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The Black American Women Journey Through Higher Education: Racial and Gender Gap

رحلة النساء الأمريكيات السود من خلال التعليم العالي: الفجوة العرقية والجنسانية

Samira BELMOKHTAR*
University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria
belmokhtar_samira@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

Black American women made significant gains in higher education during the later half of the twentieth century. Despite institutionalized racism and sexism's persistent and interacting consequences, these women accomplished major progress. They now hold leadership positions in the academia that were formerly explicitly denied to them as a result of the strong fights of the civil rights and women's movements. This article looks at the experiences of Black American women in mostly white higher education institutions, as well as how race and gender intersect and influence their academic careers. Additionally, a more in-depth examination of potential roadblocks and challenges would add to the literature on their responsibilities and victories. This research paper takes a historical look at Black women's journey in the United States as they seek their first academic opportunities. Ultimately, the crux of this paper assumes that Black women can express, document, and emphasize their careers, as well as demonstrate the relevance of the elements that determine their success and hard-won wins.

Keywords: Black American Women; Higher Education; Predominantly White Institutions; Racial and Gender Gap.

* samira Belmokhtar ; univ ORAN2

الملخص:

حققت النساء الأمريكيات السود مكاسب كبيرة في التعليم العالي خلال النصف الأخير من القرن العشرين. على الرغم من عواقب العنصرية والتمييز الجنسي المؤسسية المستمرة والمتفاعلة، فقد حققت هؤلاء النساء تقدمًا كبيرًا. وهم الآن يشغلون مناصب قيادية في الأوساط الأكاديمية التي حُرِم منها صراحةً في السابق نتيجة المعارك الشديدة بين الحركات الحقوقية والمدنية. تبحث هذه المقالة في تجارب النساء الأميركيات السود في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في الغالب من البيض، وكذلك كيف يتقاطع العرق والجنس ويؤثران على وظائفهن الأكاديمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن الفحص المتعمق للحواجز والتحديات المحتملة من شأنه أن يضيف إلى الأدبيات المتعلقة بمسؤولياتهم وانتصاراتهم. تلقي ورقة البحث هذه نظرة تاريخية على رحلة النساء السود في الولايات المتحدة أثناء سعيهن لفرصهن الأكاديمية الأولى. نتيجة لذلك، يمكن للنساء السود التعبير عن حياتهن المهنية وتوثيقها والتأكيد عليها، وكذلك إثبات أهمية العناصر التي تحدد نجاحهن والمكاسب التي تحققت بشق الأنفس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النساء الأمريكيات السود؛ تعليم عالى؛ مؤسسات يغلب عليها البيض ؛ الفجوة العرقية والجنسانية.

Introduction

As African American women gained access to higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, obvious gender and sexist disparities emerged, gaining social and cultural significance. One of the goals of this article is to provide an overview of selected literature relating to Black women's prior experiences in predominantly white institutions and other higher education institutions, in order to better frame contemporary descriptions of their academic journeys from the nineteenth century to the present. Despite recent improvements in the literature on Black American women in higher education; black American women have produced the vast bulk of the limited amount of material available on Black women and gender and racial issues as they relate to achieving leadership roles in higher education. Furthermore, there is much dispute concerning black American women's potential to hold high-ranking positions in higher education institutions. In order to appreciate Black American

women's early impact on American higher education as well as their future prospects, including educational attainment and professional placement, it is necessary to explore the history of higher education in the United States. The study's research questions arose from a desire to learn more about what happens in the academic life of black American women academics and administrators in predominantly white institutions. By looking at their experiences in the context of race and gender, because existing research reveals that these dimensions influence African American women's academic responsibilities in higher education. However, the study's unique research focus is on the following questions: a) Do race and gender work separately in the lives of the black American women in this study, or b) does there exist an interaction that has an impact on their academic roles? The remainder of this article will focus on African American women's higher education. This investigation will include both historical and contemporary triumphs, challenges, and opportunities. The next part begins with an examination of the origins and founders of African American women's colleges. There is also a discussion of prominent success for African American women's higher education. the article concludes with an overview of present higher educational outcomes of African American women, to better comprehend higher educational outcomes of African American women and ways for boosting their performance.

