

# The Trouble with Faculty Diversity

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Here are two facts about the students at American colleges and universities today: The first fact is that college students are a much more diverse group than they used to be. In 1971, entering freshmen were overwhelmingly (90.9 percent) white; today 76.5 percent are white. And although the corresponding increase for blacks has been small (from 7.5 percent to 10.5 percent), for Latinos and Latinas and especially for Asian Americans the increase has been substantial. Each of the latter two groups represented 0.6 percent of college freshman in 1971; now Latinos and Latinas are at 7.3 percent, Asians are at 8.6 percent. The second fact is that, as the entering classes have become more diverse, they also have become richer. Of course, the families of college students have always been richer than the average American family. But in 1971, their median incomes were 46 percent above the national average; today, they are 60 percent above the national average.<sup>1</sup>

No discussion of faculty diversity can begin without taking both these facts into account. The need for faculty diversity often is linked to the increasing diversity of college students. As JoAnn Moody puts it, “Although U.S. colleges and universities are enrolling far more minority *students* than ever before, they are failing to diversify their *faculty*.”<sup>2</sup> The idea is partly that faculty diversity is intrinsically valuable—we need a diverse faculty just as we need a diverse student body—and partly that, given the increased diversity of our students, a diverse faculty is useful—we need a diverse faculty properly to teach our diverse students.

Needless to say, the increased wealth of our students doesn’t have the same kind of relevance; no one, as far as I know, has openly argued that it’s intrinsically good to have richer students and no one openly argues that richer students require a richer faculty. Not so openly, however, it’s a different story. Many colleges want stronger students and nothing says higher SAT scores like higher

family income.<sup>3</sup> So if you're trying to attract stronger students, you're also trying to attract richer students. And insofar as one way to attract stronger students is by making yourself more prestigious, you need to hire a more prestigious faculty, which you can only accomplish by paying them in a way that's commensurate with their prestige.

But the real relevance of the increased wealth of students is not in the impact it has on the wealth of faculty. My point in this essay will be that the increasing diversity of the student body should be understood as an alternative to and a distraction from efforts to address the increasing wealth of the student body. When you worry about matching your diverse student body with a diverse faculty, you're taking one problem (lack of student diversity) that has very little to do with the real injustices of our educational system and adding to it another problem (lack of faculty diversity) that has absolutely nothing to do with those injustices. This, I will argue, is the strategy not of liberalism but of neoliberalism—of a politics that has no problem with inequality as long as the beneficiaries of that inequality are as diverse as its victims.

Of course, there's an important argument for diversity that has nothing to do with social justice and, therefore, is not compromised by the claim that diversity doesn't actually promote social justice. It is often said (and it may well be true) that, as Stanley O. Ikenberry (former president of the American Council on Education) puts it, "[D]iversity provides educational benefits for all students—minority and white alike, and ... these benefits cannot be duplicated in a racially and ethnically homogeneous academic setting."<sup>4</sup> According to this view, efforts to increase diversity should be seen "not only as a means of providing equal opportunity, but as a critical academic tool in offering students the best education possible." So whether or not 30 years of striving for diversity has produced much in the way of equality of opportunity (that's the question raised by the fact that college students today are from higher-income families than they used to be), diversity is valuable nevertheless. Indeed, given how much money they are paying for the college experience, students deserve diversity—in the same way that they deserve well-equipped chemistry labs, "smart" classrooms and state-of-the-art fitness centers. The jury's still out on whether a diverse faculty matters as much as, say, a high-speed Internet connection, but—assuming it does—people who are paying for a high-priced education ought to get what they are paying for. They ought to get a diverse faculty.

As Ikenberry's syntax suggests, however, the educational benefits of diversity are characteristically subordinated to the social justice benefits. It's "as a means of providing equal opportunity"—not as a means of providing the best possible education for rich kids—that diversity makes its appeal. And, insofar as the barriers to equal opportunity have been racism and sexism—discrimination—that appeal is a powerful one. Of course, no one believes that the admissions policies of colleges and universities discriminate against racial minorities or women today. On the contrary, as Orlando Patterson has written, today "The doors are wide open for ... black middle-class kids to enter elite colleges."<sup>5</sup> But this good news has, as Patterson's formulation suggests, its accompanying bad news. The door is not so wide open for black kids who are not middle-class. More precisely, the door is not so wide open for any kids—black, white, or anything else—who are not in the upper 25 percent of American income, which is where almost three-quarters of the students in the top 146 U.S. colleges come from; 3 percent come from the bottom quartile.<sup>6</sup> So the commitment to diversity today sets out to solve a problem—students denied equal access to higher education by discrimination—that no longer exists. And it leaves untouched a problem that has not only continued but worsened—students denied equal access by their relative poverty.

