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Separate and Unequal: Twenty-first Century Segregation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities through Academic Curriculum

by James Satterfield

Abstract

This study identifies discriminatory patterns within the curriculum of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The current federal definition of Historically Black Colleges and Universities indicates that any institution founded prior to 1964, with the expressed purpose of education Blacks will be known as a Historically Black College or University. This study, redefines that definition to include any institution that has a predominantly Black student population.

In addition, this study provides an understanding of African American higher education colleges and universities by examining the nature of the relationship between their technical core and the dominant social group's normative, regulative, and cognitive categories. The use of an occupational taxonomy provides an explanation of how students who attend African American colleges and universities are being educated.

Introduction

Although there is extensive literature pertaining to Black colleges and universities, it is primarily framed around the federal definition of Black colleges and universities established by the Title III Higher Education Act of 1965. This law identifies any college and university established before 1964 with the expressed purpose of educating Blacks as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The identifying category HBCU established economic support for Black colleges. However, because of the government's precise definition, there is confusion surrounding the nature of African American higher education in this country.

Research by Minor (2008) and Brown (2001) has revealed several gaps in knowledge and understanding of Black colleges and universities, as well as a singular-thinking pattern that promotes boundaries when trying to understand the phenomena of African American Education. The fact that Black colleges and universities are only identified according to a federal definition limits the total number of colleges and universities that can receive federal funds for educating African Americans.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored one sector of American higher education, specifically African American higher education institutions. This includes institutions that have been identified by the federal government as HBCUs and those institutions serving predominantly

African American student populations. The purpose of this study was to examine the core technologies within African American higher education institutions and develop an occupational taxonomy that explains African American higher education institutional core technologies and their prestige, discretion, and earnings.

Theoretical Framework

In order to study the core technologies of Black colleges and universities, the researcher used a conceptual framework based on a cognitive system of understanding institutional theory and specifically the technical core level of Parsons (1960) theory of three levels of organizational control. Through the use of institutional theory, issues such as, core technologies, and their prestige, discretion, and earnings at multiple can be understood how they combine to form one complex sector of higher education.

In addition to Parsons, Scott's (1995) idea of institutions consisting of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures and activities offers meaning to the social behaviour of an institution. The regulative pillar emphasizes rules, laws, and sanctions. North (1990) said that institutions have formal written rules and unwritten codes, which, if broken, are followed up by sanctions and punishments.

The normative aspects include values and norms. "Norms specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends" (Scott, 1998, p. 37). Scott also said that norms limit social behaviour but simultaneously promote social action. According to March and Olsen (1989) ". . . behaviour we observe in . . . institutions reflects the routine way in which people do what they are supposed to do" (p. 21).

The cognitive element of institutions constitutes the nature of reality and how meaning is made of things. "Mediating between the external world of stimuli and the response of the individual . . . is a collection of internalized symbolic representation of the world" (Scott, 1995, p. 40). D'Andrade (1984) also supported Scott by indicating that what a person does is mostly a representation of his environment.

In order to understand the relationship between occupations and social status categories must be developed (Hall, 1975). The categories helped the researcher determine what social stratification each occupation would come under. It allowed the researcher to see occupational relationships in the larger social system.

This theoretical framework allowed for an organization of the data and led to the development of an occupational taxonomy that explains African American higher education institutional core technologies and their prestige, discretion, and earnings. Therefore, by framing research in this way, this study explains how one sector of higher education fits into the larger social system of American higher education.

Methodology

This study utilized a method of inquiry commonly referred to as field study research (Scott, 1965). This approach allowed for multiple

methods and multiple kinds of information. Using a variety of methods enabled the researcher to collect data in a manner that permitted the conceptual framework and additional research questions to emerge directly from the data.

The use of documentation helped provide a contextual dimension to the research. According to Glesne & Peshkin (1992), as your use of the documents grow you obtain better understanding of the phenomena. The researcher also looked to the U.S. Department of Education's office of postsecondary education to determine how many HBCUs were currently listed. The fact that the U.S. Department of Education only provided the list of Black colleges as HBCUs, and not a listing of institutions that serves a predominately Black student population; it prompted the researcher to question the classification system of HBCUs. By changing the definition set by the government from only those institutions identified as HBCUs to indicate any institution that serves a predominantly African American student population, new categories emerged. The researcher used a list provided by the Chronicle of Higher Education that identified institutional student populations by race. Once the researcher identified all the institutions with a majority African American student population, the next step was to gather and examine documentation regarding their technical core.