1/African-American Women's Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century (Antebellum and Postbellum): An Overview

From slightly wider perspectives, the historical context for understanding African American, i.e. Black women's access to higher education, was the antebellum era. There were more than 250 colleges and institutions in the United States prior to the Civil War, but only a few were open to black or female students. Among the most notable were Oberlin (founded in 1833), Antioch (1853), and Wilberforce (1856); Hillsdale in Michigan (1844); Cheyney (1837) and Lincoln in Pennsylvania (1854); and Berea in Kentucky

(1855) (Lawsen.E , 1983, p 142-155). Even in liberal New England, initiatives to educate black girls [women] frequently resulted in violent reaction, as evidenced by the 1833 Connecticut mob violence that razed Prudence Crandall's school for black girls. In the other hand, the rest of the country was downright homicidal, if New England's milieu was unfriendly to African-American professors. Despite this, seeds of hope began to blossom in colonial and antebellum America's frigid, harsh environment; black women earned their first college degrees in Ohio.Therefore, Oberlin was the only college that graduated a significant number of black women before the Civil War (Darlen.C.H,1998, p 122-23).

Due to limitations in the South and shaky support for educational attainment in the North, free and enslaved black people in the antebellum era had to rely on their own initiative to learn to read, write, calculate, and pursue liberal or vocational courses. In fact, Historians have documented black people's efforts in the South to undertake their own formal and informal learning, despite the danger of violent repercussions, from Carter G. Woodson (1919) to Heather Williams (2005). Before and after the Civil War, many schools and universities offered a mix of liberal arts and vocational education. Yet, in the late nineteenth century, the rise of private secondary schools and the establishment of public high schools paved the way for more advanced university studies, and the term "higher education" came to be associated with at least two years of college, and then with the full four years we know today. (Woodson C.G, 1991).

Berea Colleges' Relationship to Black American Women's Higher Education

Abolitionist John G. Fee founded Berea College, a small liberal arts school at the base of the Cumberland Mountains in Madison County, Kentucky, in 1855. Berea College is well-known for being one of the first completely integrated colleges in the South, providing free tuition to all students from diverse backgrounds. According to Fee, a school should be a place of equality and excellence for men and women of all races and

ethnicities. He also preached against slavery constantly, thanks to his steadfast faith and perseverance. Berea's development, which lasted from 1865 to 1892, was lauded as a breakthrough experiment in a slave-holding state, with equal numbers of black and white students enrolled in racial coeducation classrooms. Remarkably, for the 1887 school year, there were 187 kids enrolled, with 96 blacks and 91 whites. The "Day Law," which forbade integrated schooling and targeted Berea for its integration in both relationships, jobs, social prestige, and education, was passed in 1904. (Berea college : https://www.berea.edu/about/history/)

Hence, Berea's admissions were directed toward white Appalachians as a result of the new statute, as students were no longer allowed to attend classes with a mixed population of black and white students. Furthermore, in a desperate attempt to recapture its number of black students, Berea officials decided to build the Lincoln Institute near Louisville to continue the education of black students. Additionally, Berea Institution was the first college in Kentucky to reopen after the "Day Law" was overturned in 1950, allowing black students to pursue a college education. Jessie Reasor Zander was the first black woman to graduate after desegregation in 1954, despite the fact that Elizabeth Denny was the first black woman admitted to Berea after 1950 and was lauded for her efforts. Therefore, Denny was the first Black woman admitted to Berea College, and Zanders graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Despite the fact that Berea College has extensive historical record demonstrating its free tuition and admission for black students as early as 1855, the majority of historical writing on one of the first colleges to admit women of color ignores Berea College. However, Oberlin College in Ohio appears to be in the forefront in terms of historical literature being the first of its sort to publicly admit women of color to higher education.

