The Jar is Half-Empty and The Jar is Half-Full: Challenges and Opportunities in Graduating First-Generation African American Undergraduates

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Introduction

A gap exists between the degree to which African Americans embrace the cultural value of higher education attainment (Butchart, 1988; Du Bois, 1935; Mickelson & Greene, 2006; Washington, 1900; Woodson, 1919) and the reality of their unsatisfactory undergraduate degree attainment at traditional white institutions (TWIs) (Allen, 1992; Allen, Jayakumar, & Griffin, 2005; Brown, 1994). Metaphorically, the jar is both half-empty and half-full. The three-fold objective of this article is to describe what the jar of degree attainment looks like for African American undergraduates at TWIs; to outline the role that parents' early and sustained academic expectations play in creating a home environment for their sons' and daughters' academic achievements in Pre-K-12 education and beyond; and, to clarify and expand upon the position that educators have taken that early and sustained academic preparation is the key to increasing the pool of African American students who attend and graduate from TWIs. In this article, the socially constructed concepts of "African American" and "black" are used interchangeably to describe Americans who identify themselves as having historical origin from West Africa.

The Jar is Half-Empty

The half-empty jar is painstakingly illustrated in multiple data sets that show African American undergraduates' unsatisfactory between- and within-group six-year graduation rates at TWIs. Ryu (2009) noted that as of 2007, 27.4% of young Americans between the ages of 25 to 29 years had earned at least a bachelor's degree, and this average rate conceals large disparities among subgroups. The current bachelor's degree attainment rate has shown little improvement in 20 years and is up only by a few percentage points in recent years. Asian Americans aged 25 to 29 years rank at the top with 58% holding a bachelor's degree, followed by White/Europeans (33%), African Americans (17%), Hispanics (11%) and finally, Indigenous Americans (9%). Thus, the disparity between subgroups shows that African Americans did not graduate from four-year institutions at rates comparable to their White/European and Asian counterparts at TWIs. Also, there is a within-group graduation disparity with gender overtones that exist within the African American undergraduate community. The within-group six-year graduation data show that more black females (53%), in comparison to black males (44.3%), are graduating from TWIs (Harper, 2006; Harper & Stephen, 2007). African American females are attending, academically achieving, persisting (continuous enrollment), and graduating from four-year institutions at a much higher rate than their African American male counterparts (Center, 2010; Harper, 2006; Walpole, 2008). The gender gap roots can be traced to fissures between males' and females' academic readiness and performance during their elementary years. Higher education literature shows that the gender gap widens during subsequent educational junctions in students' middle school and high school years (Hammon-Darling, 2010; Jeynes, 2005; Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Unfortunately, scholars who study African Americans' graduation

rates at TWIs only focus on the unsatisfactory graduation rates while ignoring the students who satisfactorily obtain their undergraduate degrees at TWIs.

The Jar is Half-Full

Since 1968, African American undergraduates have made much progress in their matriculation and graduation from TWIs. Regarding enrollment, Harvey & Anderson (2005) (as cited in Allen, et al., 2005) outlined how there are now 1.8 million African Americans enrolled in college, a full three times more than the number enrolled in 1965. In 1960, over three-quarters of all African American undergraduates attended historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs,); by 1990, trends reversed such that more than three quarters of African American students attended TWIs (p.3). Briefly, HBCUs are public and private institutions of higher education (IHE) that were designed to educate African Americans during the 1865-1954 era of de jure racial segregation in the border and southern states.

 In the de facto racial segregation era of 1854-today, HBCUs continue to educate black students and other underrepresented students. Before the late nineteen-sixties, most African American high school students who sought to earn a bachelor's degree attended HBCUs, not TWIs (Allen, 1992; Allen, et al., 2005; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). For reasons beyond the scope of this article, there is a graduation disparity between African Americans who attended HBCUs in comparison to students who attend TWIs. In the 1980s and 1990s, HBCUs enrolled 17% of the black high school graduation class while they are responsible for graduating 34 % of the African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees during that time period (Allen, et al., 2005; Harper, et al., 2009). In aggregate terms, the African American high school students' shift from pursuing bachelor's degrees at HBCUs to TWIs occurred due to the interaction of multiple factors.