This is not to say that the economic issue has gone entirely unnoticed, but usually, it's secondary to race. Thus, for example, responding to the recent Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District*, the distinguished law professor Derrick Bell by noting that "most poor children, regardless of race, are attending schools that are not meeting their educational needs" and then concludes it by attacking the "great many white Americans, including many with otherwise liberal views on race, who do not want their offspring attending schools with more than a token number of black and Latino children."<sup>7</sup> The disconnect here is exemplary: poverty is the problem, diversity is the solution. And it's just as exemplary when the equation is reversed, as when people hopefully point out that, since minority students are disproportionately poor, a commitment (entirely legal) to economic diversity would indirectly contribute to racial diversity. Thus, as Jeffrey Rosen summed up the situation in the wake of *Parents Involved*, "Some scholars who support affirmative action also agree that public schools will use proxies for race—like neighborhoods, socioeconomic status or single-parent households to achieve their goals."<sup>8</sup> Here, lack of diversity is the problem and poverty is the solution.

The mistake in both these cases is that economic inequality is regarded as essentially a consequence of racism (rather than, say, as a consequence of capitalism). Thus, efforts to remedy economic inequality are taken seriously only if they can be justified as contributions to diversity—it's diversity rather than equality that counts as the primary goal. And the irrelevance of diversity to equality is even more obvious when we look at the efforts to supplement racial and gender diversity with what is often called economic diversity. This is partly because the goal of diversity is a student population that roughly corresponds to the population as a whole and while virtually no colleges are able to achieve this with respect to race, no college is even trying to achieve it with respect to wealth. One obvious reason is that most colleges couldn't afford it. The total "Student Expense Budget" (tuition plus room and board) at Northwestern University for 2006-07 was \$46,860, about \$1300 less than the median household income in the United States. If economic diversity worked and poor students stopped being an underrepresented minority at Northwestern, then at least half the students would be unable to pay tuition at all, and a vast majority would pay very little. Right now, Northwestern (like most selective colleges) finds itself compelled to offer some financial aid to students from households whose income is as high as \$150,000. An income of \$150,000 puts you right in the middle at schools like Northwestern (Harvard calls families earning between \$110,000 and \$200,000 a year its "middle-income group"<sup>9</sup>), but it puts you in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile of American incomes. When tuition is so high that even rich people can't pay it, no college can afford to be successful in its quest for economic diversity.

But the financial difficulty of paying for all the poor students would pale by comparison with the difficulty of actually educating them. So few students in the bottom half of American wealth get anything like the preparation they need in order to be admitted to and perform satisfactorily at most colleges and universities. The real reason, in other words, that Shanice from Chicago's West Side can't go to Northwestern is not because she's black (Northwestern is eager to recruit black kids) and not because she can't afford the tuition (Northwestern will pay her tuition if she gets in), but because she has nothing even remotely approaching the kind of educational preparation you need to do the work Northwestern will require her to do. A college that reconfigured itself to be able to teach our Shanices (both the black ones and the white ones) would have to be an entirely different sort of institution. That's why even public universities (where tuition is much lower and hence much less of an obstacle) are increasingly the preserves

of the rich. At the University of Michigan—which has been a leader in the fight for diversity—70 percent of the students come from families with incomes over \$75,000. That figure is for 2005; the comparable figure for 1995 is 56 percent, which, even allowing for inflation, the university itself has identified as a “statistically significant change.”<sup>10</sup> So as Michigan has been winning (or at least breaking even in) the battle for diversity, it has been losing (insofar as it was even trying to fight) the battle for equality. Twenty percent of Michigan students come from families earning over \$200,000 a year; 2 percent of American families earn over \$200,000 a year. During the same 10-year period that the median income of University of Michigan students went up, the median income of the people of Michigan went down. In what sense, then, has the University of Michigan’s commitment to diversity made it a more progressive institution? Isn’t cloaking yourself in the moral superiority of diversity while contributing to the increase of inequality the epitome of liberal elitism?