2/The Impact of Oberlin College on the Education of Black American Women:

Understanding Black women in higher education roles requires a complete evaluation of where and when the first Black women entered academia. This can be accomplished through sharing information about their degree completion path as well as information about the institutions they attended, particularly Oberlin College, where many women of color participated in higher education in the mid to late 1800s. Women of color's experiences at Oberlin College, a predominantly white institution, are instructive in understanding the historical context of their entrance into higher education. Oberlin College is notable in researching the experiences of women of color in higher education because it was the first largely white college to openly admit students of color into its matriculating bachelor's degree program. During the antebellum years, Oberlin, which was founded in 1833, was the first institution to admit both Blacks and women, admitting 152 identified Black women in its college and preparatory school, making it a trailblazer among higher education institutions. Famous Black women educators such as Anna Julia Cooper, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary Church Terrell, and others attended Oberlin College in the early 1900s. Thus, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Oberlin College was a prominent role in encouraging Black women's education. (Bonnie.D , 2014)

Oberlin College, located in the Midwestern farming village of Oberlin, Ohio, was founded in 1833 by a Presbyterian preacher and a missionary with the intention of teaching pastors and teachers to redeem the "Godless West." It was one of the first "college towns" in the United States because the community and school were founded together. Besides, by growing beyond its local campus into the neighboring town, Oberlin established a distinct community. "This new colony of Oberlin was both innovative and meticulous in the early nineteenth century," writes historian Cally Waite of Oberlin's uniqueness, adding:

> *"In the early nineteenth century this new colony of Oberlin was both progressive and perfectionist. It was a community that embraced progressive and unpopular ideas yet was conceived out an of a perfectionist*

> *evangelical movement. From the school's inception in 1833, women students were educated in the same classrooms as men. This was, for the time, unique, as the majority of women who were educated during the antebellum period attended New England female seminaries in small numbers. The notion of women and men learning together was overwhelmingly discouraged".*

(Cally L.Waite, 2002)

Despite the fact that women were not permitted to receive a B.A. at Oberlin until 1837, the "Ladies Course of Study" was nearly identical to the classical college program, and the trustees and faculty of Oberlin agreed to accept students of all genders and colors in 1834 (one year after its founding). Anti-slavery activities at Oberlin had overshadowed the college's pre-Civil War years, thus this was not an exceptional step. Anti-slavery lectures were given on a regular basis by college faculty members, and an economic boycott of slave-made items was launched in 1836. Oberlin College considered July 4th to be a day of "cruel mocking," and instead observed August 1 as the anniversary of slave emancipation in the British West Indies where there were few distinctions among the students.(Fletcher.r , 1943)

In fact, there were no course grades provided, pupils recited in alphabetical order and no prizes or accolades were given out at the start. Confidential societies and restricted organizations were forbidden from the college because the administration judged them "undemocratic" and a threat to "republican institutions."(Fletcher.R. 1943). As a result, students were able to advance intellectually without feeling competitive, and there was a great sense of friendship on campus.

3/The Value of Black American Women's Higher Education and Northern Education:

Mary Jane Patterson became the first African-American woman to receive an A.B. (B.A.) degree when she graduated from

Oberlin College in 1862. Patterson then moved to Washington, D.C., where she taught in Ohio and Pennsylvania. In the 1870s, she was the first African-American principal of Washington, D.C.'s Preparatory High School for Colored Youth (now Dunbar High School). Unlike in the antebellum years, when northern schools had significant attendance by Black women, the main colleges for Black collegiate women were in the segregated South by the 1900s. Nevertheless, the admission of Black women to the "Seven Sisters" women's colleges took a long time, and there were only three historically Black women's colleges at the time: Spelman College in Georgia, Bennett College in North Carolina, and Hartshorn Memorial College in Virginia.(Andrson.J, 1988). Thus, charting the educational achievement of Black women between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries is not as complex or time-consuming as it is for other groups, but it is extremely important.

In her book Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954, Stephanie Y. Evans analyzes Black women in academia from a historical viewpoint. During this time period, Zora Neale Hurston, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary McLeod Bethune, Pauli Murray, Mary Church Terrell, and others worked, and their contributions are documented in her work. She also examines their educational ideas, experiences, academic careers, and the environment both inside and outside of academia. Others are interested in recording Black women's pre-, during, and post-academy journeys because the majority of scholarship on Black women's history is undertaken and reported by Black women. Apart from the rise of racism, the nineteenth century saw a renaissance of evangelical Protestantism, which highlighted the importance of educating women and girls for their new roles in a changing culture. Black women and girls, on the other hand, were barred from the "cult of pure womanhood." The "ideal lady" was defined by innocence, humility, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. The "ideal lady" was intended to spend her life caring for her husband, children, and home.. In the opinion of B. H. Andolsen. "The "real woman" was nearly always the wife of a well-to-do White and native-born, whose financial prowess allowed her to reign as queen of the house."