Likewise, multiple factors shaped the new educational environment for African Americans from the "baby boom" generation (1946-1964) who attended TWIs during the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies. These factors included the 1954 Supreme Court case "Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka," the Civil Rights Movement of 1955-1965, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and black student activism from the late sixties and early seventies (Allen, et al., 2005; Harper, et al., 2009). The combined impact of these factors contributed to the apex of black undergraduate enrollment in 1976 at TWIs (Brown, 1994). The accomplishments of the baby boomers fueled the vast expansion of the middle and upper social classes within the African American population (Blackwell, 1991; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fisher, 2003).

Subsequently, many of these achievers married and had children in this new social context. The greatest contribution of college graduates was their intergenerational transfer of educational attainment values to their immediate and extended families. College-educated parents socialized their children to understand that academic achievement in K-16 (kindergarten through college) is the primary pathway for continuing to enhance this generation's life and social station (Jewell, 2007; Keller, 2008; Lareau, 2003; McCoy-Pattillo, 1999).

Moreover, expanding the pool of black undergraduate degree recipients has contributed to narrowing the socioeconomic disparities between majority whites and minority blacks (Blackwell, 1991; Hamilton, 2006). Thus, we have a growing pool of middle- and upper-class African Americans who have a vital stake in the preservation and enhancement of our society (Allen, et al., 2005; Massey, et al., 2003). The most visible symbol of this African American upper-class is President Barack Obama and his wife, First Lady Michelle Obama. The Obamas

used higher education attainment at the undergraduate and professional levels to propel their careers and life mobility. The Obamas represent a stratum of "Outliers" within the African American college population who have been able to use their undergraduate and graduate degree attainment to propel their career and life mobility.

Outliers

The Outliers trait model describes how a phenomenon does not share the aggregate characteristics of larger phenomena. In the context of sociology, Gladwell (2008) argues that successful individuals in American society are Outliers who share similar characteristics that underpin their success in different fields. These common characteristics include: strong social development; an inculcation of cultural value reflective of their environment (larger community, family, and school); networking of parents and patronage that helps the individuals clarify values and gain access to resources; and, talent that is enriched through prolonged and intensive preparation.

Gladwell (2008) proposed that the Outliers trait model offers strengths and weaknesses to researchers interested in helping to expand the pool of African American students who attend and graduate from public universities, especially first-generation students. The major contribution of the Outliers trait model is its identification of the common characteristics of successful people across different fields. In particular, Gladwell recognized that a major characteristic of successful individuals is their commitment toward blending their raw talent in different fields of specialty. Finally, Gladwell's Outliner trait model shares both similarities with and differences from higher education authors such as Sedlacek and Brooks' (1976) Noncongitive Questionnaire (NCQ) and Tinto's (1987) Retention Model (both as cited in Brown, 1994).

The author of this article will show that blending the models of Gladwell (2008), Sedlacek and Brooks (1976), and Tinto (1987; 1993) (as cited in Brown 1994) will provide a hybrid conceptual framework to help us understand and address some of the causes of African American low graduation rates at TWIs. Gladwell's model will unevenly contribute to a hybrid conceptual framework for this article. His generic model is flexible enough to help identify the characteristics of a cross section of achievers. However, his basic model inadequately considers the psychosocial characteristics of traditional (17-24) age undergraduates at institutions of higher education. Thus, Gladwell's model, as a conceptual framework, will be enhanced by blending it with frameworks grounded in a theoretical developmental understanding of traditional-age students in higher education. The works of Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) and Tinto (1987; 1993) (as cited in Brown, 1994) offer a more focused conceptual framework to help understand and address African American students' unsatisfactory graduation rates at TWIs.

Sedlacek and Brooks

The NCQ of Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) (as cited in Brown, 1994) and the Outliers trait model of Gladwell (2008) share a similar focus on the importance of establishing social networking and long-term thinking in fostering individuals' success in different fields. Sedlacek and Brooks developed the NCQ as a tool to assess African American students' admission and persistence prospects at TWIs. Essentially, the authors determined that traditional admission factors (GPA, class rank, and ACT/SAT scores) were unsatisfactory predictors of black students' admissibility, retention, and graduation at TWIs. Sedlacek and Brooks also developed the NCQ in order to provide higher education officials an alternative method of assessing some African

American students' potential for success at TWIs. The NCQ attempts to measure the following noncognitive variables: positive self-concept; realistic self-appraisal; understanding of and ability to deal with racism; preference for long range goals over short range needs; availability of a strong person (mentor); successful leadership skills; and demonstrated community service experience. The Outliers trait model of Gladwell and the NCQ of Sedlacek and Brooks identified some common variables that successful individuals share.

