

The 1997 Charles H. Thompson Lecture–Colloquium Presentation

Four Decades of Progress. . .and Decline: An Assessment of African American Educational Attainment

Antoine M. Garibaldi, *Howard University*

In this, the 18th annual Charles H. Thompson lecture, Dr. Garibaldi charts African Americans' forward and backward movement in education since the 1954 Brown decision, noting both the obstacles and success factors that have shaped the contemporary Black experience in U.S. schools, colleges, and universities. He provides a sweeping review of K–12 data, examining the relationships between race, poverty, school location, course-taking patterns, and parental expectations on Black students' academic achievement. He also assesses African Americans' standardized achievement and college admissions test performance, college enrollment, and postsecondary and graduate degree attainment, highlighting the significant role of historically Black colleges.

Over the last four decades, notable progress has been made in the educational attainment and achievement of African Americans. More African Americans are attending elementary and secondary schools; African Americans are graduating from high school at higher rates; more African American students are attending college, graduate, and professional schools; and there are more African American professionals in leadership roles as a result of expanded educational opportunities. Those positive results are due in large measure to the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. That celebrated case was argued by Howard University alumnus Thurgood

*Dr. Antoine M. Garibaldi became Howard University's first provost and chief academic officer in December 1996. He is a nationally recognized scholar, author, and speaker on such topics as higher education, elementary and secondary education, Black colleges and universities, teacher recruitment and preparation, African American male academic achievement, effective schools, and the education of Black youth. He came to Howard from Xavier University of Louisiana, where, during a 14-year tenure, he advanced through the ranks from associate professor to professor of education, chairman of the Department of Education, and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, to vice president for academic affairs. He was formerly a researcher and staff member with the National Commission on Excellence in Education, publisher of the landmark 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*; and has worked as a teacher and administrator at the elementary and secondary school levels.

Dr. Garibaldi is the author of more than 60 research articles and book chapters and 10 books and monographs, including *The Education of African-Americans* (1991) co-edited with Charles V. Willie and Wornie Reed, *Teacher Recruitment and Retention* (1989), *The Revitalization of Teacher Education at Historically Black Colleges: Four Case Studies* (1989), and *Black Colleges and Universities: Challenges for the Future* (1984). Additionally, as chairman and study director of the New Orleans Public Schools' Committee on the Status of the Black Male Student, he authored that committee's stellar final report, *Educating Black Male Youth: A Moral and Civic Imperative* (1989). He serves on numerous professional and civic boards of directors, including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Morehouse Research Institute, the American Association for Higher Education, The College Fund/UNCF Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute Advisory Board, and the Editorial Board of the *American Educational Research Journal*. He is a former member of the *Journal of Negro Education's* Editorial/Advisory Board. This 18th annual address was presented on November 5, 1997.

Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice, and a host of other legal and educational scholars who were determined to reverse the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision. The *Brown* decision not only opened the nation's school doors wide, it also provided the impetus for the elimination of "separate-but-equal" laws in employment, housing, voting rights, and related civil rights areas.

Ironically, however, as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the integration of de jure segregated schools such as Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas, most of our nation's public schools are more segregated than they were 40 years ago; and legislative attacks on affirmative action threaten the numerous gains in educational opportunity and civil rights made possible by *Brown*. Thus, there are fewer reasons to celebrate because of the perplexing signs of missed educational opportunities; declines in educational performance; lower than expected four-year college-going rates; and uneven undergraduate, postgraduate and first-professional degree attainment by gender for African Americans. Today I will describe the status of educational attainment of African Americans four decades after *Brown*, with an attempt to balance the gains and declines in progress so that prescriptions can be developed to remedy the educational problems that exist in our schools and communities.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

As shown in Table I, the total U.S. public school enrollment during the 1993–94 school year was 43.5 million students, and the total private school enrollment was approximately 5 million students. Ninety-four percent (94%) of African American students, or almost 7.2 million young people, were enrolled in the nation's public schools, while the remaining 6%, or close to a half-million students (462,105), attended private schools (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, 1997). African American students represented 16.5% of all public school enrollments, and they accounted for 9.3% of private schools' student bodies. Though African Americans' 16.5% share may seem small when compared to the 66% of White students enrolled in public schools, it is important to note that approximately 30% of Black public school students are enrolled in schools in large central cities with populations of more than 400,000 people, and more than half of all Black public school students (56.2%) live in the South (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, 1997). School location is an important determinant in assessing educational quality, especially that provided to African American and other minority students. I will demonstrate this point later in my presentation, when I discuss the results of a recent U.S. Department of Education study.