The question of faculty diversity is at least superficially different from student diversity. Faculty diversity has lagged behind student diversity, and it’s plausible to think that people of color and (in some disciplines) women are sometimes victims of discrimination. Obviously, the fundamental commitment to anti-discrimination forbids this. But it would be a mistake to think that the goal of a diverse faculty, even if achieved, would get us any closer to social justice than the goal of a diverse student body has. A university that no longer excludes people of color but that increasingly excludes people without money is not a more just university. It is, instead, a university that has refused the injustices produced by racism while accepting the injustices produced by the unrestrained capitalism that is neoliberalism. Indeed, in this situation, injustice itself is defined on the model of discrimination rather than exploitation, and thus the university has begun to deal with even the economic problem as if it were a function of discrimination, as if it too could be solved by diversity. But, as we have already seen with respect to students, that solution can’t really work, and its irrelevance is even more obvious with respect to faculty.

What would it be like to supplement racial and gender diversity with economic diversity in faculty hiring? The first problem would be that, in principle, we couldn’t hire lower-income faculty the way we hired black faculty or women faculty. Why? Because the minute we hired them, they would stop being lower-income. So, unless we instituted special programs to keep lower-income faculty

relatively poor (e.g., by paying them less than the other faculty), the best we could do is hire *formerly* lower-income faculty.<sup>11</sup> Of course, this is not what we're seeking to do with race and gender diversity hires. We're not seeking to hire people who used to be black. But we might still defend the practice of hiring the formerly poor by saying that even though they cannot help us raise our lower-income diversity numbers, they can at least help us deal with the special needs of the (comparatively few) lower-income students we've got, and perhaps enable us to attract some new ones. This demonstrates once again the profound disanalogy between race and gender on the one hand and class on the other. For, just as lower-income faculty, in becoming faculty, have stopped being lower-income, the whole point of increasing the number of poor students would be to help them stop being poor. But the point of increasing the number of black students is not to help them stop being black; the point of increasing the number of women is not to help them become men. None of the arguments for celebrating and preserving racial and gender diversity makes any sense as an argument for economic diversity, because economic diversity is just another name for inequality.

By the same token, these arguments don't make any sense as a weapon against economic equality, since there is no contradiction—in practice or in principle—between increased diversity and increased economic inequality. Indeed, over the last 30 years, the commitment to racial and gender diversity and a high tolerance for economic inequality have turned out to be profoundly compatible. In the mid-1970s—after being held down for many years by what economists Thomas Piketty and Emanuel Saez call “nonmarket mechanisms such as labor market institutions and social norms”<sup>12</sup>—both income and wealth inequality began to grow. In 1975, the top 20 percent of the population earned 43.2 percent of the money made in the United States; in 2005, it made 50.4 percent, “the highest share of income going to the richest 20 percent of households on record.”<sup>13</sup> The figures for wealth are even more pronounced (essentially, the bottom 20 percent have none). And while the usual conservative account of this increase attributes it to irresistible laws of supply and demand, economists Frank Levy and Peter Temin have recently produced an influential working paper that buttresses Piketty's and Saez's emphasis on nonmarket mechanisms with evidence that conservative “government policy”—tax cuts, union-busting, etc.—has played a crucial role.<sup>14</sup> If we want a more equal society, they argue, we need a society committed to what they call “ex-post redistribution,” a society

committed to producing institutions that mitigate rather than accentuate the growing gaps in wealth.

But the contribution of American universities, as we have seen, has been on the conservative side. When confronted by the challenge of increased inequality, their response has been to demand increased diversity. So instead of fighting for a system of education designed to produce equality of opportunity, our liberal institutions have fought for a system in which inequality is tolerated as long as its benefits are distributed without recourse to racism or sexism. Thus, the struggle for faculty diversity is a perfect example of the kind of social justice struggle (the kind of liberalism) that conservative champions of the free market love, the kind that leaves questions of “ex-post distribution” not only unanswered but unasked.