Gladwell (2008) observed that successful individuals blend hard work with talent. Also, successful individuals cultivate strong social networks that help support them in different phases of their careers. Similarly, Sedlacek and Brooks' (1976) (as cited in Brown, 1994) identified a variable preference for long- range goals over short-range needs as described students who realize that they might not immediately reap the gains of attending and graduation from college. In fact, earning a degree will help students position themselves to increase their promotional ability and life-time earnings.

Also, Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) (as cited in Brown, 1994) observed that persisting and graduating students had cultivated a mentor relationship with at least one strong person within the institution. The student retention model of Tinto (1987; 1993) (as cited in Brown, 1994) shares similar features with Gladwell's Outliers trait model and Sedlacek and Brooks' NCQ.

Tinto

The Outliers model of Gladwell (2008) and the interactive student retention theory of Tinto (1987; 1993) (as cited in Brown, 1994) share a common focus on the importance of individuals devoting meaningful time toward developing their areas of expertise. Also, both authors recognize that successful people must develop networks of support that reinforce and sustain their success. Pace's quality of effort (1980) and Astin's involvement theory (1985) (as cited in Brown, 1994) are concepts that underpin Tinto's interactive student retention model. The common thread between both concepts is that the student must devote significant mental and physical energy on a recurring basis to assimilate the content of different courses. Tinto recognized that the institution and the student both play a role in the undergraduate's persistence and graduation. His theory brings to the surface the independent existence and interplay between an IHE's academic and social systems. The principal focus of the academic (formal) system is the academic affairs of the IHE. Academic curriculum's fundamental purpose is to foster the intellectual development of students inside the classrooms. Faculty and students build formal relationships around an IHE's academic system. The social system describes undergraduates' participation in institutionally approved student organizations and activities.

On the whole, I propose herein that blending the models of Gladwell (2008), Sedlacek and Brooks (1976), and Tinto (1987; 1988) (as cited in Brown, 1994) provides a hybrid conceptual framework to help us understand African American achievers. Academic achievers are individuals who persist, attain academic success in the classroom, and graduate from the institution. Since 1968, the reality is that academic achievers represent a marginal stream within the pool of blacks who attended TWIs (Allen, 1992; Allen, et al., 2005; Brown, 1994; Harper, et al., 2009). President Barak Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama are the most visible symbols today of the Outliers stratum among African American undergraduates who graduated from TWIs.

President Obama's Pathway

In November 2008, Americans overwhelmingly elected a President who identifies himself as an African American. Americans should all be proud that they have collectively allowed a citizen to be judged by the content of his character, vision, and political platform in contrast to being primarily judged by the color of his skin. Initially, Americans have shown themselves and the world that a citizen from an underrepresented group can, through democratic elections, become President of the United States, the only remaining superpower in the world (Ifill, 2009).

President Barack Obama's story mirrors the great American tradition of using higher education as a social escalator to improve one's socioeconomic conditions (Harper, et al., 2009). Obama, a child of interracial marriage between his white mother and Kenyan father, grew up in a very modest socioeconomic household. America's 44th President's success did not occur in a historical vacuum. In fact, his success was socially constructed through the synergistic interaction of high academic expectations of his mother and grandparents and the youthful Obama's talent and strong work ethic. President Obama assimilated his family values, and he progressed well in secondary school. After his high school graduation, Obama's excellent high school academic record allowed him to pursue an Ivy League undergraduate education at Columbia University. Following graduation from Columbia, Obama's academic record allowed him to attend law school at Harvard University, one of the most prestigious law schools in the country (Ifill, 2009).

Finally, President Obama's academic and career interests merged with like-minded young professionals and mentors throughout high school, undergraduate education, and law school. Thus, Obama developed what Gladwell (2008) (as cited in Brown, 1994) referred to as a "patronage network" through his development of a wider achievement-oriented social network in college and law school. Likewise, Obama's characteristics unite with Gladwell's characteristics of successful Americans from different fields.