African Americans are the largest non-White student group in all regions of the United States except the West, Alaska, and Hawaii. The proportion of African American public school students in the South, 27.2%, is twice their representation in the Northeast (14.8%) and Midwest (13%), and more than four times their 6.3% proportion in the West (Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997). In the West, as Orfield et al. (1997) have reported in their

TABLE I
African American School Enrollment Demographics (1993–94 School Year)

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	% OF TOTAL PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	% OF TOTAL PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT
94%	6%	16.5%	9.3%

Source: Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute/UNCF (1997).

recent study of segregation in the nation's public schools, Hispanic students accounted for 27.4% of the 1994–95 public school population in the West and almost 40% of California's school population. It may come as a surprise to some that between 1968 and 1994, the number of Hispanic students increased by 178%, from 2.0 million to 5.57 million.¹ Over this same 26-year period, these researchers note that the number of White public school students declined by 9%, from 34.7 million to 28.46 million, while Black student enrollments increased slightly, from 6.28 million to 7.13 million. With Hispanic students' rapidly growing (currently 13%) share of the nation's school population and African Americans' relatively stable 17% share, the nation's public schools now have a much larger proportion of minority students than they did in the 1970s (see Table II).

Despite the slight increase noted in the number of African Americans in public schools over the last two decades, the most striking and disappointing observation is that more Black students are being educated in segregated public schools today than there were in the early 1970s. As Orfield et al. report:

In fall 1972, after the Supreme Court's 1971 busing decision [in *Swann v. Charlotte--Mecklenburg (NC) Board of Education*], which led to new court orders for scores of school districts, 63.6% of Black students were in schools with less than half White enrollment. Fourteen years later, in 1986, it was virtually the same, but now it is 67.1%. (p. 11)

These "reseggregated" schools have not occurred by accident; rather, they are partly the result of the outmigration of Whites from urban to suburban school districts and the ineffective implementation of court orders designed to increase school integration in the late 1960s and 1970s. The 1954 *Brown* decision notwithstanding, it is disconcerting to realize that in 1997 many of the schools attended by African Americans are still inherently unequal.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Over the last four decades, African Americans have made tremendous gains in elementary and secondary educational attainment. Significant increases in our high school completion rates began in the 1970s. For example, in 1975, the high school completion rate for 18- to 24-year-old African Americans was only 64.8% compared to 83% for Whites and 80.8% overall. In 1995, however, 18- to 24-year-old African Americans' high school completion rate was 76.9%, a 12% increase over the 20-year period (see Table III). As shown in Table IV, the high school graduation data were even better for 25- to 29-year-old African Americans between 1975 and 1995: in 1975, 71% had graduated from high school, compared to 86.5% in 1995 (Carter & Wilson, 1997). Not only are these gains

TABLE II
Public School Students' Enrollment by Race (in Millions): 1968 and 1994

YEAR	AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS	HISPANIC AMERICAN STUDENTS	WHITE AMERICAN STUDENTS
1968	6.28	2.0	34.7
1994	7.13	5.57	28.46

Source: Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle (1997).

¹Orfield et al. (1997) note that 1968 was the first year that student data were available nationally by racial/ethnic categories.

remarkable, but the data also confirm that more African Americans have obtained an education over the last three decades as a result of expanded educational opportunities and a variety of special programs such as Head Start, Title I, and Chapter 1, which target African American and other disadvantaged students.

Achievement Test Performance: The National Assessment of Educational Progress

African Americans' high school completion rates provide one barometer of educational attainment, but data on Black students' performance on national assessment tests are needed to determine how much learning has actually been achieved. The best collection of national comparative data is that obtained from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a Congressionally mandated project of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. Since 1969, NAEP has periodically assessed student proficiency and academic achievement in science, reading, mathematics, and writing in public and nonpublic schools, with the specific purpose of evaluating the condition and progress of education in the nation. This national database assesses student performance in reading, mathematics, and the sciences at 9, 13, and 17 years of age; it also assesses students' writing in grades 4, 8, and 11. More recent assessments since 1990, however, use grades 4, 8, and 11 as the baseline of comparison across all four areas of study.

Before presenting the 28-year trend data for African American and White students, it is useful to cite NAEP's recently released summary statement on the overall performance of American students since the tests were first administered in 1969. That statement makes the following claim:

In general, the trends in science and mathematics show early declines or relative stability followed by improved performance. In reading and writing, the results are somewhat mixed; although some modest improvement was evident in the trend reading assessments, few indications of positive trends were evident in the writing results. (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997, p. iii)

Trends in NAEP Mathematics Scale Scores, 1973–1996. On the NAEP mathematics test, 17-year-old White and Black students had declining scores between 1973 and 1978, but

TABLE III
High School Completion Rates for 18- to 24-Year-Olds: 1975 and 1995

YEAR	AFRICAN AMERICANS	WHITE AMERICANS	OVERALL
1975	64.8%	83%	80.8%
1995	76.9%	81.9%	80.8%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).

TABLE IV
High School Completion Rates for 25- to 29-Year-Olds: 1975 and 1995

YEAR	AFRICAN AMERICANS	WHITE AMERICANS
1975	71%	84.4%
1995	86.5%	87.4%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).



both increased their performance between 1978 and 1996, with Black students showing the most growth. The mathematics scores of White and Black 9- and 13-year-old students also consistently increased throughout the assessment period. However, whereas Black and White students' mathematics scores increased between 1973 and 1996, the scores of White students were at least 25 points higher than those of their Black counterparts in each age group.

