"Reflections on America's Academic Achievement Gap: A 50-Year Perspective"

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Acknowledgements

I want to begin by acknowledging the late Professor Augustus (Gus) Low, who in 1966 was the founding member of UMBC's History Department, and in whose memory this lecture is given each year.

Born to African American sharecroppers in Mississippi, Professor Low graduated from Lincoln University and became in 1941 one of the first black Ph.D.s in history at a predominantly white institution, the University of Iowa. Following World War II, he taught for many years at Maryland State College (now the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore) before coming to UMBC. His scholarship focused on African American history and the history of the south and civil rights, and his major work, the *Encyclopedia of Black America*, co-edited with Virgil Clift in 1981, remains a widely used, highly regarded resource. He also is recognized for contributions as editor of the *Journal of Negro History*, helping to publish a number of young scholars who went on to have outstanding academic careers.

While I did not have the pleasure of knowing Professor Low (he retired in 1984, three years before I came to UMBC, and died in 1988), I know that he played a crucial role in building the academic and cultural foundation of our campus. Some of his colleagues, including John Jeffries, Ed Orser, and Jim Mohr (now at the University of Oregon), have told me how engaging and supportive he was of his students and junior faculty. Because he was one of only a few senior faculty on the new campus, his role as a mentor and friend to many of the young, new Ph.D.s on the faculty was vital, and he helped establish the supportive atmosphere we enjoy today.

I also want to thank the History Department for inviting me to deliver the Low Lecture this year. This opportunity is especially meaningful to me both because the lecture has become an important campus tradition, and also because this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's momentous *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* decision.

Introduction

The 50 years since *Brown* represent essentially my lifetime so far. In fact, I was three years old when the decision was rendered and started kindergarten that September, at age four. As we look at the developments after *Brown*, much of the substantive progress began almost 10 years later, in the early to mid-1960s, when a number of us

went to college and when this university was founded. Consequently, while most of our students can relate to this period as history, many of us see it as our story.

The following quote from Henry Louis Gates captures the thinking of many African Americans, and others, about the status of blacks after decades of progress. (While Professor Gates's point of reference is the death of Dr. King, we know that the *Brown* decision is considered one of the precursors of the civil rights movement, of which Dr. King is the most visible symbol.)

> When I was growing up in the fifties, I could never have imagined that one of Harvard's most respected departments would be a Department of Afro-American Studies and that twenty professors would be teaching here at the turn of the century. Our experience at Harvard is just one instance of a much larger phenomenon. Since the death of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, individual African Americans have earned positions higher within white society than any person black or white could have dreamed possible in the segregated 1950s. And this is true in national and local government, in the military and in business, in medicine and education, on TV and in film. Virtually anywhere you look in America today, you'll find black people…[W]ho can deny that progress has been made? In fact, since 1968, the black middle class has tripled, as measured by the percentage of families earning $50,000 or more…[but] this expanding middle class even now includes only 17 percent of all black Americans…At the same time – and this is the kicker – the percentage of black children who live at or below the poverty line is almost 35 percent, just about what it was on the day that Dr. King was killed. Since 1968, then, two distinct classes have emerged within Black America: a black middle class with "white money," as my mother used to say, and what some would argue is a self-perpetuating, static black underclass.[1]

This special anniversary of *Brown* is reason enough to reflect on the decision's significance and the nation's progress since 1954. But the Supreme Court's recent ruling on the University of Michigan affirmative action case heightens Brown's importance. That ruling reaffirmed the importance of diversity by allowing the "narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions to further a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body,"[2]

In the decision, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor issued a powerful statement on the value of diversity, asserting that, "In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity."[3] She also expressed the expectation, however, that "25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary."[4] This assertion troubles anyone who looks carefully at today's academic achievement gap between minority and white children, and in particular at the reading and math skills of minority children in relationship to the requirements of the nation's No Child Left Behind Act. In fact, half a century after *Brown*, patterns of segregation continue for most black and Latino children, many of whom attend schools that are underfunded, underachieving, and unequal. But even in wealthy school districts, the majority of black and Latino children lag dramatically behind their white classmates.