Advocates for the uplift of African Americans should treasure and celebrate the successes of families whose life positions have been transformed through undergraduate and graduate degree attainment. Supporters should use their insights to help the next generation of students to obtain their bachelors and post-bachelors education. Basking in the joy of upward mobility for African Americans through academic success should not blind them to the reality that their achievements are a lesser stream within the black high school student population who have attended college at TWIs since the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies (Allen, et al., 2005; Harper, 2006; Harper, et al., 2009). In order to contribute to addressing the graduation disparity, I propose the following recommendations are made to improve the pool of African Americans who graduate from TWIs.

Raising the Jar's Level

There are several implications in using the Outliers concept by Gladwell (2008) (as cited in Brown, 1994) to help expand the pool of African American students, especially first-generation students, who attend and graduate from TWIs. Specifically, Gladwell demonstrated that those successful individuals emerged from their environment, which includes parents, school, and the community. Parents play the vital role in establishing early and sustained academic expectations for their children. Several caveats can be used to enrich the application of the Outliers trait model of Gladwell to expand the pool of African American students with an emphasis on first-generation students who attend and graduate from selective public institutions. They are parents are not a monolithic population, they are a heterogeneous population; parents play the decisive

role in helping establish and sustain academic expectations for their children; by reading to preschool students, parents foster an interest in reading which is a foundation for future learning in various disciplines; parents should reinforce reading by establishing regular monthly family days at the library; parents must establish standards that result in limiting the hours that children listen to their iPods, surf the internet, and watch television; parents who had negative experiences in school themselves should participate in "letting go of the past" workshops sponsored for instance by the 100 Black Men Organization, alumni chapters of the historically black fraternities and sororities and the Urban League; and parents must become involved in their child's education through regular attendance at parent-teacher conferences, attending open houses, and participating in other parent and school programs.

Heterogeneous not Homogenous Population

The African American parent population is heterogeneous, not a homogenous population. There are traditional high school-educated, blue-collar nuclear families, college-educated families, and single-parent college-educated nuclear households, just to note a few (Lareau, 2003; Lightfoot-Lawrence, 1994; McCoy-Pattillo, 1999). The common thread among the households is that academic achievers have emerged from vastly different household structures. Thus, this diversity in parents' socio-economic background deflates the myth in some majority white and minority black communities that African American academic achievers do not arise out of low-income black families (Brown, 1994; Hill & Craft, 2003; Mickelson & Greene, 2006).

Parental Expectations

Expectations are beliefs and values that individuals acquire which help shape their behavior in different areas. Parents, not teachers or school counselors, are responsible for playing the principal role in establishing the early academic expectations for their children. Also, parents are responsible for sustaining high academic expectations for their children throughout their K-12 education. African American history is rich with the experiences of parents who established and sustained high academic expectations and educational goals for their children throughout different historical stages from before the Civil War (Bennett, 1964; Du Bois, 1935; Washington, 1900; Woodson, 1919), Reconstruction Era (Anderson, 1988; Du Bois, 1903, 1935), The First Great Black Migration (Bennett, 1964; Franklin & Moss, 1994), The Second Great Black Migration (Bennett, 1964; Franklin & Moss, 1994), and The Post WWII era (Irvine Jordan, 1996; Lightfoot-Lawrence, 1994; Yan, 1999). Moreover, many of the parents in the different eras would be classified as first-generation parents who embraced the value of education and college attendance. All in all, parents play a major role in fostering their children's high academic expectations for achievement in schools (Lareau, 2003; Yan, 1999).

Academic Preparation

In the current post-affirmative action world, TWIs are increasingly relying on traditional admission criteria (GPA based on college preparation curriculum, high school class rank, and strong ACT/SAT test scores) to admit African American students into their institutions. Selective institutions use high SAT scores (1200 and above), a GPA based on advanced college prep curricula, and class rank to determine a student's admissibility to their institutions (Bell-Rose, 1999; Massey, et al., 2003). Regardless of race or ethnicity, students who have completed a rigorous high school curriculum are more likely to have the preparation necessary to acquire the credentials that facilitate their college admission.

Students seeking to enhance their academic preparation in high school must complete gateway courses in English, math, and sciences, going beyond the minimum graduation requirements established by their state and local school districts (Hamilton, 2006; Haycock, Lynch, & Engle, 2010; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Administrative guidelines in many states allow high schools to offer three different diploma options: regular, college prep, and advanced honors.