Trends in NAEP Reading Scale Scores, 1971–1996. The NAEP reading scores for each of the three age groups of White students increased slightly during the 1971–1996 assessment period. African Americans' scores also increased between 1971 and 1988, but fluctuated between 1988 and 1996. Although both groups showed modest performance improvements on this key educational measure, White students' scores averaged 30 points higher than those of their Black counterparts in each age group.

Trends in NAEP Writing Scale Scores, 1984–1996. On the NAEP writing tests between 1984 and 1996, both White and Black students performed poorly. The scores of White 11th-graders decreased consistently over the assessment period, while White 8th-grade and 4th-grade students' scores fluctuated over the 12-year period. Black students' writing scores also fluctuated at all grade levels. Fourth-grade Black students' 1984 score was identical to the 1996 score, while both 8th- and 11th-grade Black students' 1996 score was slightly lower than their 1984 score. White 8th- and 11th-grade students and Black 11th-grade students demonstrated an ability to write clearly, but Black 8th-grade students and White 4th-grade students demonstrated vague and unclear writing skills. As was the case in the previous assessments, White students' average writing scores were at least 22 points higher than those of their Black counterparts in each age group.

Trends in NAEP Science Scale Scores, 1969–1996. Between 1969 and 1982, the average NAEP science test scores for 17-year-old Black and White students decreased; however, those scores steadily increased from 1982 through 1996. Similarly, the scores for White 9- and 13-year-old students decreased slightly from 1969 to 1977 but increased moderately from 1977 through 1996. African American 9- and 13-year-old students' scores also declined during the early 1970s but increased noticeably through 1996. Although their scores increased more over the duration of the assessment period, they did not exceed those of their White counterparts in 1996. Between 1969 and 1996, the average score for White students was 47 points higher than that for Black students.

Performance on Standardized College Admissions Tests

The preceding NAEP data indicate trends of both progress and decline in all American students' performance in the four core subject areas of reading, mathematics, science, and writing. Less-than-proficient signs of performance are unfortunately but predictably reflected in students' scores on other national educational measures such as the verbal and mathematical scales of The College Board's Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and the English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning sections of the American College Test (ACT). In 1997, for example, the average SAT score of all students was 1,016 on a total scale of 1,600. Asian American students obtained the highest average score of 1,056; White American students were next with a score of 1,052; American Indian students had an average score of 950; Hispanic American students had a score of 934, followed by Mexican Americans with 909, and Puerto Rican students with an average score of 901. African American students had the lowest average score: 857 (see Table V).

The patterns of performance were similar on the ACT. In 1997, the average overall ACT score nationwide was 21.0 out of a total possible score of 36. Asian and White American students had the same average score of 21.7; and American Indian and Hispanic

TABLE V
1997 Average SAT Test Scores, by Racial/Ethnic Group

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS	WHITE AMERICAN STUDENTS	NATIONAL AVERAGE	HISPANIC AMERICAN STUDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
1,056	1,052	1,016	934	857

Source: The College Board (1997).

TABLE VI
1997 Average ACT Test Scores, by Racial/Ethnic Group

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS	WHITE AMERICAN STUDENTS	NATIONAL AVERAGE	HISPANIC AMERICAN STUDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
21.7	21.7	21	19	17.1

Source: ACT, Inc. (1997).

American students had scores of 19; Mexican American students scored 18.8. Again, African American students had the lowest average score: 17.1 (Selingo & Fiore, 1997) (see Table VI).

One of the signs of progress with respect to both these tests is that over the years increasingly more students have opted to take them. This has been especially true among minority groups. Minority students accounted for 32% of those who took the SAT in 1997, but they accounted for only 22% of test-takers in 1987. Sixty percent of college freshmen (959,301 students) took the ACT in 1997 compared to 817,076 in 1990.

Despite these increases, staff from both the organizations that develop and administer these assessments have expressed concern about the lower standardized-test performance of minority students who are encouraged to take the tests because they receive high grades in high school. Donald M. Stewart, president of The College Board, has attributed this predicament to the increasingly common practices of grade inflation and social promotion in schools. As he has emphatically stated: "Educators who give high grades for average or below-average performance promote a hollow, 'just good enough' attitude that is detrimental to students and society" (Selingo & Fiore, 1997). Indeed, grade inflation and social promotion are unconscionable practices that should be eliminated at every school site to assure that all students, especially minority students and particularly African American ones, have a realistic idea of both their abilities and potential. Additionally, schools must assume more responsibility and require African American and other non-White students to take more academic and college-preparatory courses in junior and senior high school. This recommendation is especially important given the evidence which shows that many of these students are more likely to take lower-level courses in the core subject areas of English, mathematics, and science rather than college prerequisite courses (Braddock, 1990; Irvine, 1990; Oakes, 1985, 1986).