To assess how far the nation has come since 1954 – and to predict how far the nation can progress in the next quarter-century – it may be helpful (1) to look back at the climate and events surrounding and following *Brown*; (2) to consider the influence of these events and *Brown* on both K-12 education and the nation's colleges and

universities; (3) to examine where we are today regarding educational opportunity and the academic achievement gap; and finally, (4) to suggest how we can increase the number of minority students who succeed academically, both broadly and at the highest levels. Unlike America in the 1950s and '60s, when the civil rights movement involved primarily African Americans, 21st-century America is focused on the challenge of educating not only black and white children, but also millions of other children of color – largely Latino, American Indian, and Asian.

Changes in the Wind: 1950s & 1960s

Writing about the *Brown* decision in his book, *Simple Justice*, historian Richard Kluger asserts that, "Probably no case ever to come before the nation's highest tribunal affected more directly the minds, hearts, and daily lives of so many Americans."[5] Indeed, the Supreme Court's decision on May 17, 1954 was both a legal and moral formulation overturning its 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which had given legal legitimacy to the bogus ideas and policies of "separate but equal." This doctrine, the Court asserted, "…has no place in the field of public education."[6] Interestingly, the arguments used by the lawyers for the plaintiffs were based largely on interdisciplinary work in the social sciences, rather than simply on legal theory. (An excellent source of historical and legal analyses of *Brown* can be found on the University of Maryland Law School's website regarding its recent conference, "Maryland and the Road to *Brown*," commemorating the landmark decision's 50th anniversary.[7]) Through *Brown*, then, the Court not only provided the means by which to rectify decades of educational inequality (reflected, in part, by shameful funding disparities between schools for blacks and whites and irrational commuting requirements imposed on black children), but it also dramatically challenged the nation's conscience. Until that time, some states spent two to three times as much, if not more, on schooling white children. Barely one year later, however, in its follow-up ruling on *Brown*, the Court qualified its mandate issued in 1954 with its famous "all deliberate speed"[8] stipulation, which had the effects of calling into question the interpretation of its 1954 decision and of slowing school desegregation. In short, those states and local jurisdictions that sought to be defiant now could delay action.

In fact, the *Brown* decisions became precursors of the nation's civil rights movement, leading ultimately to federal legislation insisting on equal opportunities. At times during this turbulent period, progress was stymied by serious, even tragic setbacks – from the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, and the 1956 expulsion of Autherine Lucy from the University of Alabama (just days after she enrolled as the first black graduate student there), to the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in my hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, killing four black girls, and the 1968 assassination of Dr. King in Memphis, Tennessee. At other times, though, progress was steady and clear – from the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott in 1955, the federally enforced school desegregation in Little Rock in 1957, and the Birmingham children's march in 1963 in which I participated, to the Civil Rights (1964), Voting Rights (1965), and Fair Housing (1968) Acts.

Reflections on Birmingham

Naturally, my perceptions of this period are heavily influenced by my own background as a "Negro" or "colored" child growing up at the time in Birmingham. In the African American community there, as in other cities and towns, adults worked hard to counter for their children the message from the larger, outside, white world that we were second-class citizens. Nevertheless, I remember inescapable messages reinforcing our second-class status – from schools, water fountains, restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, and amusement parks for "Whites Only," to seeing only whites as positive models on television and in positions of responsibility downtown (from businessmen and policemen to even sales clerks). Perhaps no practice was more degrading to me than receiving used, worn books from white schools. These messages had an immeasurable impact on the psyches of young African American children, and the 1954 *Brown* decision took direct aim at segregation's psychological impact. Writing for the Court, Chief Justice Warren asserted that, "To separate [black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone."[9]