Regular diploma. The core curriculum for the regular diploma includes four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, and a computer science course. Students receiving the regular high school diploma complete introductory gateway courses. Researchers have determined that the regular core curriculum does not provide adequate depth and breadth of content to enable students to perform well on the SAT/ACT examinations (Adelman, 1999; Hamilton, 2006; Horn, Kojaku, & Carroll, 2001).

College prep diploma. The next diploma requires that students take additional gateway courses. Specifically, students must complete algebra I, geometry, two science classes from the combination of biology, chemistry, and physics, and at least one year of a foreign language (Horn, et al., 2001). The college prep diploma requires that students complete a curriculum that is between the regular and advanced curricula in difficulty. High school counselors and college admissions officers consider students who have completed this diploma to be fundamentally prepared for admission at selective colleges and universities.

Honors diploma. Curricular requirements for the advanced honors high school diploma include four years of English, four years of mathematics (including pre-calculus or higher), three years of science (including biology, chemistry, and physics), three years of a foreign language, and three years of social studies (Haycock, et al., 2010; Horn, et al., 2001). The advanced honors diploma requires students to earn a B average in gateway courses, grade requirements that are significantly beyond the state's minimum graduation requirements. Researchers have found that African American students who complete a rigorous honors curriculum in high school have a greater chance of earning high SAT scores of 1200 and above (Adelman, 1999; Bell-Rose, 1999).

Moreover, research conducted by Adelman (1999) demonstrates the effect of honors curricula on improving students' chances of earning a bachelor's degree. He compared completion rates for the top two quintiles of African American and white students who entered four-year colleges directly from on-time high school graduation. He found that while 45% of his sample of African American students completed bachelor's degrees, the percentage of completion jumped to 75% when students had taken the highest-level curricula in high school. Similarly, the percentage numbers for whites also increased from 75% of their sample to 86% for students who had completed the most rigorous high school curricula. Students who complete advanced placement classes further enhanced their academic preparation for college.

Advanced placement courses. College bound students seeking to enhance their academic preparation can complete advanced placement (AP) work in key gateway courses. Advanced placement courses are specially designed to allow high performing students to earn college credit for courses taken in high school. Completion of AP courses is an additional signal to university admissions officers that the students are academically prepared for college.

Increasingly more high performing African American students, like their Asian, Latino, and white peers, are registering for AP classes offered in their high schools. In 2003, African American students took 78,368 AP exams for a total of 4.6 percent of all AP test takers. This is more than four times the level of African American participation in 1985 (McMillen & Dulaney, 2005). The additional financial cost of completing AP courses is an obstacle for many African

American families who are already financially strapped. Despite major progress, African Americans still lag behind whites in both participation as well as performance in the AP program. (To illustrate, a score of 3 or more on a 5-point testing scale qualifies the student for college credit. A score of 5 is equivalent to receiving an A in a college-level course). In 2003, 64.9 percent of the 1,118,448 white students who took AP exams received a qualifying grade of 3 or above, compared to 31.8% of African American students (McMillen & Dulaney, 2005). Thus, whites were more than twice as likely as African Americans to receive a qualifying grade. All in all, students' early and sustained academic preparation in middle school and high school is closely associated with their later admission, success, and graduation from college. The reality is the interaction of different forces inside the African American community and family is important in fostering the long term expansion of the pool of college-ready African American students from the public K-12 sector.

Revitalizing the African American Community

Gladwell's (2008) Outliers trait model and the African proverb, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child," both recognize the idea that successful children do not develop in a social vacuum, but in fact are the products of the cultural value of their environment, which includes the larger community, family, and school. Likewise, the proverb focuses on gathering all elements of the community to raise children. Revitalizing the African American community is the long-term urgent strategy for narrowing the cultural capital gap of educational attainment between the black "haves" and "have-nots" and narrowing the educational attainment gap between African Americans and White/European Americans.

African American history has clearly established that blacks have long embraced the cultural capital value of educational attainment from kindergarten through college. More African American students obtaining at least a bachelor's degree will strategically narrow the group social stratification gaps within the African American community as well as between white and black American group social stratifications. African Americans' long history of resilience in the face of all odds will be the cultural capital (resources in the form of ideas, practices, and knowledge) that they can draw upon to take the leadership role in assuring that more black children earn undergraduate degrees in the twenty-first century.

