

MEMORANDUM TO:

FROM

SUBJECT:

ENCOURAGEMENT OF MINORITY GROUP MEMBERS TO PURSUE HIGHER
EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



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Last week this writer had the opportunity to spend a day and a half in Portland discussing the problems of minority group persons in the greater metropolitan area. Discussions were held with the principals and staffs of the three high schools in Portland which enrolled the largest numbers of Negro students. More specifically, discussions were held at Washington, Jefferson and Grant High Schools. In addition, this writer had the opportunity to interview the Research Coordinator and the Chairman of the Committee on Race and Education which is sponsored by the Portland School Board. Discussion was also held with a prominent University of Oregon graduate who is a Negro and resides in Portland.

The first, and possibly the largest, impression received was of the vast waste of human talent found among minority group persons. This is not to say that there are great numbers of highly motivated and successfully achieving Negro students in the schools. Indeed, the reverse is true. However, it could be assumed that among the large number of Negro students in the senior classes of high schools in Portland, there should be more than about twenty who are admissible to the University of Oregon. For example, at Washington High School, which has about six per cent of its student body comprised of Negroes, there is not one single Negro male in the senior class who has a 2.0 cumulative grade-point average. Indeed, I have been apprised that there are probably only two Negro girls in this senior class who would meet the admissions requirements of state institutions of higher education. In a similar vein - at Grant High School there are probably four Negro students in the senior class who are admissible to state institutions. At Jefferson High School -- which has about 26 per cent of its student body of Negro origin -- only seven negro males of a senior class of 222 men have a cumulative grade-point average of a 2.25; only one negro male has above a 3.0. Thus, the initial assumption that was made on this campus, (i.e., there is a vast resource of talented motivated Negro students) is in error. At the present time, there is no large group of talent in the high schools from which we can recruit students. By and large those Negro students who have done well (above 2.0) are eagerly sought after by both public and private educational institutions and many business concerns. It was said, time and time again, that these people can "write their own ticket". Such institutions as Harvard and Yale have been actively engaged in trying to identify students who have a glimmer of ability and have committed themselves to a college preparation program to enable these Negro students to matriculate at these fine private institutions.

Negro Students

Some additional data would be pertinent at this point. In the senior class at Jefferson High School there are 92 students who are in the honors program; only one is a Negro. If we can assume that academic ability is normally distributed, we would expect over twenty Negro students to be in this group. It is necessary to have a 3.0 to be initiated into the Junior Honor Society; there are 40 juniors at Jefferson High School who qualify, but not one is a Negro. The Chairman of the Committee on Race and Education indicated that during last year's high school graduation there were many hundreds of Honor Society students recognized in Portland, not one was a Negro.

If we can assume that academic ability is normally distributed without regard to race, there are some dramatic influences in Portland which seriously hamper the Negro student from achieving at his ability level. Each person interviewed expressed identical attitudes about the reasons for such low achievement; toward the end of the day it sounded as if they were all playing the same record. Negro teachers, counselors, school administrators, civil authorities, all capsulized their comments by saying that the environmental influences strangle a Negro student's motivation to achieve in school. As examples; there are four grade schools whose enrollment is at least 70 per cent Negro. These four schools are the lowest in achievement among all elementary schools in the Portland metropolitan area. The next group of four schools is predominately of caucasian students. Among these two groups there is a common element of a low socio-economic status. There is an elementary school which is a "feeder" for Jefferson High School. The two sixth grade students that are achieving at the highest level in this school are at the lowest level of achievement when compared to another, predominately "average-white", elementary school's sixth grade class. There are schools -- if we take extremes -- where the achievement of the students enrolled do not even overlap; that is, the slowest, or lowest, achieving student in one school is above the most successful student in another at the same grade-level.

It is the observation of this writer that if skin color were disregarded, there are vast numbers of students who are in a similar socio-economic status to the Negro, but who are much more eminently qualified for financial assistance and encouragement from this institution. If we are interested in encouraging deprived youngsters to pursue higher education without regard to race, creed, or religion -- and concern ourselves with the home situation, financial need and student achievement -- we would find ourselves swamped with qualified candidates. If we turn ourselves solely toward the Negro problem and do not concern ourselves with other deprived youngsters, there is a dearth of qualified applicants.

