



African-American Female Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions in Tennessee: Is There a Need for Affirmative Action?

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Abstract

With recent attention given to affirmative action and race relations, the purpose of this research was to revisit a previous study made in 2001 and determine if there was a need for further attention to African-American female administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in Tennessee based on the number of such in these positions. In 2001, these individuals made up 26% of the similarly classified administrative/professional positions in the Tennessee Board of Regents schools, half of which were located at Tennessee State University which is a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). A review of data in 2015 show at Middle Tennessee State University, 6.4% of positions classified as executive/administrative/managerial were held by African-American females compared to 35% White females and 51.3% White males. At the University of Memphis, 18.9% African-American females were in executive/administrative/managerial positions compared to 31% for White females. At the University of Tennessee, 9.5 % of the executive/administrative/managerial positions were held by African Americans (including both males and females). Information was not obtainable from Austin Peay and Tennessee Technological Universities. Data show, at the very least, a decline in the disaggregating of data for African-American female administrators. Data also show low numbers and percentages of African-American females in executive or managerial roles in year 2015.

Keywords: African American, Female, Higher Education, Administration

Introduction

With recent attention given to affirmative action and race relations, the purpose of this research was to revisit a previous study and determine if there was a need for further attention to African-American female administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in Tennessee based on the number of such in these positions. A Gallup poll released in April 2016 showed 35 percent of Americans are now worried "a great deal" about race relations. Worry about race relations is at an all-time high since 2001 when Gallup began polling on the issue.

“That's up from 17 percent two years ago and is the highest since Gallup began polling on the issue in 2001. The previous high was 28 percent in 2001 and again in 2015” (Kenworthy, 2016, para.2 line 2-3). With the state of Tennessee no longer being mandated to seek a targeted racial distribution in its public institutions of higher education as mandated in the Geier vs. University of Tennessee case of 1979, attention must be given to other avenues to ensure racial equality (“Tennessee Desegregation Suit”, 2001). Bean (2014) identified that “Courts have used two approaches to analyze equal protection issues. Under the traditional approach, the purpose of the Equal Protection Clause is to prevent racial discrimination and classifications based on race” (para.7 line 1-3). Furthermore, “the second approach, known as the political structure doctrine, holds that the purpose of the Equal Protection Clause is to prevent the State from inhibiting minority groups from enacting beneficial legislation as compared to other groups seeking the same or similar legislation” (Bean, 2014, para.8 line 1-3).

Studies directed specifically toward the African-American woman in higher education administration have been few (Beverly, 2012; Crews 2007; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Howard, 2016). African-American women are generally included in the broad categories of minorities or females. More specific in nature, Beverly (2012) stated, “The factors that influence success of African-American faculty and administrators at Predominantly White Institutions have been scarcely researched” (para. 1 line 1). Also, the data is often disaggregated for faculty but not for major administrative roles. As this specification is overlooked, African-American women continue to be underrepresented in administrative positions in higher education (Etter-Lewis, 1997; Wills, 1997).

Eminently, data points to low numbers of African-American women in administrative positions. According to Crews (2007), Black Issues in Higher Education documented that in 2003 of the 1,168 leaders of two-year institutions, 318 were women (27.3%) and 76 were African American (6.5%). For four-year institutions, 370 out of 2,023 were women (18.3%) and 137 were African American (6.8%). These numbers included Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which, by far, employ the most African American leaders and minority staff. Gamble and Turner (2015) reported for Georgia, fewer than 100 of African-American women were serving as college leaders in an executive or administrator position. Reasons for the lack of representation seem to be discriminatory. Gamble and Turner (2015) stated, “Women were excluded from leadership positions based on their sex; men were excluded based on their education” (para. 19 line 11). Wills (1997) stated, “African-American females are often overlooked by search committees who screen and identify candidates who most reflect their own credentials and goals” (p. 3-4). Brown (1997) and Rolle (1998), asserted that more African-Americans are found in positions that do not have the “power” or “influence” as those in other positions. While research does exist about minority groups in higher education, it is often not gender specific and does not address the differences in the plight of the African-American woman (Moses, 1997). Gamble and Turner (2015) stated, “Barriers that hinder career advancement of women are complex and come in myriad forms” (para.7 line 1). Myriads such as ethnic hairstyles, lack of representation in advertisements and publications, and lack of a safe space for African-Americans at PWI’s were presented by Crews (2007). “In order to have a better understanding of the characteristics needed to become an effective African American female administrator, we must understand the experiences and address the concerns of those who currently hold these positions” (Howard, 2016, p.1). Howard (2016) found in a study performed in 2001, that the average African-American female administrator employed by PWIs in Tennessee was between 30 and 39 years old, married, earning \$40,000-\$49,000. The largest

category for positions held by African-American female administrators was in the Student Affairs division at 43.3%. The second largest category was in the Business and Finance division at 23.3%. Also, 33% of the participants stated they had to work twice as hard as others to prove themselves as an African-American administrator, while 40% felt they had faced no barriers as a female administrator (p.2).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate recent literature on African- American female administrators in higher education, find the number and/or percentage of African-American female administrators at PWI's in Tennessee, and determine if there was a need for further attention to African-American female administrators at PWIs in Tennessee based on the number of such in these positions. What is the number and/or percentage of African-American female administrators at PWIs in Tennessee in 2015?

