



The biggest problem in this school is there isn't enough money what we could do to solve this problem is to have someone like the president or some thing to donate a little money to our schools. the president said he wants to help schools if he really wanted to help us had give us money for ~~the~~ schools

## RETHINKING DIVERSITY

Why do so few black and Hispanic Americans become students or faculty? Blaming the absence of affirmative action snares the University in a trap, and lets state leaders off the hook. By David Hollinger

**T**he debates about "diversity" at Berkeley and other University of California campuses often swirl around a single question: Why do so few black and Hispanic Americans become students or faculty? This important question is rarely answered as effectively as it can and should be. In trying to change our collective approach to this question, I speak in sympathy with most of the efforts our administrative leaders are making to recruit and retain students and faculty who are members of historically disadvantaged groups. I also write as someone who

has long been in favor of diversity, and who has studied and written about its dynamics in essays and books for more than 30 years.

Why do so few black and Hispanic Americans become students or faculty? Too often, the wrong answer is given, or implied. This wrong answer usually comes in two parts. First, we are constrained by Proposition 209, the ballot measure that prevents us from carrying out affirmative action as we once did. Second, we are not doing as much as we should even within the limits set for us by the voters of the state.

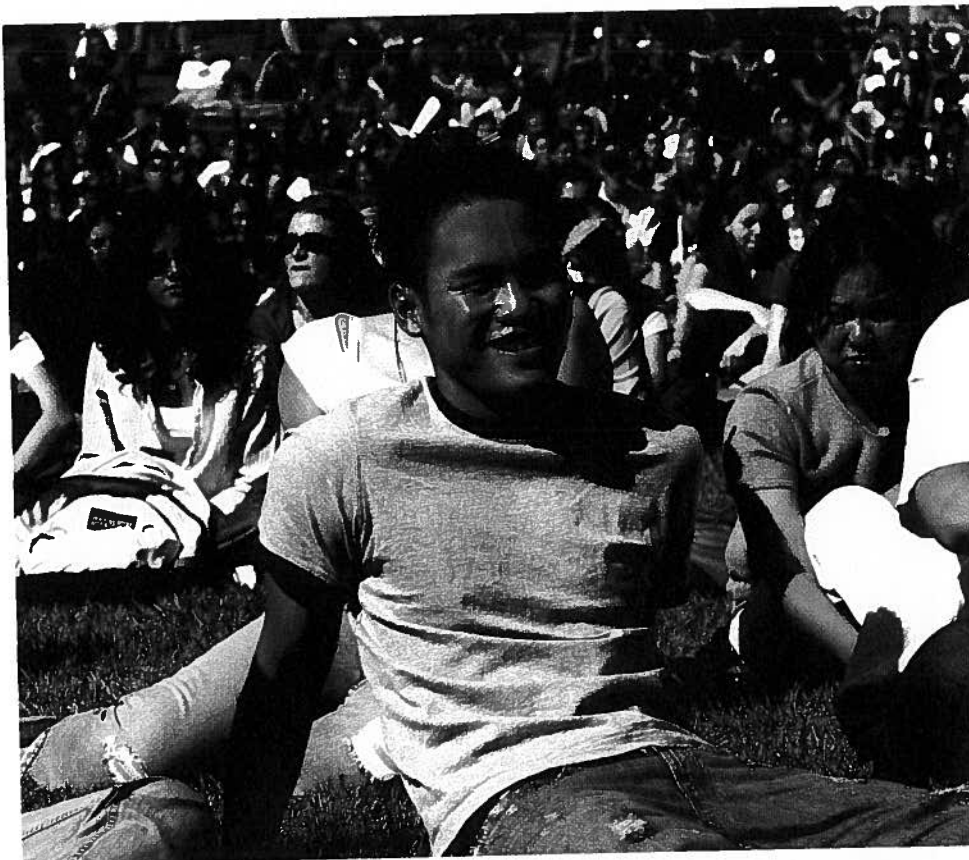
This answer avoids the most important truth relevant to the question: *The barriers that most prevent black and Hispanic Americans from finding their way into the University of California are located primarily outside the policies and practices of the University and its various*

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*campuses.* Those barriers are in the policies and practices of the State of California and the federal government. Those barriers are, above all, a failing public school system and a deficiency in basic social services available to poor people, among whom blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately represented for historic reasons well-understood, including ethnoracial prejudice and the economic and legal position of many immigrants. Even if Proposition 209 were repealed, the chief barriers to increased black and Hispanic participation in the University of California would remain. The frequent talk about overturning Proposition 209 misses the point, and directs our attention away from the actual matrix of inequality in California.