In response to segregation's psychological harm, the black community of my youth constantly worked to balance the negative messages we received from the outside world – from constructive guidance in the home and neighborhood, and moral lessons taught in the church, to inspirational stories in the black newspapers and constant encouragement by black teachers who told us we were special. The message we received in our internal world was that we would have to be twice as good as others in order to overcome life's unfair obstacles. Moreover, for many of the children, academic work took on an added dimension. From our exposure to local leaders, like Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and national leaders, like Dr. King and Reverend Andrew Young, who came to Birmingham when I was 12, in 1963, we learned that often these leaders were educated, knowledgeable people, and that knowledge was power. As they prepared the children to march peacefully in protest demonstrations, they served as extraordinary role models, demonstrating their ability to think clearly, speak eloquently, and act confidently. In so doing, they reinforced what our families and teachers had been telling us all our lives – that education makes the difference between success and failure. In the process, many of us became more committed than ever to becoming the best.

Recently, I had dinner in Washington, D.C., with several childhood friends from my neighborhood in Birmingham, including a former director of the International Monetary Fund, a former CEO of a major financial institution in New York, and the current National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. While we may have held different opinions on a variety of issues, what we shared was a common understanding of the impact of growing up in the '50s and '60s in a segregated neighborhood that supported its children and valued education.

My memories of Birmingham in 1963 are vivid. As a ninth-grade student, I listened to adults questioning the idea of encouraging children to march as a tactic in the civil rights struggle. But participate and march we did. My memories of the events that unfolded are particularly clear. I recall seeing big dogs and fire hoses as I led my line of children – singing freedom songs, "Ain't going to let nobody turn me 'round" – with the

goal of kneeling on the steps of City Hall and praying for our freedom. My heart was pounding, and I have never been more afraid. Before we could reach the steps, however, we were stopped by Birmingham Police Commissioner "Bull" Connor, who asked me, "What do you want little Niggra?" As I replied, "We want our freedom," he spat on me, and the police shoved us into the paddy wagons in a moment of confusion. I spent five days of confinement thinking about the meaning of freedom while constantly supporting the kids for whom I was responsible and worrying about my own personal safety. It was one of the most frightening experiences of my life, yet, we learned many lessons – the importance of group support, what it means to stand up for your beliefs, the power of individual choices.

After being released, I was devastated to learn that I could not return to school. In fact, the local Board of Education had suspended all children who had participated in demonstrations and used this approach to discourage others from doing so. I distinctly remember worrying that, even as an A student, I might not be able to finish school, or that I might miss so much school work that I would be unable to excel. I will never forget our jubilation when we learned that a federal judge in Atlanta ordered the school system to return the children protesters to school. And so it was that in this community and environment, during tense and often terror-filled times that gripped the nation, my friends and I grew up as children.

Changes in Higher Education

Throughout the 1960s, as integration came slowly to public schools in the South and elsewhere in the country, important changes also were taking place in previously segregated colleges and universities, and the experiences of black students moving into these institutions ranged from peaceful integration to being met with resistance and violence. Recently, I have spoken at anniversary events marking the desegregation of Clemson University and medical schools at Duke and Vanderbilt, where the transitions were reasonably smooth. Such experiences were in sharp contrast to the response in 1963 by Alabama Governor George Wallace, who, on national television many of us recall, stood defiantly in the doorway, blocking the admission of black students to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Just three years later, in 1966, as I entered Hampton University in Virginia, UMBC opened its doors to approximately 700 students – black and white – and became Maryland's first predominantly white postsecondary institution that, from its inception, admitted any student qualified to attend, regardless of race. (Today, in fact, we refer to ourselves as an "historically diverse" university.) Unlike UMBC, however, most of the nation's colleges and universities were founded long before court rulings outlawing segregation. Many of those in the South admitted their first blacks in the early 1960s. Others, like my graduate alma mater, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, had admitted a few before this period but initiated major desegregation efforts in the mid-to-late 1960s. Over time, these efforts have resulted in the movement of substantial numbers of African American college students from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In 1954, the vast majority of black college students were enrolled in HBCUs; by 1980, however, fewer than 20 percent were studying at HBCUs; and

today, more than 85 percent are enrolled in predominantly white institutions, and they award more than three-quarters of all bachelor's degrees earned by blacks.[10]

1970s & 1980s

With the influx of black students onto campuses where they had previously been excluded, American colleges and universities began grappling with the challenge of helping these students to succeed. The focus shifted with time from simply admitting these students – what some called a "revolving door" phenomenon – to their academic performance. My own observations and experience as a graduate student at the University of Illinois are illustrative.