Method

This study included a recent review of the literature regarding African Americans and African-American females in higher education, and a descriptive analysis consisting of percentages drawn from archival data at the major four-year PWIs in the state of Tennessee that were included in a previous study which focused on the background factors of African-American female administrators. Those institutions include Austin Peay University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, University of Memphis and University of Tennessee. The data included the number of African-American females, the number of African Americans, and the number of females in executive and managerial administrative positions at these universities. Percentages were derived from the stated number of the targeted population (African-American female) in relation to the overall number given of executive and managerial administrative positions. This information was obtained by contacting the Office of Institutional Research at each university. Some universities provided a website in which the information could be obtained. Data of this nature is often not real-time. Therefore, while the research was conducted in 2016, the numbers come from a report in 2015.

Findings and Conclusion

Information obtained from the same schools assessed in year 2001 (Austin Peay University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, University of Memphis and the University of Tennessee) show, at the very least, a decline in the disaggregating of data for African-American female administrators. Data also show low numbers and percentages of African-American females in executive or managerial roles in year 2015. In attempts to obtain the data, the researcher was informed that disaggregated data on employment based on race and/or gender is no longer kept by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) due to the absolution of the Geier vs. University of Tennessee case as it was in 2001. Due to this decline or absence of disaggregating employment data based on race, a comparison of the number of African American females in executive, administrative, or managerial roles in 2001 and 2015 could not statistically be assessed. However, there is a descriptive comparison.

In 2001, these individuals made up 26% of the similarly classified administrative/professional positions in the TBR schools, half of which were located at Tennessee State University, which is a HBCU. According to the data obtained in 2015, these individuals made up an average of 11.6% of executive/administrative/managerial positions at the three reporting institutions: Middle Tennessee State University, the University of Memphis (TBR schools) and the University of Tennessee (THEC school). At Middle Tennessee State University

6.4% of positions classified as executive/administrative/managerial are held by African American females compared to 35% White females and 51.3% White males. At the University of Memphis, a total of 469 positions, which includes faculty and staff are held by African American females for a total of 18.9% compared to 31% for White females. At the University of Tennessee, of the 411 executive/administrative/managerial roles, 39 are held by African Americans (including both males and females) or 9.5 %. Austin Peay and Tennessee Technological Universities did not provide updated information.

There was a great challenge in obtaining recent data on this public information, because it is no longer disaggregated in this manner and kept by the governing agencies i.e. TBR and THEC. Each institution keeps its own data and it may or may not be disaggregated according to race and gender. Also, the data may not be obtainable from the institutions website and the institution may charge a fee to obtain the information.

Discussion

Although perceived as a threat by some it can be concluded from this study that affirmative action policies are still needed. Kenworthy (2016) quotes, "Swain says some whites perceive affirmative-action type policies as well as liberal immigration policies as contributors to their worsening condition" (para.19 line 1-2). This is clearly not the case as marginal gains have been made for the African-American female. Literature continues to reinforce the long-standing belief among African Americans that, in fact, Caucasian females have benefited most from Affirmative Action. This belief is reverberated by one article stating, "By both dollar amount and percentage, white females are now getting a bigger slice of the pie than before" ("White Women Gaining from," 2015, line 13).

As presented in this study, significant changes to the number and experience of African-American female administrators have yet to be documented. African-American female administrators are often placed in roles of less significance and continue to face barriers as African Americans that are not perceived as barriers in the same manner to women in general. Continued research needs to be placed on the experiences of the African-American female in executive administration opportunities if a difference is to be made in the number and experiences of these individuals (Howard, 2016, p.2). Does the cessation of the federal mandate for public higher education institutions in Tennessee make the matter of racial equity of less importance? The absolving of the Geier vs. University of Tennessee mandate should not lessen the importance of retaining data on minority hiring practices. Furthermore, a structure of accountability is established when information on hiring practices of minorities and women are recorded and disaggregated in like fashion. Data of this nature should be important to every institution of higher learning.

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