

OPINION

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Severe Case of Economic Homogeneity

Medical schools fall short on diversity

BY DR. G. RICHARD OLDS

American medical schools are suffering from a severe case of economic homogeneity.

Three in four med students come from families with incomes in the top 40 percent of the population. Just 5 percent of students come from the bottom income quintile.

People from poor backgrounds aren't the only ones underrepresented in medicine. The field lacks sufficient numbers of minorities of all sorts -- socioeconomic, ethnic, even linguistic.

Medicine's diversity crisis isn't just cosmetic. It's harming patients.



About half of medical students are white males. Ethnic minorities comprise just 4 percent of medical school faculty and 8 percent of American doctors.

This homogeneity is fueling physician shortages in vulnerable communities. Doctors are most likely to work in areas that share their demographics. White medical students from wealthy backgrounds tend to return to well-off, predominantly white locales to practice. Conversely, communities that produce few medical students also tend to have few practicing physicians.

Take rural areas. Not only are there very few people from these communities training to be doctors -- medical school pedagogy often ignores them entirely. Just 4

percent of family medicine training and 5 percent of internal medicine training occurs at rural, community-based health clinics.

As a result, while about 20 percent of the American population lives in rural settings, only 10 percent of doctors practice there. Rural communities have 20 percent fewer doctors per person than their urban counterparts. Studies show that med students from rural areas are more likely to return there to practice. To address the shortage of rural doctors, med schools need to recruit rural students in the first place.

The story is similar for racial minorities. Research suggests that black doctors are more likely to practice medicine in communities with higher proportions of black residents. Likewise, Hispanic doctors tend to work in areas that have, on average, double the share

of Hispanic residents relative to populations served by non-Hispanic doctors.

Increasing the number of black and Hispanic doctors will surely increase access to care for their brethren.

Consequently, boosting the diversity of the physician workforce isn't just a feel-good mission. It's crucial to improving the quality of care, especially for at-risk Americans -- and can have tangible, positive consequences for patients and doctors.

Some have taken up that charge. The University of California-Riverside's med school provides admission preferences to students who are first-generation, speak English as a second language, come from economically disadvantaged communities, or reside in inland Southern California, a

historically underserved area.

At the institution I lead, St. George's University, all second-year students go through a 10-week rotation at a community hospital in Grenada, in the Caribbean. We've also made diversity the focus of our recruitment efforts. Our students come from 97 different countries; non-U.S. residents account for 35 percent of our enrollment.

Today's medical schools don't reflect the ethnic, socioeconomic, or geographic composition of the patient populations doctors serve. By boosting diversity, med schools can improve the quality of their training, help close the healthcare access gap, and improve patient health.

Dr. G. Richard Olds is president of St. George's University in Grenada.

Museum of African American History at Long Last

Telling America's story

BY MARC H. MORIAL

It has taken over a century, but African-American history will at long last occupy a permanent and prominent space in our nation's capital.

What has now manifested into a museum occupying five-acres of land on the National Mall was originally envisioned as a memorial meant to recognize African-American contributions in our nation's history.

In 1915, a group of Black Civil War veterans collected money and created a movement to support the creation of a national "Negro Memorial." President Calvin Coolidge signed legislation estab-



lishing a commission to plan its construction—with Congress refusing to finance the project.

The Great Depression, new national priorities, inevitable political obstruction and fading interests, stalled the project for generations, but on Saturday, Sept. 24, the once deferred dream of African-American war veterans will become a reality that makes its home mere steps away from the Washington Monument.

Commissioned to share the painful history and, oftentimes, unsteady progress of black men and women on American soil, the mandate of the National Museum of African American History and Culture goes beyond carving out a niche for black history within America's grander history, or mainstreaming the black experience.

Through its 11 inaugural galleries, visitors will experience African-American history from slavery's Middle Passage, to the election of our nation's first black president, to the police violence and racial unrest that has given rise to the Black Lives Matter movement.

But rather than act as a warehouse of "firsts" and a cataloger of the challenges the black community has faced, the museum—devoted exclusively to the African-American experience—will become an active participant and voice in our nation's ongoing conversation and understanding of our unique American experiment and experience.

The National Museum of African-American History and Culture is a museum that "seeks to understand American history through the lens of the African-American experience," or as Lonnie Bunch,

the founding director of the museum describes it:

The defining experience of African-American life has been the necessity of making a way out of no way, of mustering the nimbleness, ingenuity and perseverance to establish a place in this society. That effort, over the centuries, has shaped this nation's history so profoundly that, in many ways, African-American history is the quintessential American history. Most of the moments where American liberty has been expanded have been tied to the African-American experience. If you're interested in American notions of freedom, if you're interested in the broadening of fairness, opportunity and citizenship, then regardless of who you are, this is your story, too.

Like any national museum, the National Museum of African-American History and Cul-

ture can help all of us—regardless of race—to understand who we are as a nation. National museums document our aspirations, our achievements and how much further we must climb to achieve those lofty goals. Whether the museum is dedicated to World War II airmen, modern art or African Americans, understanding and knowing the good, the bad and the ugly of every group that calls these 50 states home means a deeper understanding of our nation, who we claim to be, and how far we have arrived.

All of us can attain that deeper understanding by recognizing African-American history while acknowledging the intricate and tangled role it has played in shaping our nation's identity.

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

Letter to the Editor

Editor's note: The following is public letter to Portland Police Chief Mike Marshman and Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill:

We're writing to express our outrage and deep concern about the use of officers with controversial shooting records being put into positions of power in your offices.

At the Sept. 7 Citizen Review Committee meeting, two of the

three officers representing the Bureau were Jeffrey Bell, the new captain of Internal Affairs, and Chris Davis, the commander of Central Precinct. Not only were these the two officers who shot and killed Jose Victor Santos Mejia Poot in 2001 (inside a psychiatric hospital), but they were awarded Medals of Valor, prompting community outrage.

Seeing these two sitting in judgment of officers who esca-

lated a confrontation with a man with mental health issues, including one who discharged his Taser 6 times, made us wonder whether the foxes with blood on their mouths are now guarding the hen house.

Meanwhile, DA Underhill has seen fit to hire out from the Miller Nash law firm one Cody Berne. Berne was one of the officers who followed African American 25-year-old Keaton Otis for driv-

ing his mother's Toyota in a hoodie, and one of the three officers who shot and killed Otis.

Berne fired 11 times. We have to wonder whether the DA is aware that this ex-police officer prosecutor will be seen as 100 percent biased toward the police, but especially hope that he will never be assigned to an officer involved shooting, death in custody or serious injury case.

It was disappointing to read

Underhill's defense of hiring someone who will be perceived as racially biased in addition to his violent past.

Please let us know what your plans are to address the distrust your actions of promoting and hiring these individuals brings to the community, particularly communities of color, in this post-Ferguson America.

Dan Handelman, Portland Copwatch