This is why the vaunted liberalism of universities makes them indistinguishable from institutions that no one has ever thought to identify with progressive politics, like, for example, white-shoe law firms. A half-century ago, the very term white-shoe designated not (as it does today) a large and prominent firm working for major corporations, but a large and prominent firm that didn't employ Jews. And although by the mid-1960s, Jews had begun to enter these firms in large numbers, the firms still hadn't exactly become bastions of diversity. For example, they had almost no women. So when Levy and Temin want to compare the 1967 salaries of new associates in Wall Street firms with other college graduates' salaries, they use “full-time *male* workers, ages 25-34” (italics mine) for the control group.<sup>15</sup> Today, of course, the situation is very different. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reports that 40 percent of the lawyers in large firms are women (about 4.4 percent are black, and 4.3 percent are Asian).<sup>16</sup> The most recent (2006) figure for women associates at white-shoe firms in New York City is 45 percent.<sup>17</sup> If, then, you compare the diversity performance of law firms 40 years ago with law firms' diversity today, you get a history of real (albeit incomplete) progress—law firms now employ many more women, many more Asians, and at least some more blacks. It's not unlike the history of faculty diversity; indeed the comparable (2005) figures for full-time tenure-track faculty today are: women—44.6 percent, blacks—6.2 percent, Asians—9 percent.<sup>18</sup>

But the reason that Levy and Temin are interested in the contrast between law associates in 1967 and law associates today has nothing to do with the increase

in diversity. The increase they're focused on is the one between the median income of new lawyers and the median income of "all full-time male workers, ages 25-34, with post-bachelors education." In 1967 new associates "earned about \$49,500 in 2005 dollars," 14 percent more than "median earnings of all full-time male workers, ages 25-34, with post-bachelors education."<sup>19</sup> In 2005, they "earned about \$135,000"; "the gap between this salary and the median salary of 25-34 year old men with post-bachelors education had opened from 14 percent to 120 percent." And today (in 2007, the starting salary at white-shoe firms is \$160,000), new lawyers begin their careers in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile of American income. (Rich, but not too rich to qualify for financial aid at Northwestern.) They make a lot more than almost everyone else; more important, they make a lot more than almost everyone else than they used to. That's what it means to say that inequality is growing.

So, what's the moral of these two increases—in diversity and in income? Among lawyers, it's that the gains in diversity, however admirable, are insufficient. The New York report cited above complains of "stagnation" and urges signatory firms to "intensify their efforts," particularly with respect to "racial/ethnic minorities and attorneys with disabilities."<sup>20</sup> The Chicago Bar Association's Alliance for Women, shocked by the small percentage of women associates who go on to make partner at their firms, issued a "Call To Action: Focus on Diversity," demanding the elimination of "any disparity in the rates in which men and women are retained, promoted, and laterally recruited" in Chicago firms.<sup>21</sup> Neither document mentions any redistribution of income, ex post or ex ante. It's the disparity between men and women and between blacks and whites that concerns these lawyers, not the disparity between lawyers and others, much less between rich and poor.

Of course, this isn't surprising. After all, they're lawyers. But it's not as if doctors and professors are any less committed to diversity, or as if their commitment to diversity has anything more to do with equality. The enthusiasm for more diversity among well-rewarded professionals represents a desire to legitimate our elite, not to make it any less elite—to make it fairer by eliminating prejudice as an obstacle to joining it. But at a time when the major obstacle to becoming a doctor or professor (or even a college student) has much less to do with race and gender than with money, the continuing call for racial and gender diversity begins to look like what it is—an essentially reactionary way of defending eco-

conomic privilege. Diversity for doctors and lawyers is liberalism for rich people; diversity for professors is liberalism for slightly less rich people.

The trouble with faculty diversity, then, is that achieving it will not make our education system fairer. And the energy we spend trying to achieve it can be described at best as wasted and at worst as directed toward a profoundly conservative goal. Seeing such efforts as merely wasted energy is the glass-half-full view, because although reapportioning the race and gender of the privileged few won't make the system better, it also won't make it worse. If our faculties are going to be staffed by people whose primary qualification is their good fortune at being born into relatively well-off families, why shouldn't some of the undeserving rich be black too? But the glass will begin to look half empty if we recognize that the cheerleaders for diversity are not just the corporate right (corporations are at least as committed to diversity as colleges are) but the supposedly anti-corporate left. Richard Kahlenberg recently reminded us of the outraged response to the report that, in the wake of attacks on affirmative action, UCLA had admitted a freshman class that was only 2 percent African American. "A commission was formed, and action plans were detailed to address the problem."<sup>22</sup> But he goes on to point out that "poor children are even more underrepresented on selective campuses than blacks at UCLA." And not only is there no outrage, there's massive acquiescence to an educational system that—from the use of property taxes to fund public schools, to the use of tax-free endowments to fund financial aid for upper-middle-class students—is entirely structured to reward the wealthy.

