 academic year there were 1,946 black women enrolled at the 50 highest-rated law schools. At 47 of these 50 top-rated law schools, women made up a majority of the African-American students. At 32 of the 50 top-rated schools, black women made up more than 60 percent of the African-American students. At the University of Utah, there were only two black students, but both of them were women. At eight other law schools with large numbers



**Women as a Percentage of All Law School Students**



Source: American Bar Association.  
 Chart © JBHE.

of black students — Emory, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wake Forest, Cornell, Tulane, Vanderbilt, Washington and Lee University, and the University of Maryland — black women made up more than 70 percent of African-American enrollments. An unexpected statistic is that seven of these eight law schools where black women made up 70 percent or more of all African-American enrollments are in southern states. It will be recalled that these schools did not admit any black students whatsoever until the late 1950s or early 1960s.

Today black women make up less than 50 percent of the African-American enrollments at only three of the nation's 50 highest-ranked law schools: the University of Colorado, the University of Washington, and the University of Arizona.

The emerging dominance of black women over black men in the legal profession is also happening at the nation's five historically black law schools. Black women make up a clear majority of the law students at each of these five schools. At all five of these schools combined, black women make up 63.4 percent of all African-American enrollments. This rate is very similar to the percentage of black women among African-American law school students at the nation's top 50 law schools.

### Black Women Are Increasing Their Lead

JBHE conducted a similar survey five years ago. Since that time black women have increased their lead over black men by a large margin. Five years ago black women made up 59.6 percent of all African-American enrollments at the nation's 50 highest-ranked law schools compared to 64.3 percent today. Five years ago there were 10 top law schools at which black men were a majority of all African-American enrollments. In this survey there are only three.

Five years ago black women were more than 60 percent of African-American enrollments at 25 of the 50 top law schools. Today the figure is 32. In our earlier survey there were five leading law schools where black women made up 70 percent or more of all African-American enrollments. In this year's sur-



### Black Women Now Dominate African-American Law School Enrollments

*Black Women at the Nation's 50 Highest-Ranked Law Schools (Ranked by the Highest Percentage of Black Women)*

Law School	Black Students	Black Women Students	% of All Black Students Who Are Women
University of Utah	2	2	100.0 %
Wake Forest University	28	22	78.6
Washington and Lee University	42	33	78.6
Tulane University	82	63	76.8
Cornell University	39	29	74.4
Emory University	59	43	72.9
University of Maryland	100	71	71.0
Vanderbilt University	79	56	70.9
Univ. of N. Carolina-Chapel Hill	97	68	70.1
Univ. of Southern California	56	39	69.6
Georgetown University	209	143	68.4
American University	108	73	67.6
Harvard University	159	107	67.3
University of Wisconsin	67	45	67.2
Brigham Young University	3	2	66.7
Fordham University	117	78	66.7
New York University	102	68	66.7
Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley	47	31	66.0
University of Notre Dame	26	17	65.4
George Washington University	159	103	64.8
Duke University	61	39	63.9
Indiana University	44	28	63.6
University of Georgia	88	55	62.5
University of Chicago	37	23	62.2
University of Michigan	74	46	62.2
University of Texas-Austin	71	44	62.0
Stanford University	42	26	61.9
University of Pennsylvania	62	38	61.3
University of California-Davis	18	11	61.1
Univ. of Calif.-San Francisco	36	22	61.1
University of Virginia	59	36	61.0
Ohio State University	61	37	60.7
University of Florida	103	62	60.2
Northwestern University	47	28	59.6
University of Alabama	32	19	59.4
University of Connecticut	32	19	59.4
Washington University	44	26	59.1
Boston University	31	18	58.1
Case Western Reserve Univ.	31	18	58.1
Columbia University	117	68	58.1
George Mason University	23	13	56.5
Univ. of Calif.-Los Angeles	41	23	56.1
University of Illinois	61	34	55.7
Boston College	45	25	55.6
Yale University	49	27	55.1
College of William and Mary	35	19	54.3
University of Iowa	31	16	51.6
University of Minnesota	18	9	50.0
University of Colorado	19	9	47.4
University of Washington	11	5	45.5
University of Arizona	22	10	45.4
TOTAL	3,026	1,946	64.3 %

Source: American Bar Association

**Black Women Also Dominate Law School Enrollments at Historically Black Universities**

Law School	Black Students	Black Women Students	% of All Black Students Who Are Women
Univ. of the District of Columbia	63	45	71.4 %
Howard University	447	297	66.4
Texas Southern University	287	189	65.9
North Carolina Central Univ.	174	114	65.5
Southern University	297	159	53.5
TOTAL	1,268	804	63.4 %

*Note: The new law school at Florida A&M University in Orlando had not received accreditation at the time the enrollment statistics were collected.*

*Source: American Bar Association.*

vey there are nine top law schools where black women are at least 70 percent of all black enrollments.

Increased black female dominance is also taking place at the law schools at historically black universities. Five years ago black women made up 58.8 percent of all African-American enrollments at these law schools. As we stated earlier, today black women are 63.4 percent of all African-American enrollments at the law schools at HBCUs.

**Why Do Black Women Excel in Legal Education?**

Why have black women come to dominate African-American legal education in this country? Clearly, the fact that black women earn nearly two thirds of all black bachelor's degrees in the United States necessarily will result in a larger pool of black women, compared to black men, who have the option of entering law school.

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Furthermore, some surveys show that upwards of 80 percent of all students on the honor roll at the nation's historically black colleges and universities are women. Therefore, black women appear more likely than black men to be achieving the high grade point averages in their undergraduate years that will enable them to qualify for admission to law school.

But the issue of why black women are pursuing a difficult law curriculum at a faster rate than black men also raises some extremely sensitive issues:

- It appears that, unlike many black men, black women are less likely to accept the harmful expectation that academic ambition and success are undesirable forms of "acting white."

- Some standardized tests suggest that black women tend to be better writers than black men. Writing ability is an important qualification for success in law school.

- Law firms, in common with commercial organizations in general, get employment credit for "two-fers" — the hiring of a black *and* a woman. Black women often attend law school to take advantage of the strong demand for African-American women at law firms.

- According to some demographers, 75 percent of African-American children spend a portion of their childhood without a father. If, as is likely, the presence of a father as a guide and role model is more important to the future ambitions of boys than of girls, it seems likely that for this reason alone fewer young African-American males will be showing up to face the minefields of three years of law school.



**The Changing Demographics of Black America**

"The diversity of the black population in the United States grew rapidly over the 1990s. The number of black people with origins in the Caribbean (from places such as Jamaica, Haiti, and Guyana) increased by over 60 percent. The number of black Americans with recent roots in sub-Saharan Africa (from places like Nigeria and Ghana) more than doubled during the 1990s. Blacks in the United States with recent Caribbean roots number over 1.5 million. Blacks from Africa numbered over half a million in 2000. Combined, these groups represented only about 6 percent of the total black population but they accounted for 25 percent of the growth of the black population between 1990 and 2000.

"The social and economic profile of Afro-Caribbeans and Africans is somewhat better than that of African Americans, in part because immigrants from these places tend to be well educated. Still, like African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and Africans are highly segregated from whites."

— *The American People, Census 2000*  
(Russell Sage Foundation, 2005)