In 1968, the university established Project 500, an experiment in affirmative action which presented challenges for both the administration and students. Among the 500 black undergraduate students admitted, a few thrived academically because of strong backgrounds, but many were not prepared to handle college-level work, and therefore struggled simply to pass or left discouraged. In retrospect, it is remarkable that some of these students succeeded, given the university's lack of experience with black students and their weak academic preparation. Working with these students as a graduate student helped me to understand what often happens to minorities and others whose academic preparation is significantly below that of most students and in climates that lack successful experience in educating minorities. We find that the environment, or their experience there, often shakes their confidence and leaves them feeling like victims, unable – and sometimes even less motivated – to overcome obstacles.

The UMBC Experience

The UMBC experience over the past several decades is especially instructive. On arriving at UMBC (in 1987), two decades after its founding, I found a complicated situation involving the campus's black students, especially those in science and engineering. As those of you who were here then may recall, during my first week as vice provost (on April Fool's Day, in fact) I walked onto the 10th floor of the Administration Building and found the entire floor occupied by hundreds of black students and television cameras. The students were protesting what they saw as racism on campus. A staff member assured me, though, there was no cause for concern. "Don't worry,' she said. "This happens every spring." I immediately thought back to the last time I had seen a major student protest – it had been at Hampton in the 1960s, and I had participated in it. My second thought was that, ironically, I had become "The Administration."

We quickly learned that the primary reason for the protest – beyond a number of obvious racial incidents in the residence halls – was the students' sense of isolation, perhaps resulting, at least in part, from their poor academic performance, especially in science and engineering. When we examined data on black students' grades and retention rates, we found that their mean grade point average was slightly below 2.0, and substantially below those of whites and Asians. In short, many of the black students who expressed disappointment about the campus climate, were, in fact, also not doing well academically. Many simply lacked the academic background needed to succeed – not

only in terms of high school preparation, but also study habits, attitudes about course work, and a willingness to accept advice about balancing school work, outside interests, and part-time employment. While the university had been successful in preparing blacks in the social sciences and humanities for graduate programs and especially law school, few black students were succeeding in science and engineering – a national trend. In addition, like other institutions, the university had not developed an adequate support system for these and other students, especially in science and engineering.

We responded to the problem by working with focus groups of faculty, staff, and students, several of whom showed considerable interest in understanding this issue and helped develop strategies for supporting students. We found that many of the challenges that minority science students were experiencing were being experienced by all science students, and that we needed to look carefully at both admission standards and the level of support we were giving students (e.g., tutorial efforts, academic advising, freshman-year experience) in order to improve their performance and increase retention among all students. Within this broader context, and with support from philanthropists Robert and Jane Meyerhoff, we created in 1988 the Meyerhoff Scholars Program. The program has become a national model for excellence and diversity in science and engineering.

Today at UMBC, unlike at most universities, no academic achievement gap exists between minority and white students across disciplines. At other institutions, we find that underrepresented minority students, even those with strong academic preparation, often do not persist at rates similar to those of their white counterparts (often, the research points out, because these students face negative stereotyping and low expectations.)[11] UMBC has become a model for what is possible regarding minority high academic achievement, and this is why representatives from other universities, foundations, federal agencies, and companies with interests in this area visit the campus regularly. In fact, *Science* magazine recently identified the Meyerhoff Program as one of the nation's leading higher education initiatives for "training minorities and women scientists," specifically citing "institutional leadership" as one of the program's strongest components.[12] That leadership refers broadly to department chairs and leading faculty and staff, in addition to central administration; and the involvement of research faculty with minority undergraduates is precisely what makes UMBC one of the exceptions in the country. In this light, 50 years after *Brown*, the question is how much progress has the nation made in eliminating the achievement gap in schools, colleges, and other areas of society? The results, we find, are mixed.