Our leaders in the Office of the President and in the Chancellor's office at Berkeley certainly understand the state of K-12 education in California, and the role of class and immigration in structuring inequality. But these leaders could do more to focus public attention on these truths. A failure to articulate the true character of the problem catches the University in a dangerous trap. By not talking regularly and insistently about the most salient barriers to black and Latino representation, our leaders enable economic and political elites to ignore their own responsibility to diminish inequalities in American life. By invoking the mantra "we must do more" and by lobbying for the reversal of Proposition 209, our academic leaders encourage those elites and their constituencies to blame the persistence of these inequalities on universities. *This is the trap: The more responsibility we accept for fixing inequalities, the causes of which do not lie in our own policies and practices, the more we place at risk our capacity to do well what universities are designed and equipped to do.* The more we link public support to our ability to increase black and Hispanic participation, the more we risk losing that support when circumstances prevent us from delivering. We also risk narrowing the public's understanding of the role of universities.

Universities expand and disseminate knowledge, and provide advanced training for a multitude of professions. They apply the latest knowledge to critical challenges in contemporary life, including health care, the environment, energy, agriculture, and industry. A campus with genuine intellectual distinction enables students to be close to the advancement of learning in all fields, and vigorously enacts the classic role of forcing students to assess their ideas with evidence and reasoning. That Berkeley does all this is well



*Asian admission: Do we learn nothing from one of the most dramatic cases in all modern history of a stigmatized group suddenly becoming one of the best educated and best paid?*

confirmed by survey after survey, including the recent, widely publicized one by the *London Times* ranking Berkeley second only to Harvard in all-around strength, and superior even to Harvard in the intellectual stature of its faculty.

No doubt everyone is proud of this, but I have often heard it said that if Berkeley does not greatly increase its percentage of Hispanic students and faculty within the next generation, it will not be able to maintain its present standing. This common speculation measures the campus' social value by its degree of direct service to ethnoracially defined segments of the state's population. We should reject this definition of the University's social responsibility, despite decades of its implicit acceptance by many academic leaders. If the public will not put in place educational and social programs that can help historically disadvantaged people, the pool of Hispanic Californians prepared to flourish at Berkeley will remain scandalously small. Wealthy private universities and colleges will continue to recruit many of the Hispanic Californians who are ready to thrive at a place like Berkeley. The campus is right to want more Latinos, but it should be cautious about the impressions it leaves as to why so few are here. Proposition 13, which more than 30 years ago cut the taxes that might otherwise have helped

California's schools, is much more to blame than Proposition 209.

Much can be learned by examining recent history of Asian Americans at the University. Asian Americans constitute about 10 percent of the class that entered Berkeley in August 2005. With about 9 percent of California's population, Asian Americans are overrepresented here by well over 400 percent by about 1,500 percent if viewed in a national context. This has occurred despite the fact that nearly all immigrants from Asia were allowed to become naturalized citizens in 1952, and that blatantly racist restrictions on Asian immigration were removed only in 1962. Readers of this magazine know enough about California's past to need no detailed reminders of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and of other examples of anti-Asian prejudice within our lifetimes.

Understanding this dramatic increase in Asian Americans at Berkeley focuses attention on just where the barriers to black and Latino progress are. What happened, during California's history of anti-Asian prejudice and violence, to bring so many Asian Americans to Berkeley? Does anyone really believe that this happened as a consequence of affirmative action for Asian Americans of the sort that Proposition 209 now prevents us from practicing?

black and Latino Californians?

Surely, this demographic change in the composition of Berkeley undergraduates follows from other causes. The economic position, commercial skills, and level of literacy brought to the United States by many immigrants from China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and other Asian countries are relevant. Our social scientists tell us that for all the internal diversity of the population we call Hispanic, many derive from some of the economically poorest communities in Mexico. Bengali engineers really do bring to California a different set of skills than do agricultural laborers from Chihuahua. These skill sets affect the life opportunities of the children and grandchildren, too.