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON URBAN SCHOOLS

As I indicated earlier, I am greatly concerned about the increasing resegregation of many of the nation's public schools. Of special significance to me is the finding that most of the schools attended by non-White youth are located in urban areas. Though this has

been known for some time, numerous perceptions about the quality of these schools are fueled by unsubstantiated anecdotal comments rather than by verifiable research. A July 1996 report by the U.S. Department of Education provides some data to more accurately frame this discussion. That report, *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty*, examines how poverty related to the characteristics of students in urban, rural, and suburban public schools in the 1980s. The study on which it reflects makes several notable comparisons in describing students' real school experiences and achievement, the expectations of their parents, and other related factors.

The Department of Education study's methodology controlled for the extent of poverty in three types of school locations: urban, suburban, and rural. The level of poverty in each school was defined by the percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunches; thus, more balanced comparisons were able to be made on each factor, even though more low-income students attended urban schools. The following highlights of the study's major findings show more clearly how the factors of school location and the level of poverty of students in a school directly and indirectly affect school performance.

Race, School Poverty Level, and School Location

As shown in Figure I, the Department of Education study found that among urban students, 40% attended high-poverty schools—that is, schools with high concentrations of poor students (40% or more)—compared to 12% who attended low-poverty schools (those that enrolled 5% or fewer poor students). Only 10% of suburban students and 25% of rural students attended high-poverty schools, and 36% of suburban students attended low-poverty schools. Further, high-poverty urban, suburban, and rural public schools were more likely to have larger minority student populations than were low-poverty schools, with high-poverty urban public schools enrolling larger numbers of minority students than did high-poverty rural and suburban schools. Sixty-nine percent of students who attended high-poverty urban public schools were minorities, but only 26% of the students at low-poverty schools were non-Whites. Similarly, 56% of the students at high-poverty suburban schools were minorities compared to only 10% of the students at low-poverty suburban schools, while high-poverty rural schools enrolled 35% minority students compared to only 9% at low-poverty rural schools. Thus, most African American and other minority students not only attended urban schools during the 1980s, but urban schools also had the highest concentrations of students from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Student Achievement, School Poverty Level, and School Location

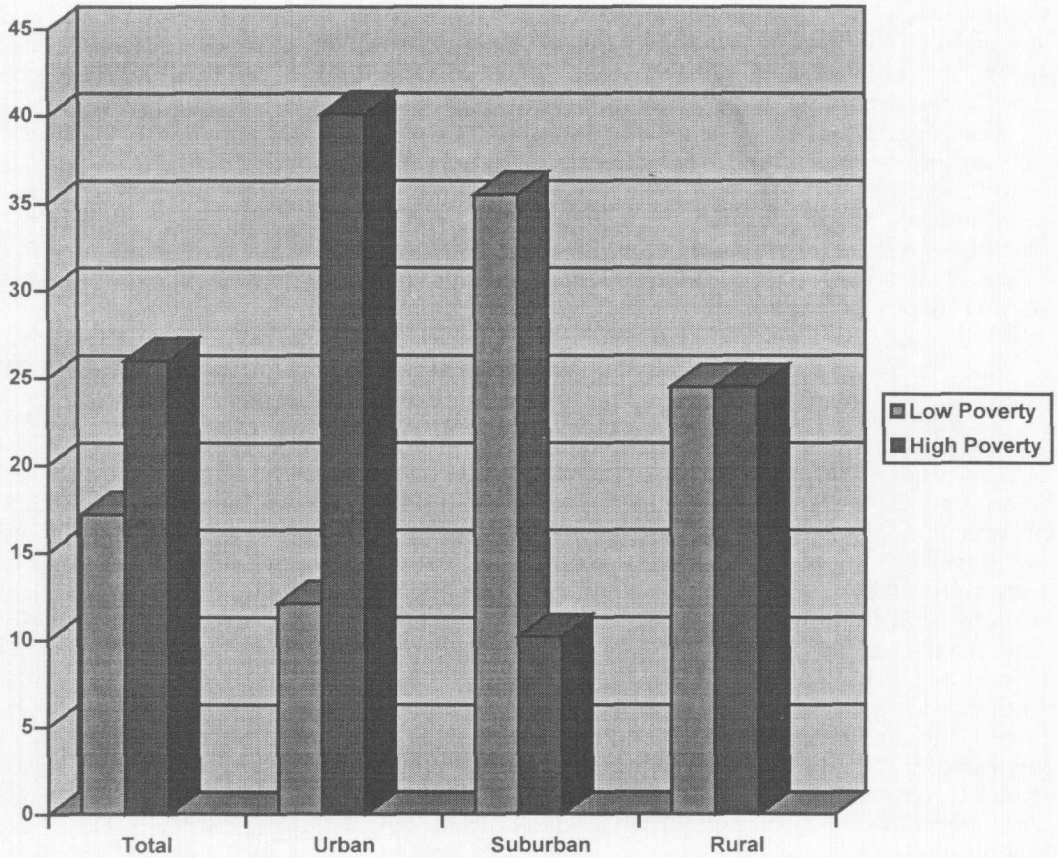
In the 1996 Department of Education study, the level of school poverty was an important variable when examining students' academic achievement. The data reveal that students who had the lowest levels of achievement on standardized tests were more often enrolled at high-poverty schools, while students who performed at higher achievement levels typically attended schools with lower levels of poverty. However, when the schools' poverty levels were controlled for, the results demonstrated that high poverty concentrations and the urban location of a school were major influences on low student performance.