Analysis and Display

To determine the core technologies, the researcher examined institutional catalogs, promotional mailings, institutional web sites, and College Source, an online database housing post-secondary institution course catalogs. Because of the in-depth nature of core technologies, the researcher developed an occupational taxonomy to categorize the core technologies at African American higher education colleges and universities. The occupational taxonomy helped the researcher lay out the data, see what was there, and draw some initial conclusions about patterns, themes, comparisons, contrast, and clustering (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process enabled the researcher to build categories around the core technologies. Also to determine the dominant core technologies of African American higher education colleges and universities, the researcher began to analyze the data based on a process called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through this process, the researcher was able to break down the data, make comparisons, and recategorize the data according to general similarities and differences. During this stage of analysis, the researcher developed some initial categories that were abstract enough to include all the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that when discovering categories, the conceptual name given must be more abstract than the concepts grouped under it.

After developing the first set of categories, the researcher then recategorized the data through the process of axial coding. Axial coding enabled the researcher to reanalyze the data and identify attributes and properties of the categories and subcategories, thus allowing the researcher to reorganize it by specific similarities identified. A rigorous and systematic process of data collection allowed for a natural relationship to develop among the data, analysis, and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Once the categories were developed in the occupational taxonomy, the researcher looked at each individual occupation's level of occupational prestige, occupational discretion, and occupational earnings. The researcher gave a score of high, medium, or low for each occupational attribute. The prestige scores assigned to each occupation in this study were taken from a rating system developed at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) in 1963 in a project on occupational prestige directed by Hodge, Siegel, and Rossi and updated on the 2003 General Social Survey. If an occupation had a prestige score of 70 or above, it received a score of high occupational prestige. If it received a prestige score of 60 to 59, it received a score of medium occupational prestige. If it received 58 or lower, it received a score of low occupational prestige.

The occupational attribute of discretion was determined by using the 2004-2005 edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). To understand the level of discretion each person had in a particular occupation, the researcher looked at the nature of work as outlined by the DOL. Each occupation earned a score of high, medium, or low on the basis of its nature of work.

A score for the occupational attribute of earnings was determined by using the DOL Occupational Handbook. The scores for each occupation were set at specific income levels. To score a high level of occupational earnings, an occupation had to have a median income level of \$51,000 or more. To receive a score in the medium level, an occupation had to have a median income level between \$39,000 and \$50,000. Occupations that had a median income level between \$15,000 and \$38,000 received a score of low for occupational earnings. Once each occupation had a score for each occupational attribute, percentages for occupational prestige, occupational discretion, and occupational earnings for each major category and subcategory were calculated.

Results

Traditionally, African American higher education institutions have been recognized as HBCUs. There are 105 institutions federally recognized as HBCUs. In addition, there are 110 institutions not recognized as HBCUs but that serve a predominantly African American student population. Within these institutions the products and services are the degree programs that are offered at African American higher education institutions. Each of the 215 African American higher education institutions has an operating core that supports and promotes the production of a service industry.

Within the 215 African American higher education colleges and universities, there are 196 individual occupations. These occupations were divided into five major occupational categories with 26 subcategories (See Table 1). Within the major category Commercial Services Industry all of the occupations had a low level of occupational prestige, a medium level of occupational discretion, and a low level of occupational earnings. According to Daniels (1973), occupations have high discretion when people are able to "... define or regulate the nature of the service offered in the following ways: they control recruitment and certification or members, and set the

standards of adequate practice” (p. 39).

Table 1. Occupational Taxonomy

Major Category	Subcategory
Commercial Service Industry	Mechanical Vocational Illustration Services Food Service Personal Service
Business Industry	Business Office Support Business Support Service Business Service Management Business Specific Service Facilities Operation
Health and Science Services	Health Diagnosis Health Diagnosis Assistant Health Assessment and Treating Health Technicians Scientist and Sciences Science Technicians Health Vocations
Human Services	Consumer Social Service Professional Human Service Professional Human Service Assistant Protective Services Public Service
Education	Health Related Education Humanities Language and Literature Related Education Public/Private Education Related Services Educational Assistant

The present core technologies at African American higher education institutions offer limited opportunity for occupations with high amounts of occupational prestige, discretion, and earnings (See Figure 1). An example of this is the 98% low-prestige occupations in the commercial services industry. Moreover, allowing the regulatory system to maintain the cognitive category of HBCU further institutionalizes past and present social norms and values. Over time the institutionalized norms, values, and cognitive categories have caused Blacks to recreate the social system that they despised in their own institutions. Consequently, the dominant social group does not have to work as hard to stay in control of the larger social system.