A society that does not provide social support services and effective K-12 education cannot expect an economically disadvantaged Hispanic population to be well represented in its universities. An important study by several of Berkeley's finest social scientists released this last fall, *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California's Future*, found that the percentage of Hispanics who complete those high school courses that might render them eligible for admission to UC campuses is much lower than for other ethno-racial groups. Asian Americans were many times over more likely to complete these courses than black or Hispanic or, for that matter, white students. The authors (Henry Brady, Michael Hout, and John Stiles) pointed

On campuses today, the question is often pushed aside. I have often heard it said that, "the Asian American case is no longer relevant because Asian Americans are no longer underrepresented," without any analysis of why this is so. Do we learn nothing from one of the most dramatic cases in all modern history of a stigmatized group suddenly becoming one of the most well-educated, well-paid segments of a national population?

Scholarly investigation into underrepresentation and overrepresentation is also a step toward the anti-racist demystification of descent communities. Social scientists and historians often attribute the overrepresentation of black men in prison and their underrepresentation in colleges and universities to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow racism. It is not inherent "racial" characteristics, our scholars keep hammering away, that explain these demographic facts; rather the explanation is found in a complex of social conditions that have developed historically. The same kinds of historical and sociological explanations can help us understand the overrepresentation of Jewish Americans and Japanese Americans in some occupations and not others. The more we focus on historical conditions rather than flee from them, the farther we will move away from racism. Indeed, a failure to look to historical explanations for the differential experience of different descent-defined groups can serve indirectly to reinforce unspoken ideas of genetic hierarchy.

campus by using every legal device to bring qualified, historically underrepresented ethnoracial minorities into the student body and faculty. Existing "outreach programs," such as the highly successful "Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships," are all to the good. But Berkeley and the University of California alone cannot correct historic inequalities, and should not exaggerate the capacity of universities to fix problems over which they have very little control. The time has come to remind the public that universities are not all-purpose institutions, capable of picking up the social pieces left about by the failure of other institutions.

A public university has responsibilities to the public other than the diminution of inequality. One is to deliver a public university just as good as the private ones. Berkeley does indeed deliver this. But the University's ability to maintain its distinction is now threatened by insufficient state support, rendering it less competitive in staff and faculty salaries, particularly with the escalating housing costs here. It is crucial that state support not be seen as dependent on the ability of a campus to serve ethnoracially defined constituencies that face barriers to their progress outside the University's policies and practices.

California's tradition of strong support for public education from kindergarten through the doctorate has been connected to a popular vision of a democratic, egalitarian society. During the nearly three decades since the passage of Proposition 13, it has become clear that substantial segments of the state's decision-makers and the public are unconvinced that a strong system of public education is worth the

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out that even a small monetary investment in a better educational system would have enormously beneficial payoffs for California.

This study is a welcome exception to our national as well as our local diversity discourse, which avoids the Asian American case with almost pathological regularity. A typical example is the report of President Clinton's 1998 Commission on Race, the only presidential-sponsored inquiry on the topic since the Kerner Commission of 30 years before. *One America in the 21st Century: Forging a New Future* systematically concealed the differences in overcoming white racism achieved by Americans of Asian descent as opposed to those of African and Latin American descent, and offered recommendations that made no significant distinctions between these groups.

Those who care about diminishing inequality need to look to its deepest sources and to develop remedies that reflect an analysis of those sources. At issue is not whether the society owes historically disadvantaged populations equal access to the benefits of membership in American society. At issue, rather, is through what institutions and at what stage in the social process that access is to be provided.

Academic leaders have been properly eager to accept a large measure of responsibility for facilitating that access. This is part of the University's responsibility as a public institution. Our presidents and chancellors and faculties have a strong record of support for affirmative action, which attests to this acceptance of responsibility. And Berkeley cannot diminish efforts to enhance the ethnoracial diversity on

effort. It is in that wider political domain, not in the University's policies and practices, that we Californians will salvage or surrender the tradition that has made Berkeley great, and ensure or forsake the equal distribution of Berkeley's benefits. ■

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