Parental Expectations

As previous studies have indicated, parents' expectations for their children's education are often reliable indicators of students' academic success, behavior, self-concept and motivation to learn (Horn & West, 1992). Data from the National Center for Education

FIGURE I

Public School Enrollments at High- and Low-Poverty Schools, by School Location



Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1996).

Statistics' National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 indicate that most parents (over 50%) of eighth-graders expected their children to complete four or more years of college. On average, the parental expectations for students attending urban schools were higher than those of rural students but lower than those of suburban students. Specifically, 56% of parents whose children were enrolled in urban schools expected their children to complete four or more years of college compared to 49% of rural parents and 60% of suburban parents. At high-poverty schools, however, 49% of parents of eighth-graders expected their children to finish college, compared to more than 66% of parents of students attending low-poverty schools. Despite the great differences in parents' expectations for their children's likely college attendance and graduation, these results should be viewed positively because they show that parents of children who attend urban and high-poverty schools are just as hopeful that their youth will pursue and obtain education beyond high school.

Gifted and Talented Programs

The availability of gifted and talented programs at schools in different locations is another important factor in determining the strength and quality of school curricula. According to U.S. Department of Education (1992) schools and staffing data from 1987–88, seventy-seven percent of all public elementary schools offered some form of gifted and talented programs. However, only 73% of urban and rural elementary schools provided such programs, compared to 84% of their suburban counterparts. Unfortunately, schools that had higher concentrations of poor students were less likely to offer gifted and talented programs than were low-poverty schools; yet when factoring out the rate of poverty, suburban schools were still more likely to offer these programs than were urban schools. Thus, other variables need to be explored to determine both the disparity and lower availability of these programs at urban and rural schools.

Advanced Course-Taking Patterns

The preceding information on the limited availability of gifted and talented programs in urban schools and on the number of advanced courses offered at certain schools are important determinants in predicting whether or not students are sufficiently prepared to do college-level work. In my next analyses, however, I will use student enrollments in “gatekeeping courses” such as geometry and algebra both as a means to predict how well students will perform on college entrance examinations and also the types of colleges that they might select. A study of the 1990 NAEP administration focused on the percentage of students who had taken a course in geometry because the patterns for those students were similar to those for students who had taken science, foreign language, and other advanced courses. Moreover, 68% of the 1990 graduates of the nation’s public schools were found to have taken a geometry course at the secondary level. At suburban schools, 73% of students had done so, compared with 57% of urban students; and 60% of students who attended high-poverty schools had taken geometry, compared to nearly 74% of students at low-poverty schools. However, when the study controlled for the level of poverty, no statistical difference was found among urban, rural, or suburban students who had enrolled in a geometry course. This suggests that to raise the educational achievement of all students, advanced placement as well as college-preparatory courses such as algebra and geometry, biology, chemistry, three years of English, and other core subjects must be offered so that students will be prepared for college, even if they elect not to attend a four-year college or university.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND ATTAINMENT

Given the increases in African American high school graduation that occurred during the 1970s, it is not unreasonable to expect a larger share of African Americans to have attended and graduated from college. As shown in Table VII, in 1975, the college-going

TABLE VII
College-Going Rates of High School Graduates: 1975 and 1995

YEAR	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICANS
1975	36.2%	32.8%
1995	42%	34.4%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).



rate for all Americans was 36.2%, compared to a rate of 32.8% for African Americans (Carter & Wilson, 1997). By 1995, however, the proportion of African American high school graduates who were enrolled in college increased by almost 2 percentage points to 34.4%, compared to a national average that increased by 6 percentage points to 42%.

Although college enrollment statistics have fluctuated since the mid-1970s when slightly more than one million African American students (1,033,000) were attending college, almost one-and-a-half-million (1,400,000) African Americans were enrolled in college in 1995 (Hoffman, Snyder, & Sonneberg, 1996). Despite the increase of almost four hundred thousand more African American students in college between 1976 and 1995, the ratio of those attending four-year and two-year institutions did not change: 59% attended four-year institutions, compared to 41% who were enrolled at two-year colleges and universities. In 1976, almost 604,000 African American students attended four-year institutions, while a little more than 429,000 attended two-year institutions. In 1995, almost 834,000 African American students attended four-year institutions, and 614,000 were enrolled at two-year institutions. Thus, the larger number of African American students in college in the 1990s cannot be viewed as a major gain because a significant amount of these students are enrolled in two-year institutions. Furthermore, much of the growth in postsecondary attendance made by African Americans over the last 20 years is due to a sizable increase in the numbers of African American women enrolled in college (see Table VIII).