50 Years Later: Where Are We Today?

Unquestionably, changes in American society resulting from *Brown* and other landmark developments of the civil rights movement have made it possible for African Americans to participate freely and fully in all walks of American life. Those changes also have enabled high-achieving blacks to excel and become national leaders – from Secretary of State Colin Powell to Brown University President Ruth Simmons and Johns Hopkins neurosurgeon Ben Carson, for example.

Persistent Disparities

While serious disparities continue to persist between blacks and whites in education, Census Bureau data show that the percentages of African Americans and whites attending school and graduating from high school and college are much higher now than at the time of *Brown*, and that the gap between the two groups has narrowed over time. The percentage of blacks 25 years old and over with high school diplomas increased dramatically between 1957 and 2002, from 18 percent to about 80 percent, and the percentage of whites the same age earning high school diplomas increased from 43 percent to almost 90 percent.[13] But high school completion rates are only one measure of achievement. Perhaps an even more important question to ask is how well prepared are minority students today who are graduating from high school? Unfortunately, the answer is not encouraging. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report[14] showed heartening gains by African American school children in the 1970s and early 1980s and a narrowing of the achievement gap, but by the late 1980s, that gap had stopped narrowing. Most alarming, in the nation's high schools today, the achievement gap is distressingly wide, with African American and Hispanic twelfth graders performing at the same level as white students in eighth grade.

School Resegregation and No Child Left Behind

In addition, we are seeing the steady "resegregation" of America's minority school children, particularly African Americans, especially in the nation's urban areas. We know that the majority of children in our country attend schools where most of the children are the same race. Between 85 and 95 percent of the students in many of the largest school districts in the country – New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Houston, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Baltimore – are black and Latino children.[15] Georgetown University law professor Sheryll Cashin provides evidence of this disturbing development, even in cities cited as models of desegregation. In her new book, *Failures of Integration*:

> Take Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, for example. By the early 1980s, the school district had come close to fulfilling a court order to eliminate its system of dual education…By the late 1980s [however],…the number of racially identifiable schools began to grow and then in the early 1990s began to accelerate. By 1999, the school system was resegregating rapidly, even though the district's demographics were relatively stable…and Mecklenburg County as a whole was more residentially integrated than it had been thirty years earlier. Whereas roughly 19 percent of black students had attended racially identifiable black schools in 1991, by 1996, the count had risen to 23 percent; by 2000, that percentage had risen to 29 percent, and by 2001, the number jumped to 37 percent. In the 2002-2003 school year, fully 48 percent of the black students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system attended racially identifiable black schools.[16]

Commenting on school resegregation, more generally, Cashin notes that,

> A similar fate befell many, if not most, school districts throughout the country that serve significant numbers of minority children. Black and Latino public school students are

> now more separated into racially identifiable schools than at any time in the past thirty years. Nowhere are the effects of this retreat more palpable than in the South. Court-ordered desegregation of African American students in the late 1960s and 1970s resulted in the South becoming the region with the most integrated schools. By 1988, the South reached a high point of 43.5 percent of black students attending majority-white schools, up from a mere 0.001 percent in 1954. But by 2000, marking a twelve-year and continuing process of resegregation, only 31 percent of black students in the South attended majority-white schools.[17]

In fact, many of the nation's poorest black children live in "'hypersegregation' – a demographer's term for segregation along several dimensions that translate into a deep wall of isolation and concentrated poverty."[18] Such isolation has a profoundly adverse impact on children's education, which was well documented by sociologist James Coleman's famous 1966 study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*.[19] Moreover, Abigail Thernstrom, co-author of *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*,[20] recently highlighted the implications of the achievement gap among American school children and concluded that the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act falls far short as a remedy for narrowing the gap, "with its unfunded mandates, its tendency to drown schools in data… and its dream deadline of 2014 for 100 percent of students to be achieving at the proficient level."[21]