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, black universities began to train African-American teachers. Fisk University, Hampton Institute, Tuskegee University, and a number of other Black schools and universities were formed in the post-Civil War South.(Davis A.Y,1983,p 113-122). The majority of these institutions, however, were solely open to women: Scotia Higher Education, Spelman College, and Bennett College were all founded specifically for Black women. (Hilker A.y , 1986, p114-125-256). In their early years, these schools almost exclusively trained Black women to become teachers. Teaching, which was considered as a womanly profession throughout the mid to late 1800s, was the most common, if not the only, professional occupation for college and normal school Black and White female graduates. (Harley.S, 1990, p 22).Yet, teaching was one of the only viable jobs for metropolitan Black women as an alternative to, say, domestic work. "Not only were Black women denied access to male-dominated jobs, but they were also denied access to the comparably restricted options accessible to White women." Hence, teaching in the Black community gave exposure that eventually led to community leadership, and teaching became a platform for political participation wherever it occurred. (Neverdon-Morton. C, 1982, p 207-221).

4/Black American Women's College Education in the Modern South:

The South's concern with the past has been both a blessing and a tragedy. Plantation gender and race standards make it difficult for black women to speak up and challenge the current quo. For that reason, traditional ideas about womanhood have inhibited autonomous thought and action, pushing women to look for solutions to their problems from the outside rather than from inside. (Thompson.A, 1992, p 453-465). Rural poverty and racism persist

in the area, decreasing educational standards and preventing social integration. The Southern sense of a distinct history, on the other hand, has educational benefits. For much of the last century, Southern schools and universities' paternalistic care for the "special" needs of women and blacks gave students the confidence and knowledge to face the world outside of the campus home.

Because of the emphasis on family and community, graduates were driven to look beyond individual achievement and strive for improvements that would enhance the lives of others. In practically every aspect of life, there is segregation and discrimination. (Haniff.N. p 251) Despite the fact that segregation and prejudice were not legally compelled, they became deeply ingrained in the community's design. Discriminatory practices , therefore , became as common as apple pie and Sunday baseball games in the "American way of life," and few White Americans spoke out against them. Many Black people, on the other hand, were regularly opposed to them, particularly those that had become legislation, but they were continuously rejected by the majority of the legal system's members. "By this time, African Americans had been reduced to a caste rank in society, and no Black person could expect to be regarded identically to that of a White person," he claimed. (Fleming.J, 1985, p 145-148-154).

5/African American Women in Higher Education in the Twentieth Century:

Almost every major development influencing the lives of Black people in the United States had a negative impact on them between 1877 and 1954. (Smith. A., & Stewart, A. J,1983). While society as a whole advanced, African Americans' status remained largely unchanged. In point of fact, many White Americans harbored prejudices against African-Americans, which expressed themselves in acts of cultural appropriation and "race uplift" in black colleges, which gave students a sense of pride and purpose. Ultimately, the Southern experience of "two-ness" may be able to

assist in the creation of a truly multicultural society that celebrates both its differences and its commonalities at a time when educators are struggling to strike a balance between the desire for a national culture and the recognition of America's past diversity.(Pinkney.A ,1969)

The fact that the South (i.e., segregated) facilities for Blacks and Whites were not in violation of the Thirteenth (slavery abolition) and Fourteenth Amendments (rights guaranteed to citizens of the United States) constitutional guarantees may actually point to a bright future for black women's higher education. While the law suit challenged the usage of separate railroad facilities for Blacks and Whites, it was subsequently concluded that the judgement applied to everything from bathrooms to educational institutions under the concept of "separate but equal." This ruling, however, opened the door for future measures that would keep African-Americans out of high-paying jobs and positions of authority across the board. Yet, "White higher education institutions continued to ignore the plight of African-Americans," he said. (Higginbotham, E. 1994).