Postsecondary Degree Attainment

The best way to determine whether any gains in college access have been realized by African Americans over the last two decades is by reviewing the number of degrees received during this period (see Table IX). Regrettably, the data show that Blacks have not experienced consistent annual increases in some of the degree categories since 1976. For example, more African Americans received baccalaureate degrees in 1976 and 1981 than in 1985. In 1976 and 1981, African Americans received an average of slightly more than 59,000 bachelor's degrees (59,122 and 60,673, respectively), or about 6.5% of the total degrees awarded, compared to 57,473 undergraduate degrees in 1985, or 5.9% of the total (Carter & Wilson, 1989). Thus, the 1981 and 1985 totals for African Americans at the baccalaureate level showed a decline in both the number and percentage of degrees awarded compared to those awarded in 1976. In the 1990s, however, the percentage increased from 6% of the total awarded in 1991 (65,341 degrees) to a high of 7.2% in 1994 (83,576 degrees). African American baccalaureates rose to 72,346 in 1992, or 6.4% of the total; and to 77,872, or 6.7% of the total, in 1993.

As I mentioned earlier, the gains made by African Americans at the bachelor's degree level are primarily attributed to the significant increases in the number of Black women who completed their undergraduate studies. In 1976, for example, 33,489 African American women received baccalaureate degrees, compared to the 25,026 baccalaureate degrees

TABLE VIII
1994 and 1995 College Enrollments of African Americans, by Gender

YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1994	550,000	899,000	1,449,000
1995	556,000	918,000	1,474,000

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).

TABLE IX
Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to African Americans for Selected Years: 1976–1994

YEAR	AFRICAN AMERICAN BACCALAUREATE DEGREES	% OF TOTAL DEGREES AWARDED
1976	59,122	6.5%
1981	60,673	6.5%
1985	57,473	5.9%
1991	65,341	6.0%
1994	83,576	7.2%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).

awarded to African American men—a difference of almost 8,000 degrees. Ten years later, African American women received 34,056 undergraduate degrees, compared to the 22,499 awarded to African men—or roughly 11,000 more (Gordon & Brown, 1990). In 1994, the gap was even wider, as 22,000 more African American women received baccalaureate degrees than did men (52,928 compared to 30,648). This pattern of disparity—that is, a difference of at least 20,000 degrees—between African American women and men has occurred consistently since the early 1990s (see Table X).

Overall increases in the numbers of Black baccalaureate recipients were partly due to the rising number of undergraduate awards made by historically Black colleges and universities, or HBCUs. In 1985, for example, HBCUs awarded 16,326 bachelor's degrees; between 1991 and 1994, they awarded an average of almost 21,000 degrees to African Americans (see Table XI). The annual number of bachelor's degrees awarded to African

TABLE X
Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to African Americans, by Gender: 1976, 1986 and 1994

YEAR	BLACK MALE BACCALAUREATE DEGREES	BLACK FEMALE BACCALAUREATE DEGREES	DIFFERENCE
1976	25,026	33,489	8,463
1986	22,499	34,056	11,557
1994	30,648	52,928	22,280

Sources: Gordon & Brown (1990); Carter & Wilson (1997).

TABLE XI
Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to African Americans by HBCUs for Selected Years: 1985–1994

YEAR	HBCU BACCALAUREATES
1985	16,326
1991	17,930
1992	19,693
1993	22,020
1994	23,434

Source: Hoffman, Snyder, & Sonneberg (1996).

Americans by HBCUs for 1991, 1992, 1993, and 1994 were 17,930; 19,693; 22,020; and 23,434, respectively. HBCUs annually accounted for approximately 28% of all undergraduate degrees to African Americans between 1985 and 1994, compared to the late 1970s and early 1980s when they accounted for between 35% and 32% of all Black bachelor's degrees. In 1977 and 1981, African Americans received 58,515 and 60,673 bachelors degrees, respectively. HBCUs awarded 20,754 and 19,556 degrees to African Americans, or 35% and 32% of the total, respectively (Gordon & Brown, 1990). Nevertheless, this is still a favorable sign that HBCUs, which represent barely 3% of all American colleges and universities, continue to enroll and graduate a significant number of students, even though African American students have much more access to other institutions of higher education than they did previously.

Graduate and First-Professional Degree Attainment

At the graduate level, African Americans' share of master's and doctoral degrees has declined annually since 1976. In 1976, African Americans received 20,345 master's degrees, or 7% of the total awarded that year. Five years later, in 1981, they received 17,133 master's degrees, or a 5.8% share of all such degrees awarded. In 1985, almost four thousand fewer master's degrees (13,939), or 5% of the total, were awarded to African Americans. In 1992, Blacks received 18,116, or 5.2% of the total; in 1993, this number reached 19,780, or 5.4%; and by 1994, it was 21,937, or 5.7%. In other words, it has taken almost 20 years for African Americans to match the number of master's degrees awarded in 1976 (see Table XII).