> Unequal skills and knowledge are the main source of ongoing racial inequality today. And racial inequality is the nation's great unfinished business, the wound that remains unhealed…It's true that, after decades of disgraceful silence in the public square, the federal government has finally addressed the situation. The central aim of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act is…"to close the achievement gap."…[But] students radically disengaged from school need radical intervention…[and] the standards-based testing and rather weak accountability measures in…No Child Left Behind…are…insufficient steps down the road to closing the gap. More is needed, especially for the country's most disadvantaged youngsters.[22]

According to Professor Cashin, No Child Left Behind "provides more in the way of mandates for testing than it does resources for the most challenged schools to meet the new standards…[T]he Bush administration reneged on its promise to provide an additional $5.8 billion in funding for the poorest schools to meet the act's tough performance requirements."[23] At the very least, closing the achievement gap will require sustained efforts and resources to support new and experienced teacher preparation, strong after-school and summer academic programs, ongoing parental education, and, perhaps most important, a critical shift in the thinking of both policy-makers and the public about the complexity of this issue.

College Preparation & Changing Demographics

In spite of the challenges at the K-12 level, at the higher education level, the percentage of blacks age 25 and over with college degrees grew from a miniscule two percent in 1957 to 17 percent in 2002, while the percentage of whites the same age earning college degrees grew from eight percent in 1957 to 29 percent in 2002.[24] On the other hand, however, what stands out is that many of the underrepresented minority

students today are ill-prepared for college work. In fact, one study of minority freshmen in California's public colleges and universities determined that nearly three-quarters of all black freshmen and almost two-thirds of all Hispanic freshmen needed developmental mathematics courses, while over 60 percent of both black and Hispanic freshmen required developmental English education.[25] Now, more than ever, colleges and universities should be involved in K-16 education not only for moral reasons, but also for self-interest. Enlightened universities are connecting proactively to school systems. The list of such initiatives at UMBC is long and impressive.

Minority student achievement has become a major issue throughout the nation's school systems. African American, Latino, and American Indian children trail significantly behind their white and Asian American counterparts in academic achievement, including high school completion, college participation, and college graduation rates.[26] These and other disparities are of growing concern especially because of the nation's overall growth and its dramatically increasing diversity. We know, for example, that Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in America; in fact, we expect that before 2050, one of every four Americans will be Hispanic. By that time, 10 percent of the population will be Asian American, and 14 percent will be black. In other words, essentially one of two Americans will be of color. Former university presidents Bok and Bowen, in *The Shape of the River*, capture the essence of this compelling issue: "The reasons why diversity has become so important at the highest levels of business, the professions, government, and society at large are readily apparent…[A] healthy society in the twenty-first century will be one in which the most challenging, rewarding career possibilities are perceived to be, and truly are, open to all races and ethnic groups."[27]

Emphasizing High Academic Achievement

Ultimately, the critical question is how do we increase the number of minorities prepared to enter and excel in leadership positions across sectors of society? *Reaching the Top*, the College Board's 1999 report on high academic achievement among minorities, points out that,

> Credentials play a gate-keeping role for entry into most professions. In many fields, from engineering to school teaching, a bachelor's degree is the minimum credential. Advanced degrees are required for entry into many desirable professions, such as law and medicine. In some areas of scientific research, postdoctoral study is increasingly essential…[I]t is undeniable that high academic achievement helps people gain access to high quality advanced education and, subsequently to top-notch career options. Unsurprisingly, many people who excel in their studies later excel in intellectually demanding professions." [28]

The academy is a primary example, where fewer than three percent of all full-time, tenured faculty at Carnegie Doctoral Research/Extensive institutions are African American.[29] While we have made progress in the production of black Ph.D.s, the actual numbers and percentages are still small. Regarding Ph.D. productivity, in the early 1950s before *Brown*, fewer than 150 African Americans with doctoral degrees were employed in the nation, and the number was fewer than 600 fifteen years later.[30] Moreover, by 1975, blacks accounted for fewer than four percent of all doctoral

degrees (1,056 of 28,796),[31] and by 2001, the percentage was virtually the same (1,604 of 40,744)[32]. In this light, the College Board report focuses on the need not only for broadly addressing the achievement gap, but also for concentrating on increasing the numbers of minority students who achieve at the highest levels so that more will pursue graduate and professional degrees.