Graduating more first-generation African American students will require transformations in the family, national community, and the public school. With this in mind, the following supportive transformative recommendations are made for each sphere in order to contribute to the long-term goal of expanding the pool of African American undergraduates who attend and graduate from TWIs.

Family

Revitalize the traditional nuclear family within the African American community. The traditional nuclear family provides the best environment and resources to establish and sustain student success. Future articles will address some of the concrete barriers toward revitalizing the nuclear family as the dominant family structure within the African American community (Franklin, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Re-establishing the nuclear family is important to developing long-term opportunities for improving black children's academic futures during the PK-16 (pre-school through college) years. In addition, we must support and encourage parental behavior that reinforces students' readiness, preparation, and performance throughout the educational pipeline.

There are many recommendations to support parental behavior that encourages academic success.

Foster intergenerational family values.   Revitalizing the African American community through the intergenerational transfer of family values (social capital), nurturing high academic performance expectations for Kindergarten through college (K-16), and establishing networks of support for futuristic oriented middle school, high school, and college students help parents reclaim their role as the most influential socializing agent in establishing academic expectations for their children's lives (Jeynes, 2005; Mandara, Varner, Greene, & Richman, 2009).

Parents reading to children. Parents can emphasize the importance of education by reading to their children during the young person's preschool years. Parents devoting one half-hour every day to reading a story to a son or daughter will send the message that reading is important (Flowers & Flowers, 2008; Scales & Synder, 2004; Smith, 1992). Learning to read occurs through some of the early experiences of students in preschool programs, reading at home with parents, or through church sponsored programs. During students' early elementary years, parents can begin the transition from simply reading to their sons and/or daughters to a shared reading of easy-to-read books. Parents should establish half an hour of quiet time in the homes so they can read with their son and/or daughter. Parents should also establish a quiet time for individual reading by the young person.

Use of libraries. Parents should establish a family outing at the public library. Libraries offer many resources that will support the student, deepening their love of reading, which is the foundation for learning throughout the K-12 educational system (Brown, 1997; Smith, 1992). The vast collections of libraries, openly available to the public in the United States mean that there are different types of books that will appeal to different readers. Parents can use their library cards to check out books for their own reading and help their sons or daughters acquire their own library cards to check out books for themselves. Parents and children can jointly choose books that they can read together.

Students should be able to find books that appeal to their interests in the libraries' diverse collections. However, space constraints and family size may impact a family's efforts to find quiet time for reading in the home. Thus, a family may be able to find that quiet space in some public libraries' reading rooms. Parents' regularly taking their children to a library provides the family an option for carving out a limited private quiet space for their children's reading and studying.

Effective use of technology. Parents should establish guidelines that result in their children devoting more time to studying while developing a healthy balance in the use of different technology (iPods, Game Boys, TV, and cell phones). There are different TV viewing habits among different socioeconomic and racial groups of Americans. In general, low income families, compared to middle- and higher-income families, watch more TV throughout the week (Caldeas & Bankston, 1999; Lareau, 2003). The common denominator between low-income white and black families is a preoccupation with watching TV by parents and children. Disproportionately, African Americans are concentrated in some of the lower income social classes in America (Allen, et al., 2005; Haycock, et al., 2010). It is recommended that parents reduce by one half their sons' and daughters' television viewing during the school year. In replacement, parents should help their sons and daughters develop structured home work/study schedules (Brown, 1997; Flowers & Flowers, 2008).

Increasingly more American homes have at least one computer. Many computer users devote significant time and energy viewing different internet sites. Parents must establish time and

content guidelines for their children's use of the internet. Parents' time guidelines establish a framework for how long the student can be searching the internet. The content guidelines allow the parent and young person to agree on the websites available to them on the computer. Parents can make use of content restriction software to reinforce to their sons and daughters the appropriate viewing content while they are on the computer.

Even though some households may not have a computer, parents and young people can use the computers that are available at many public libraries. Most public libraries restrict the content available to children on computers in their facilities. Parents can use the library's content guidelines to reinforce their young person's internet browsing in the library. Next, transformational recommendations are made for the nationwide African American community.

African American National Community

Establish nationwide town hall meetings. Begin a series of candid, frank, "keeping it real," or "telling it like it is" nationwide forums that begin and sustain a discussion of what action-oriented solutions African Americans can use to build on the success of their uplift through education while identifying the cultural and structural barriers constraining their uplift through educational attainment (Brinson, 2010; Brown, 1997).