Similar to the pattern of awards for bachelor's degrees, the number of master's degrees awarded to African Americans by HBCUs also increased over this period, though the percentage has declined significantly since 1976 and in recent years. In 1977 and 1979, for example, HBCUs awarded an average of 4,262 master's degrees to African Americans (4,568 and 3,956, respectively). In 1985, HBCUs awarded only 2,555 master's degrees to African Americans, or 18% of the total. Between 1992 and 1994, the average number of master's degrees awarded by HBCUs was 2,857, or about 14% of the total. In 1992, 1993, and 1994, HBCUs awarded 2,619; 2,766; and 3,187 master's degrees, respectively, to African Americans. These awards represented 14%, 14%, and 13.6% of the total. Yet, despite the declining share of master's degrees awarded by HBCUs, one must remember that a very small number of HBCUs, slightly more than 30, even award master's degrees—and those that do, do so in only a few select disciplines.

Doctoral trends for African Americans almost exactly match the pattern observed for master's degrees, except that more African American women are presently receiving these

TABLE XII
Master's Degrees Awarded to African Americans for Selected Years: 1976–1994

YEAR	NUMBER OF MASTER'S DEGREES AWARDED	% OF TOTAL NUMBER AWARDED ANNUALLY
1976	20,345	7.0%
1981	17,133	5.85
1985	13,939	5.0%
1992	18,116	5.2%
1993	19,780	5.4%
1994	21,937	5.7%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).

awards than ever before. For the academic years 1976–77, 1978–79, and 1980–81, an average of 1,261 doctorates, or about 4% of the total, were awarded to African Americans (1,253, 1,267, and 1,265 doctorates, respectively). By the mid-1980s, however, the numbers of doctorates awarded to African Americans in general plummeted, and the annual figures fluctuated through 1995. In 1985, African Americans received 912 doctorates, or about 3% of the total awarded that year. In 1987, the number of Black doctorates produced was 771, or 2.3% of the total; in 1991, it was 1,004, or 2.7% of the total; 1,108, or 2.8%, in 1993; and in 1995, it was 1,287, or 3.1%. Thus, there has been no appreciable increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans since the late 1970s or between 1985 and 1995.

The share of doctorates received by African American women has risen steadily also over the last 20 years. In 1976, Black women received 488 doctorates compared to the 766 doctorates received by Black men. Nine years later, in 1985, Black women received 533 doctorates compared to the 379 that were awarded to Black men. Between 1990 and 1995, Black women received an annual average of almost 200 more doctorates than did Black men. In 1994, for example, 686 doctorates were awarded to African American women, compared to 409 for African American men; in 1995, the comparable figures were 805 to 482. Black women accounted for 63% of all doctorates in 1994 and 1995 (see Table XIII).

The contributions of the extremely small number of HBCUs that award doctoral degrees deserve some attention here. Two institutions' annual production of about 60 African American doctoral graduates between 1991 and 1995 has helped to sustain the national average. Those institutions were Howard University and Clark–Atlanta University, which awarded 195 and 124 doctoral degrees, respectively, to African Americans during these years.

It is also important to recognize that HBCUs make a significant contribution to doctoral degree preparation by providing other institutions that award these degrees with baccalaureate graduates. Recent data on the production of African American doctoral recipients from 1991 to 1995 indicate that 15 of the top 20 institutions that awarded these graduates their baccalaureates were HBCUs. According to Henderson, Clarke, and Reynolds (1996), these institutions, and their numbers of Black doctoral graduates, include the following: Howard University (136), Spelman College (78), Hampton University (69), Wayne State University (69; not an HBCU), Tuskegee University (64), Southern University–Baton Rouge (60), Florida A & M University (56), North Carolina Central University (55), North Carolina A & T University (54), Jackson State University (52), Chicago State University (46; not an HBCU), Fisk University (46), University of Michigan (45; not an HBCU), South Carolina State University (45), Michigan State University (43; not an HBCU), University of Maryland–College Park (43; not an HBCU), Morgan State University (43),

TABLE XIII
Doctorates Awarded to African Americans by Gender for Selected Years: 1976–1995

YEAR	BLACK FEMALE DOCTORATES	BLACK MALE DOCTORATES	TOTAL
1976	488	766	1,254
1985	533	379	912
1994	686	409	1,095
1995	805	482	1,287

Source: Henderson, Clarke, & Reynolds (1996).

Tennessee State University (39), Grambling State University (39), and Texas Southern University (39).

Moreover, among the 5,284 African Americans who received their doctoral degrees between 1991 and 1995, twenty-one percent, or 1,122, received their undergraduate degrees at 15 HBCUs. The remaining 4,162 received their baccalaureates from 847 other colleges and universities. This is yet another sign that most HBCUs expect their graduates to pursue advanced and professional degrees.