What is distinctive about UMBC's vision is that we are increasing the number of high-achieving minorities at "the top," creating a cadre of well prepared minority students who will become leading researchers and professionals. To the surprise of some, one of the greatest examples of long-term success in diversity on this campus involves African American social sciences and humanities graduates who have become leading attorneys, judges, and policy-makers. Among recent examples are the first black woman Speaker Pro-Tem of the Maryland House of Delegates and three others who graduated from the University of Maryland Law School, including the first black President of the Maryland Bar Association, the first black Secretary of Higher Education in the State, and the first black woman Circuit Court Administrative Judge in Baltimore. Universities might be well served to identify broad success stories and practices that can provide lessons for replication.

One of the campus's most recent success stories involves the Meyerhoff Program and its emphasis on ongoing evaluation. My colleagues and I have learned a great deal in our research on how these high-achieving students were raised[33] -- including especially the roles of parents and families, the significance of peer pressure, and the importance of supplemental education. At the same time, what we have learned from our ongoing evaluation of the undergraduate and graduate experiences of these students can be applied at colleges and universities nationwide to prepare many more minority, and majority, research scientists and engineers.

Conclusion

On the 50th anniversary of *Brown*, Americans have tended to focus more on minority students' deficiencies than on their strengths, and much of the discussion in education has been about addressing the achievement gap. We can, however, find inspiring exceptions. I recently had the pleasure of speaking at the celebration of the first 100 minority Ph.D. recipients (many in the social sciences and humanities) who participated in the Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Minority Fellows Program. (In fact, one of those participants, Dr. Michelle Scott, is now on the History faculty here.) Like the Mellon-Mays program, the Meyerhoff Program, which started the same year, also stands out – having produced from the undergraduate program 20 Ph.D.s and M.D./Ph.D.s and over 50 physicians. With hundreds of Meyerhoff graduates now in graduate and professional programs throughout the country, we expect to average 10 or more Ph.D.s per year. It also is significant that we have started a major initiative to produce minority Ph.D.s across disciplines here. Our success is rooted in an idea of African American scholar W.E.B. DuBois, articulated a century ago, of "The Talented Tenth." While some considered this notion elitist, I am convinced that, more than ever, when the popular culture suggests to minority children that it is not "cool" to be smart, American society needs to increase substantially the numbers of blacks and other minorities who excel academically – and we in universities have a special responsibility in this regard. In his

much heralded 1903 treatise, *The Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois wrote,

> Can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character?...[I]t is, ever was, and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters. The Talented Tenth rises and pulls all that are worth the saving up…This is the history of human progress…How then shall the leaders of a struggling people be trained and the hands of the risen few strengthened? There can be but one answer: The best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land…A university is a human invention for the transmission of knowledge and culture from generation to generation, through the training of quick minds and pure hearts, and for this work no other human invention will suffice…[34]

Endnotes

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[2] *Grutter v. Bollinger et al*., U.S. Supreme Court, No. 02-241, June 23, 2003.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Kluger, R., *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1976 and 2004.

[6] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

[7] http://www.law.maryland.edu, link to "Conference Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education, April 29-May 1, 2004."

[8] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

[9] *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

[10] American Council on Education, *Minorities in Higher Education 2002-2003: Annual Status Report*, Washington, D.C., 2003.

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[12] *Science*, Vol. 301, August 22, 2003, p. 1030. (The article reports on the report by BEST – Building Engineering and Science Talent, a consortium of education, government, and corporate leader – "A Bridge for All: Higher Education Design Principles to Broaden Participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics," officially released in April, 2004.)

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