In terms of achieving the ultimate objective of aiding Negro students to be successful in a collegiate environment, the single largest problem is not of financial assistance but of creating an environment in the collegiate setting which will aid these students in their articulation with this foreign environment. By and large those Negro students who would be admissible at the University of Oregon need counseling and tutoring to make a smooth transition. It was stated that the University of Oregon

could make a large impact in aiding Portland Negro students in the pursuit of higher education by developing programs "at home". The writer stated above that it was felt that financial assistance is not of the largest concern to the fifteen or twenty Negro students who are eligible for admission to state institutions. It is conceivable that if this situation can be reversed, (i.e., getting Negro students to achieve at their ability level) we would have an opportunity to be of greater assistance in the area of financial aids.

It was felt that among state institutions, the University of Oregon was probably a "good place" to attend. It was stated, however, that the smaller, church supported institution is a better haven for the Negro student. Several Negro alumni have stated that the University of Oregon is a very lonesome place. Everything is fine when class is in session, but when class is dismissed and the weekend approaches, the Negro drifts back to Portland for comradeship.

The University of Oregon has enjoyed the talents of several outstanding Negro students on this campus. It was indicated that these students are so far above the "run-of-the-mill Negro" that they have not been of much impact upon the Negro subculture within the various high schools. These people have had a past history of academic and social success and have been rejected from a position of influence among the larger Negro group.

What can we do at the University of Oregon:

1. It was suggested that the University of Oregon overhaul its teacher training program. The people that we turn out are predominately middle-class persons with a middle-class value system. Such people are totally inept to handle the classroom situation within the Negro ghetto.

It was inferred above that the home environment is restrictive to the Negro student who has the ability to be an academic success. This writer suggested to an eminent member of the Bar Association that the way to break this vicious cycle was to set up a commune system as operated by Communist China. To my amazement such a suggestion was not offensive to this person. He stated that on several instances he has tried to take Negro children from their parents and put them in a more tolerable home situation. In each case the State Supreme Court over-ruled his actions. Thus, we have to take the home environment as we find it. We can not substitute for this home environment, but through gifted teachers we can certainly make an attempt to compensate for it. Such teachers are very hard to find, and the latent skills they have are not identified and sharpened in our teacher training institutions.

2. It was recommended that persons interested in solving this racial dilemma could get closer to the situation and lend a hand.

It was suggested that interested University of Oregon professors could make a large impact by going to Portland elementary schools and speaking to these students. Motivation is crucial. For example, in the Jefferson Project, the school is changing its emphasis from adapted curricular materials to one of motivation, of hope, of encouragement. In a similar vein, the University of Oregon could contribute significantly by bringing students to the University of Oregon campus and showing them what an institution of higher education looks like. There are quite a number of Negro students living in the Albina district of Portland - which is adjacent to the Willamette River - who have never been across a bridge. It was said that Eugene, Oregon and the University of Oregon are indeed foreign cultures, and a frightful place for Negroes to visit.

3. Support a controlled experiment which would have as its objective a measure of the success of such programs as cited above.

It was recommended that University of Oregon students, and/or faculty identify gifted elementary school students and nurture them along in their academic pursuits -- to compensate for their environment; to provide tutoring systems for the culturally deprived student in an attempt to break the vicious cultural cycle which is now generated and perpetuated in the Negro ghetto of Portland.

4. Identify those Negro students who are now admissible to the University of Oregon to make sure that the opportunities to pursue higher education are available.

It was stated that these persons have already been identified and financial assistance has been assured. However, no one could document this statement. It was felt that University of Oregon faculty and students could be instrumental in such a venture.

Summary: At the present time there is not much the University of Oregon can do in the way of a crash program to insure that talented Negro students attend this institution. It is felt that these persons have already been identified, recruited and are assured of receiving further educational opportunities. If we are interested in establishing a program for a marginal group of Negro students to prepare them to meet the admissions requirements via the Division of Continuing Education and private tutoring, it is conceivable that we could make an impact this coming academic year.

The long-range problem is one of identifying these students early and bringing them through a program which compensates for the cultural environment they are now in. The University of Oregon is not in an advantageous position to abet such a program because of our geographical distance from the source of the problem.

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