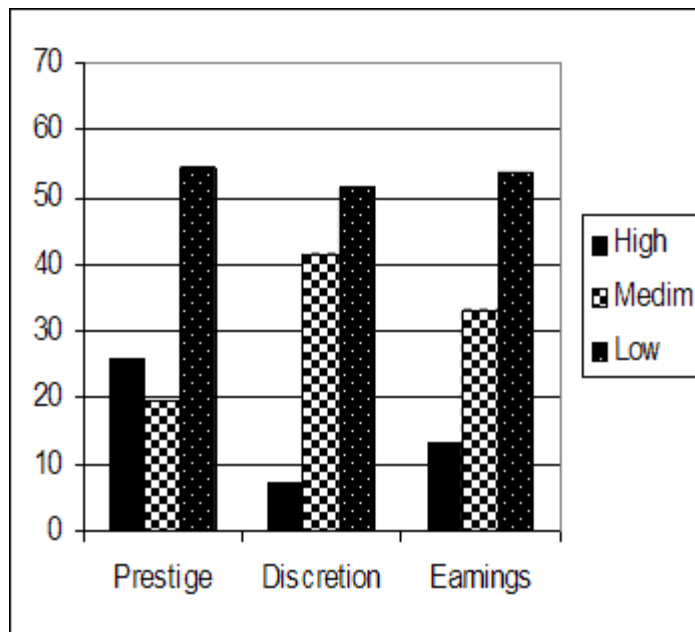


Figure 1. Occupational Prestige, Discretion, and earnings

The role that traditionally Black colleges have played in the development of African Americans is important. There are new challenges that are facing Black colleges as they still struggle for respect (Brown & Freeman, 2002). Yet, as they reach for a greater level of respect, they still support their past. In contemporary times, African Americans have progressed and increased their voice in many arenas. Most people believe that the arena of education shows the most evidence of progress. However, the occupational taxonomy shows that African American higher education colleges and universities are centered around low- prestige, low-discretion, and low-earnings service occupations.

Discussion

The system of African American higher education institutions has developed over the years through a system of normative, regulative, and cognitive categories. Historically, Blacks have been in service roles that are low in prestige, discretion, and earnings but support the wider social system. The current dominant operating cores at African American higher education colleges and universities are centered around service-industry work that has low prestige, low discretion, and low earnings.

Plantation social Structure

The social structure of a plantation reflected a well-defined racially and socially stratified caste system that had Whites in every position of authority. Because of this caste system, Blacks were in fixed social positions that offered no occupational or social mobility. The Black social position was further integrated into society by racial prejudice and discrimination as well as by labor division on plantations. During the plantation era, Blacks were the main source of labor. Black slaves held lower-class work positions and Whites held upper-class work positions (Durant, 1999). The racial division of plantation labor controlled Black slaves and manifested an intercultural conflict based on color. The plantation social structure

undermined the Black slaves' ability to develop any type of solidarity (Faust, 1980).

The Civil War

The Civil War was a period of politicization that forced changes in the nature of the regulatory system of America (Scott, 1998). The Emancipation Proclamation was a change in the regulatory system that freed the slaves. Even though Blacks were legally free, the cognitive categories that were institutionalized over time rendered emancipation socially ineffective. The plantation social structure that existed prior to the Civil War had become institutionalized in the larger society, making it difficult for southern Whites to see Blacks as anything other than slaves. But most importantly for Whites, the plantation social structure had institutionalized the cognitive processes of Blacks. According to Knotterus, Monk, and Jones (1999), this type of institutionalization created a formal social distance between Blacks and Whites that defined the nature of the Black and White relationship.

Emancipation and the end of the Civil War gave Blacks the right to leave the plantation. However, the previously institutionalized parental relationship between Blacks and Whites “. . . supported . . . White super ordination and Black subordination” (Durant, 1999, p. 12). This made it difficult for Blacks to leave the plantation. And the fact that some Blacks chose to stay shows how institutionalized the dominant norms and values and cognitive categories had become. Moreover, their choosing to stay on the plantation is further testament to the parental nature of the Black and White relationship.

Civil Rights Era

During the civil rights era culture, politics, activism, and intellectualism reemerged. The lives of Black Americans were organized around laws that maintained the norms, values, and cognitive categories of the dominant culture. The inequality in America prompted Black and White Americans across the country to protest for an end to racial discrimination and for equal rights for all.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 attempted to relieve some of the social unrest people in America were experiencing. The government tried to cure racial discrimination by making it illegal for any state to have a segregated public education system. It also established the term HBCU as an identifier of Black colleges. Although this change in law was good socially, it ultimately was detrimental to Black college enrollment. By 1968 there was a 34% decrease in Black college enrollment. The overall decrease in enrollment led to some institutions having to close or to increase their White student population.

