

OPINION

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Promoting Diversity in Higher Education

Key is need-based financial aid

BY MARC H. MORIAL



6 percent from 2003 and more than twice that of 1990.

But don't go cracking open the champagne just yet. According to the American Council study, African Americans are more likely to drop out of

college than any other minority group. Of students who entered in the 1995 to 1996 academic year, only 36.4 percent of blacks received a degree, compared to 42 percent of Hispanics, 58 percent of whites and 62.3 percent of Asian Americans.

Obviously, somewhere along the line there has been a major disconnect. While blacks are entering college at record highs, they're lagging significantly behind whites and other minorities in terms of graduation.

In September, a U.S. Educa-

tion Department advisory committee on student financial aid concluded that as many as 1.6 million degrees were lost in the 1990s among low- and low-middle income students who decided not to go to college because of costs and other factors.

With a median income of *Our nation's investment in higher education is an investment in our future. The less we invest, the less our children will have to celebrate.*

\$30,858 and net worth of roughly \$6,000, African American households are at a substantial disadvantage in affording college compared with whites, whose median income is at least \$20,000 more a year and whose net worth is 10 times that of blacks.

According to a July survey by

the Project on Student Debt, 56 percent of black adults said they worried somewhat or very often about not being able to afford education costs for their children. Nearly 60 percent said they felt students carried too much debt after college and 66 percent said it was too hard to pay back.

Back in March, Harvard University announced that it would no longer expect households with less than \$60,000 a year in annual income to contribute to their children's education. It represented a major expansion of its 2004 financial aid initiative that set the cutoff at \$40,000 per

household and brought about a 24 percent hike in enrollment of students from low-income families.

Harvard's decision in 2004 to raise the financial aid stakes served as the catalyst in a chain reaction among its competitors - including Yale, Stanford and to a large extent my alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, which replaced loans with grants for students from households earning less than \$50,000 a year.

"We will accomplish nothing significant in improving access for students from low- and middle-income families unless we focus our attention on strengthening our need-based financial aid program," wrote University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutman in a "Washington Post" commentary.

"Financial aid based on need is the great equalizer of opportunity in higher education. Nothing promotes equity and socioeconomic

diversity more effectively. Even if tuition rates were frozen, a college education would simply be out of reach for low-income and most middle-income families were it not for need-based financial aid."

Our democracy cannot expect to continue down the same track and remain a superpower if our most talented children are denied access to the highest-quality education. The powers-that-be in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere cannot expect our nation to continue to excel in the global marketplace if they continue to cut back Pell Grant funding and downsizing federal and state financial aid programs.

Our nation's investment in higher education is an investment in our future. The less we invest, the less our children will have to celebrate.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Medicare Prescription Help

There's also extra help for low income

BY D'NORGIA PRICE



Everyday I work with seniors in our community who require numerous medications to maintain their health. Many of them are unable to pay their prescription bills and struggle to cope with medical costs and daily living expenses.

However, I have been able to assist my clients and friends by introducing them to a program that will help them pay for their medications so they no longer have to make these difficult choices.

Medicare beneficiaries can access their prescriptions through a Medicare Part D prescription plan and, if they qualify for extra help, all or most of their prescription costs would be covered by the low-

come subsidy provided by the Social Security Administration.

Individuals who are eligible for Medicare can qualify for the extra help if they are single and their income is less than \$14,700 or if they are married and have combined income of less than \$19,800.

If eligible for the extra help, individuals can enroll in a Part D plan now through the end of 2006, which could provide them with necessary prescriptions.

Please share this important information with anyone you know on Medicare because it could provide them with life-changing medications. Information about this subsidy can be found by calling Social Security at 800-772-1213.

If you think you or someone you know may qualify for extra help, please call today. You could change a life.

D'Norgia Price is the adult and senior services director for the Urban League of Portland.



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Letters to the Editor

Full and Fair Coverage

Thanks for taking the time to come down to the courthouse Dec. 4 to cover my son's (Patrice Lumumba Ford's) appeal. ("Political Imprisonment Charged," Portland Observer, Dec. 7). Yours was the fullest and fairest newspaper coverage we got.

The public now understands that Mayfield was never in Spain and that there was no TNT on Kariye's luggage. I long for the day when it is understood that the so called Portland Seven case was, likewise, a product of an overzealous FBI in the anti-Muslim wake of 9/11.

Despite the unfortunate plea bargain, (my son) went to China - and only China - hoping to find a way to Pakistan to help Afghan refugees in the camps there.

This is an important issue. Just now the civil rights of blacks and Muslims are jeopardized; tomorrow it can easily be everyone else. I hope you will continue to take an interest.

Ken Ford
Northeast Portland

Help Reduce Tobacco Use

Thank you for sharing with your readers the work of the African American Tobacco Prevention and Education Network, a mental health and addictions service provider under the auspices of Lifeworks NW.

Our network brings together community partners to discuss the tobacco problem and hold public meetings to solicit community involvement about ways to reduce tobacco use. We seek to assess attitudes in the black community about the affects of advertising on initiation and use, cultural norms, and brand loyalty regarding tobacco products. What is clear is the alarming health disparities linked to tobacco use within underserved populations, and in particular, smoking behavior and the use of mentholated cigarettes.

According to a 2004 survey by the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco, almost 70 percent of black smokers choose a mentholated brand, compared to 29 percent of Hispanics, and 22.4 of whites. At the same time, a survey of 100 inner city convenience stores found a great deal of window advertising for mentholated cigarette products, clearly presenting culturally-specific symbols and representations such as black models, black speak, and hip-hop images. Our network believes this is no accident.

To get involved, contact me, Yugen Fardan Rashad, program coordinator, by calling 503-288-8066, extension 3011 ore-mail YugenR@LifeworksNW.org.

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