A refreshing change in degree production is evident in the increase of first-professional degree awards to African Americans since 1976 (see Table XIV). In academic years 1976–77, 1978–79, and 1980–81, African Americans received an average of 2,768 first-professional degrees—2,536; 2,836; and 2,931, respectively—representing a 4% share of the total degrees awarded during those years. The number of first-professional degrees awarded to African Americans in 1985 was 3,029, or 4.3% of the total. In 1991, that number was up, to 3,575, or 5% of the total; in 1993, it was 4,100, or 5.5%; and in 1994, it was 4,444, or 5.9%. Again, it is important to recognize that African American women accounted for most of those increases. It is also important to note that the HBCU share of Black first-professional degrees has fluctuated since 1987. HBCUs awarded the following number of first-professional degrees to African Americans between 1987 and 1994: 618 in 1987; 478 in 1989; 552 in 1990; 509 in 1991; 449 in 1992; 627 in 1993; and 688 in 1994. The primary fields of these degrees were law, medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the data I have presented, from findings on Black students' performance in the elementary grades to data on African Americans' attainment of first-professional degrees, it is fair to say that there has been both progress and regression with respect to African Americans' educational attainment and achievement over the last four decades. However, this mixed assessment should not be viewed as a sign of discouragement. Rather, it should be used as a source of motivation to improve further those conditions that require immediate attention. Additionally, it is imperative that the positive trends in African American educational attainment—trends such as higher graduation rates from high school; improved performance on selected tests and educational measures; success in certain school programs; successful school completion rates; the continued contributions of HBCUs to baccalaureate, graduate, and first-professional degree production, and the preparation of African American teachers—to name just a few signs, must be constantly

TABLE XIV

First-Professional Degrees Awarded to African Americans for Selected Years: 1977–1994

YEAR	FIRST-PROFESSIONAL DEGREES AWARDED	% OF TOTAL AWARDED ANNUALLY
1977	2,536	4%
1979	2,836	4%
1981	2,931	4%
1985	3,029	4.3%
1991	3,575	5%
1993	4,100	5.5%
1994	4,444	5.9%

Source: Carter & Wilson (1997).

emphasized. At the same time, however, it is necessary that those negative indicators that can be improved are addressed by such measures as more rigorous curricula, higher educational standards and expectations for African American students, higher expectations by teachers, increased involvement by parents, and so forth.

It may not be as easy to change the segregated composition of the public schools, where so many African Americans are currently enrolled. It may not be easy to change the numbers of African American students who come from poor backgrounds in those schools. But it is possible to exercise our civic duty and inquire what can be done to reduce class sizes, sustain reading and mathematics performance beyond the fourth grade, offer more college preparatory and advanced placement courses, and provide comprehensive career counseling for these students. Furthermore, it is our responsibility to find out why there are so few African Americans in gifted and talented programs in public schools, why African Americans account for almost 30% of all students in special education classes, and why more African American students do not achieve at higher levels of proficiency on various subject-matter tests. It is also our obligation to understand why 41% of African American college students are presently attending two-year institutions; why 350,000 more African American women than men are attending college today compared to a difference of 200,000 up to 1984; and why few, if any, gains are presently being made by Blacks at the doctoral level.

These are indeed challenging issues and questions which signal that serious work is needed to reduce the many inequities that still exist in the schools attended by African American students. Change and real growth are possible, but hope must be supported by commitment to standards, carefully designed educational programs, systematic action, and the realization that success is within reach. With the belief and conviction that the glass of educational opportunity is half full, we can help to fulfill the dreams of those numerous African American parents who expect their children to attend college and be productive citizens in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

- Braddock, J. H. (1990, February). *Tracking: Implications for Black youth* (Report No. 1). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students.
- Campbell, J. R., Voelkl, K. E., & Donahue, P. L. (1997). *NAEP 1996 trends in academic progress*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Carter, D. J., & Wilson, R. (1989). *Minorities in higher education: Eighth annual status report, 1989*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Carter, D. J., & Wilson, R. (1997). *Minorities in higher education: Fifteenth annual status report, 1996-1997*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute of The College Fund/UNCF. (1997). *The African American education data book, Volume II: Preschool through high school education*. Fairfax, VA: Author.
- Gordon, H., & Brown, P. (1990, October). *Degrees conferred in institutions of higher education, by race/ethnicity and sex: 1976-77 through 1986-87*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Henderson, P. H., Clarke, J. E., & Reynolds, M. A. (1996). *Summary report 1995: Doctorate recipients from United States universities*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Hoffman, C. M., Snyder, T. D., & Sonneberg, B. (1996). *Historically Black colleges and universities 1976-1994*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Horn, L., & West, J. (1992). *A profile of parents of eighth graders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.

- Irvine, J. J. (1990). *Black students and school failure*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Oakes, J. (1986, October). Keeping track, part 2: Curriculum inequality and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 148-154.
- Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Orfield, G., Bachmeier, M. D., James, D. R., & Eitle, T. (1997). *Deepening segregation in American public schools*. Boston: Harvard Project on School Desegregation.
- Seligo, J., & Fiore, M. (September 5, 1997). Average score on admissions tests rise. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A68.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics. (1992). *1987-88 schools and staffing survey*. Washington, DC: Author. [Unpublished tabulations]
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1996). *Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.