Since the dominant operating cores support a system of institutionalized racism, this raises questions about how young Black children are being socialized. It has been difficult for Blacks to break through the multiple levels of institutionalized plantation norms, values, laws, and cognitive categories. Goffman (1961), indicated that individuals in similar situations, cut off from the larger social system, lead an enclosed life. For years Blacks were physically and mentally cut off from the larger society, making it difficult for them to function or

be seen in society as anything other than servants.

Changes in laws were made to provide more opportunity for Blacks. According to Scott (1995), schools gain legitimacy by their connection to the larger social system. Because the dominant operating cores support the lower end of America's economic structure, they make it difficult to obtain legitimacy within the larger social system. In addition, the problem of institutional legitimacy is compounded by the lack of funding for African American higher education colleges and universities.

On the basis of this study, African American higher education colleges and universities should restructure their dominant operating cores to support the higher end of America's economic structure. Currently, the dominant cores reflect a system of institutionalized racism that controls the ability of students to attend. There are many different opinions about the type of education African American higher education colleges and universities should provide. According to Anderson (1998), the central purpose of a Black college should be to help Blacks progress in life.

Social Structure

Like the plantation social structure, African American higher education colleges and universities are centered around tasks. Different tasks come with different socially constructed realities. The nature of tasks has a social structure that causes the behaviour associated with the task to be rewarded (Breer & Locke, 1965). Historically, when change has occurred in this country, it has happened through periods of stability followed by periods of conflict. These periods continued on with the dominant normative, regulative, and cognitive categories. Each period of conflict was an attempt at deinstitutionalization of the normative, regulative, and cognitive systems. However, none of the attempts could change the institutionalized norms, values, laws, and language of the larger society.

Formalized education for Blacks came under the guidance of White philanthropic organizations and philanthropists. Their leadership established the early foundations for African American higher education colleges and universities. But the leadership they provided was focused according to their own reality of Blacks in society (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, it has been difficult for Blacks to achieve true institutional ownership because they have been responding to the norms, values, and cognitive categories of the dominant social group.

Conclusion

The core technologies at African American higher education colleges and universities resemble the institutionalized norms and values of American society. They are controlled to maintain a system of organization that supports low-end occupations in the service industry. Very few core technologies at African American higher education colleges and universities have prepared students for professional careers or offer professional schools. African American higher education colleges and universities operate with the dominant

social group's norms, values, and cognitive categories that have been institutionalized over time, and because of this, they supporting and maintaining a system that supports service-industry work. African American higher education colleges and universities also perpetuate institutionalization by maintaining outdated cognitive categories. They allow the process of institutionalization to persist by not recognizing how they have maintained their own institutionalization.

African American colleges and universities must challenge some of their current academic curriculum and move beyond service oriented work. The occupational taxonomy describes the current occupational outcomes available at African American higher education colleges and universities and their scores of high, medium, or low in occupational prestige, discretion, and earnings.

The Intangibles

In search of the truth, this study did a critical analysis of African American higher education colleges and universities to determine their dominant operating cores. What the researcher found was not only shocking but also disheartening. In the 215 African American higher education colleges and universities, the 196 possible occupational outcomes lead to low occupational prestige, low occupational discretion, and low occupational earnings. Knowing that, the researcher questioned why anyone would want to attend an African American higher education colleges or university. To answer that question, the researcher simply asked, "Why had he attended?"

The following is a personal testament to the experiences to be had by attending some African American higher education college or university. Not everyone's experience will be the same, but what this does is provide insight into the intangibles offered at African American higher education colleges and universities.

Community

The sense of community at African American higher education colleges and universities offers cohesiveness in Black culture that is not totally visible within the larger social structure. Unlike Whites, most Blacks grow up examining social and educational situations, making sure no racial undertones dictate outcomes. What African American higher education colleges and universities provide for some is a place free of persistent self-doubt based on race. They are seen by some as a training ground that teaches students how to deal with racial hostility in the larger society.

What Colleges Means

So much of what people understand about college life centers on what it means for Whites. At African American higher education colleges and universities Blacks are able to experience social dominance. They are able to escape the social questioning of how they got into college, whether they academically qualified, and whether they will be able to fit in socially. The environment gives students the opportunity to come in contact with numerous students of similar ethnic and social backgrounds.

Having a well-rounded college experience is important. African American higher education colleges and universities offer more of a chance for students to become involved in campus activities. They do not have to worry about activities being planned that reflect only the interest of White students.

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