Outraged by the lack of diversity, indifferent to the lack of equality—if you want a description of the new "social norms" that have helped put us in our current predicament, that's a good start. In response to the libertarian right's insistence on the virtues of unfettered capitalism, the left has devoted itself not (obviously) to promoting socialism and not (even) to mitigating the inequalities produced by the market, but to making sure that women and minorities have a chance to benefit from those inequalities. The commitment to faculty diversity is not a cure; it's a symptom.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.H. Pryor et al., *The American Freshman: Forty-Year Trends 1966-2006* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, 2007). <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/40yrtrends.php>.

<sup>2</sup> JoAnn Moody, *Faculty Diversity: Problems and Solutions* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>3</sup> This is the 2006 data on income and SAT test scores, as reported in [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org):

### FAMILY INCOME

Less than \$10,000/year—1313

\$10,000 - \$20,000/year—1350

\$20,000 - \$30,000/year—1390

\$30,000 - \$40,000/year—1436

\$40,000 - \$50,000/year—1477

\$50,000 - \$60,000/year—1499

\$60,000 - \$70,000/year—1516

\$70,000 - \$80,000/year—1534

\$80,000 - \$100,000/year—1571

More than \$100,000/year—1656

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Association of American Colleges and Universities, “New Research on Faculty Attitudes on the Benefits of Diverse Learning Environments,” *Diversity Digest*, Spring/Summer 2000. <http://www.diversityweb.org/Digest/Sp.Sm00/attitudes.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Noliwe M. Rooks, *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 163.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose, “Socioeconomic Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Selective College Admissions,” in *America’s Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Derrick Bell, “Desegregation’s Demise,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 13, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Rosen, “Can a Law Change Society?” *New York Times*, July 1, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel J.T. Schuker, “Harvard Moves Forward with Financial Aid Initiative,” *Harvard Crimson*, June 9, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> University of Michigan Student Profile, <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/StudentProfile-Datafor2006.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> A moment’s reflection suggests that many colleges already have a program to keep poor professors poor; they just need to redescribe the exploitation of underpaid adjuncts as a contribution to economic diversity.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Frank Levy and Peter Temin, “Inequality and Institutions in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America” (Working Paper No. 07-17, MIT Department of Economics, Boston, June 27, 2007), 14. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=984330>.

<sup>13</sup> Derek Douglas and Almas Sayeed, "An Ever Increasing Divide" (Center for American Progress, September 1, 2006). [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/09/ever\\_increasing\\_divide.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/09/ever_increasing_divide.html).

<sup>14</sup> Levy and Temin, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Levy and Temin, 8.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Diversity in Law Firms" (Washington, DC: EEOC, 2003). <http://www.eeoc.gov/stats/reports/diversitylaw/lawfirms.pdf>. Not insignificantly, the EEOC's data, like the rise of the new inequality, goes back to 1975. At that time, women represented 14.4 percent of lawyers in large firms.

<sup>17</sup> New York City Bar Association, "2006 Diversity Benchmarking Study: A Report to Signatory Law Firms" (New York: New York City Bar Association, 2006). <http://www.abanet.org/minorities/docs/FirmBenchmarking06.pdf>.

The report describes itself as "created under the leadership of Barry Kamins, President of the New York City Bar" and was issued to the Signatories of the Statement of Diversity Principles, a group of about 150 law firms.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2005, and Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2005-06*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007150.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Levy and Temin, 8.

<sup>20</sup> New York City Bar Association, "2006 Diversity Benchmarking Study: A Report to Signatory Law Firms."

<sup>21</sup> Chicago Bar Association's Alliance for Women, "Call to Action: Focus on Diversity." <http://www.chicagobar.org/calltoaction/>.

<sup>22</sup> Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Invisible Men," *Washington Monthly*, March 2007. <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2007/0703.kahlenberg.html>.

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