Rejuvenate and enhance the historically black church. During the 1954-1965 Civil Rights Movement, the historically black church demonstrated its capacity to assume a transformational role to galvanize African Americans to resist de jure segregation, and fight for voting rights. Without a doubt, the black church should reclaim its transformational leadership role to rally the African American community around treasuring and expanding the nuclear family as the major family structure within the black community. Also, the black church should hold and wave the banner of fostering early and sustained academic achievement for K-12 students as a precondition for attending and graduating from college (Brinson, 2010; Brown, 1997).

Develop community-wide education coalitions. African Americans should support community-wide coalitions to establish college preparatory classes in all K-12 school districts—rural, urban, and metropolitan school districts. They should develop and maintain a coalition with all Americans to pressure Congress to preserve and expand need-based student financial aid programs. Blacks should also cultivate and maintain a coalition to pressure Congress to establish student loan repayment plans through mentoring and academic support services to underrepresented (low income White/European Americans, Indigenous Americans, Latinos [Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans], African Americans, and some Asian American [Hmong, Filipinos, Meo]) students in rural, urban, and metropolitan K-12 school districts (Brown, 1997; Conway-Turner, 2007).

Public Schools

Foster students' futures orientation. Collaborate with students—especially first-generation college students—to develop futures orientation anchored on using four-year and beyond degree attainment. I defined futures orientation as students' projection of the linkages between their academic preparation and performance with developing their career and life plans(Brown, 1994).

Re-engage with school counselors. School counselors should improve their role in helping students—particularly first-generation college students—become academically ready for college (Mickelson & Greene, 2006). School counselors should team with students to cope with double blind pressure (pressure from white students that they are exceptions and pressure from some

black students to steer away from the academic achievement pathway) that many students experience during the middle school, high school, and undergraduate years(Brown, 1994).

Establish school and community partnerships. Pre-K-12 schools, churches, and community groups should establish and enhance programs that build connections with successful African American alumni from the public and private universities in the state. The goals of these programs are to allow Baby Boomer and Generation X (1965-1980) alumni to use their own first-generation experiences to assist millennial (1981 to the present) first-generation college students in achieving their degrees and later career/life success (Conway-Turner, 2007). Black alumni from area colleges and universities for example should establish a telethon that generates scholarship support to help achievement oriented high school students and their families pay for the AP courses.

Summary

Traditionally, many Americans have made use of the attainment of their undergraduate degrees as a social escalator to improve their social and economic status in life. Obtaining a bachelor's degree is considered the minimum academic credential that launches a student's post-college career. Bachelor's degree recipients in comparison to non-bachelor's degree job applicants are more marketable and competitive in the new information oriented job market (Hammond-Darling, 2010). Undergraduate degree holders have higher lifetime earnings than citizens who do not have an undergraduate degree. In this article, the focus is primarily on expanding the pool of black students from first-generation families to get academically prepared for college. The rationale is that second-generation and beyond legacy parents have assimilated the cultural capital that was described as the Invisible Tapestry, as cited in Kuh, Schuh, &Whitt (1991).

Improving African American students' rigorous academic preparation to attend selective TWIs requires the interaction of several key factors, such as high teacher expectations, good academic environment in the school, completing an advanced curriculum, developing mutual peer relationships that sustain academic achievement and projecting positive futures orientations, and high parental expectations. Notwithstanding, parents are the primary socializing agents who help their sons and daughters acquire the social capital, as well as the academic credentials, that propel many to say, "I know that I am going to college, but I do not know where I am going to college" (Brown, 1997).

The African American community is at a crossroads that metaphorically looks like a jar half-empty and a jar half-full, as measured in the achievements of the black middle- and upper-classes while the continuing disproportionate concentration of blacks in poverty is showing the jar half-empty. Expanding the pool of African Americans—particularly first-generation college students—who earn a degree will result in narrowing the within-group socioeconomic class (SEC) disparity between the black "haves" and the black "have nots," while continuing to close the gap between group SEC status disparities of White/European Americans and African Americans. Implementing these recommendations may generate small victories that may contribute to transformational cultural changes which support the strategic goal of expanding the pool of African Americans who attain an undergraduate degree from selective public colleges and universities.

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