It should be noted that only a few were willing to accept even a few black students, and almost all refused to hire black people. The judgment, therefore, defined attitudes about and treatment of African-Americans in the United States, and it remained the supreme law of the land until Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, when it was overturned. Brown v. Topeka Board of Education brought together cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. In each of the four states, the concept of "separate but equal" was questioned. In all four cases, lower courts had affirmed the idea, and the cases had been sent to the Supreme Court for a ruling. Subsequently, the cases were gathered together under Brown's umbrella since they all involved the same issue. (Fleming.J , 1985, p 154)

Knowing about all of these events gives us a better understanding of the current position of African American women in higher education. Since the federal government became interested in boosting minority participation in higher education in

the 1970s, there have been significant advancements in minority participation in higher education. Besides, many of the executive orders issued in the late 1960s and early 1970s were revoked by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, and it now appears that White institutions are regressing in their efforts to retain African Americans and other people of color in all areas of the academy. (Brubacher,1997).

6/The Status of Black American Women in the Academy at the Present Time:

While African American women are currently overrepresented in non-selected colleges, a large number of African American women attend highly selective universities, and their numbers far outnumber African American men. However, in a survey of twenty-six highly prestigious colleges and universities conducted in 2006, African American women outnumbered men in all but three—California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Notre Dame University (where the percentages were 51.7 males versus 48.7 females).

At leading state institutions (UCBerkeley, UCLA, University of Michigan, UNC-Chapel Hill), as well as leading Ivy League and elite private institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, Princeton, Cornell, Dartmouth, Columbia, and Duke universities, the percentage of African American women students ranged from 71.7 percent (Emory University) to 66 percent (UCBerkeley, UCLA, University of Michigan, UNC-Chapel Hill).Thus, many African American women's achievements have historically been viewed with "worry" rather than celebration.

Indeed, these women are enrolling in extremely selective graduate and professional schools after graduating from premier institutionsWhile black women's current educational attainment appears great, it is crucial to emphasize that their success is mostly due to taking advantage of considerable recruitment efforts and Affirmative Action initiatives at predominantly white institutions. The historical records bear out that the Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions surveyed African American students who attended

twenty-eight selective private and public colleges in the 1970s and 1980s and found that, despite their lower test scores upon entering college, they had high graduation rates, professional success, and leadership. In addition, while the number of African American women enrolled in higher education has already surpassed that of African American men, the disparity is relatively new. (Linda M. Perkins,2015 p721)

Furthermore, 20.4 percent of African American men over twenty-five held a baccalaureate degree in 2014, compared to 23.7 percent of African American women. Additionally, doctorates are more common among African American men than among African American women. Thus, in 2014, 109,000 African American men of all ages, compared to 98,000 African American women, had doctorates. African American women under the age of forty, on the other hand, had 41,000 doctorates compared to 18,000 for African American men. As a result, African American women have had more institutional and educational chances in the last three decades than they had previously. (Linda M. Perkins,2015 p747)

For African American women in higher education, the last century has been a struggle and a challenge. Before the 1970s, college-educated African American women who were fiercely committed to black advancement were predominantly teachers or in one of the other typically feminine professions. Central to this line of thinking, women are taking advantage of the increased access to various types of educational institutions that they now have. However, many people regard their desire to improve their life and become self-sufficient as a "crisis." (Shirley M. 2006) Unfortunately, while recounting the remarkable and challenging journey of African American women in higher education over the last century, this has become the prevalent viewpoint. Therefore, their numerous educational achievements should be commended rather than condemned.

Conclusion:

While historian largely overlooked Black American women experiences in higher education, black women have wanted to

make their lived experiences of working for common causes visible, guiding historical movements in which male colleagues were recognized for many of the women's accomplishments, and providing a full and accurate account of past events. Nevertheless , many Black American women have chosen silence over revealing the relevance of their history and obstacles in regard to their professional choices, why they chose a path or career, their accomplishments, and their journey into higher education. In contrast, today's Black women face different hurdles than those who struggled for access and representation in the nineteenth century. Despite modern-day institutional difficulties, Black women continue to display a strong and constant dedication to self-empowerment through education pursuit and completion. Furthermore, Black women have carved themselves a small but important niche inside the academia thanks to their newfound voice and hard-won status. All in all, the rise of Black women as leaders in higher education in the United States reflects a long history of Black women's struggle for gender and racial equality.

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