

Howard University

Digital Howard @ Howard University

Faculty Reprints

1-1-1940

Graduate Education for Negroes in Southern Universities

Charles H. Wesley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dh.howard.edu/reprints>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wesley, Charles H., "Graduate Education for Negroes in Southern Universities" (1940). *Faculty Reprints*. 204.

<https://dh.howard.edu/reprints/204>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Reprints by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact digitalservices@howard.edu.

Graduate Education for Negroes in Southern Universities

By Charles H. Wesley

I

The education of Negroes at all levels is a problem which educators are prone to blink. On the graduate level the difficulties beset a smaller number with greater force. This dispassionate summary of the present conditions by the Dean of Howard University clarifies the special complexities of graduate Negro education and indicates the general difficulties of the whole field.

THE decision of the United States Supreme Court in December 1938, which was reaffirmed in January 1939, in the case of *Lloyd L. Gaines vs. S. W. Canada, Registrar of the University and the Curators of the University of Missouri* has directed attention to the opportunities of Negro students for graduate and professional education. This decision emphasizing the "equality of legal right" and the "equality of opportunity" of the races within the State has focused a continuing interest upon this aspect of the problem

of education in the South in a spectacular way. The background for this decision has been developing for more than two decades. Its origins are found in the growth and expansion of Negro educational institutions and in the desires and needs of the Negro population for a more equitable educational system. Negro college graduates have faced the fact that there was not a single state-supported institution in seventeen States¹ where they could pursue graduate and professional education.

Nevertheless, these States had made provision for many years for State tax-supported universities with graduate and professional courses for white students. In fact, there are twenty-nine institutions of higher learning in the South which are members of the

¹Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Conference of Deans of Southern Graduate Schools. No Negroes are admitted to any of these schools. There were in 1936-37 over fifteen thousand white students who pursued these courses and 5221 of these were graduate students. However, not one Negro student was admitted to these institutions and no graduate degree was awarded to a Negro student within these seventeen States with their large Negro populations. There were 3226 graduate students in the regular sessions and 7743 in the summer sessions of thirteen State universities of the South in 1936-1937, and no Negro students were among these. However, there were seven States which provided by scholarships for graduate and professional courses for Negroes outside of their State boundaries. These States were Missouri, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. But the States with the largest Negro populations, those of the lower South, made no provision whatever for the graduate or professional education of Negro students.

One of the scholarship acts, a law of the State of Missouri, provided:

“Pending the full development of the Lincoln University (Negro institution) the board of curators shall have the authority to arrange for the attendance of Negro residents of the State of Missouri at the university of any adjacent State to take any course or to study any subjects provided for at the State University of Missouri and which are not taught at the Lincoln University and to pay the reasonable fees for such attendance.”

The adjacent States mentioned above were Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois, which admitted Negro students to graduate and professional courses. The United States Supreme Court maintained in its opinion in the Missouri case that this scholarship law did not furnish training “to the residents of the State upon the basis of an equality of right” and that “the provision for the payment of tuition fees in another State does not remove the discrimination,” since the duty rested upon the State independently of the action of other States.

The background for this case is found in several significant changes which have taken place in Negro education. These changes,

which at first seem only incidentally concerned are in secondary-school enrollment, college enrollment, the accrediting of Negro colleges, the demand for Negro teachers and teaching requirements. In the first place there has been a large increase in Negro secondary-school enrollment. In sixteen of the Southern States there was an increase of enrollment of Negro pupils in public secondary schools from 12,662 in 1916 to 157,034 in 1934. This increase was and is significant to graduate education because it meant that an increase of teachers was necessary for these pupils and it also led to the surging upward of secondary-school graduates so that college enrollment was ultimately affected. The second trend of importance was the increase in college enrollment. Since 1916 Negro collegiate institutions have developed until three-fourths instead of one-fifth of their students are on the college level. In public institutions the increase showed a development from 1053 students in 1916 to 19,237 in 1933. The increase in private institutions was from 1588 in 1916 to 19,037 in 1933.

There has also been a considerable increase in the number of Negro college graduates. The volume of increase has been greater for Negro college graduates than for all graduates. In 1920 there were 38,552 bachelors' degrees for the whole country and Negroes received 381 of these degrees. Eight years later, there were 83,065 bachelors' degrees for the whole country and Negroes received 1512 of these degrees. The total increase was 115.5 per cent and the Negro increase was 296.9 per cent. In 1936 there were 1791 bachelors' degrees awarded by Negro colleges and 143 by Northern colleges to Negroes. This represented a total of 1934 bachelors' degrees awarded to Negroes. There were approximately 2500 graduates from Negro colleges of the South with the bachelor degree in 1937. On the basis of these figures, it is reasonable to assume that there will be an increasing number of Negroes who will want graduate training.

Of equal importance with numbers is the accrediting of these Negro colleges by the State accrediting agencies and the Southern Association of Negro Colleges. This accrediting increases the prestige of these colleges and makes their degrees more desirable to their graduates and more acceptable to the State educational au-

thorities. It is worth noting that only about one-fifth of the 117 Negro colleges of the nation are accredited and nearly two-thirds of those approved are private institutions. As a result, many Negro colleges supported by the States have a long way to go for the accreditation of their college work, and accordingly are not in a position to undertake graduate instruction.

Another trend has been the increased demand for teachers. The factors noted above, the increase of secondary-school enrollment and the increase in college enrollment, have led to a demand for a larger number of teachers in these schools. The National Survey of Education in 1930 showed that in sixteen Southern States there were 51,842 white high-school teachers and 5040 Negro high-school teachers. For each white teacher there were 60 pupils and for each Negro teacher there were 211 pupils. These figures would seem to lead to the conclusion that additional Negro teachers are needed if there is to be efficiency connected with their work.

Along with these trends, there were increases in the teaching requirements in the larger cities, North and South, in several of the States. These requirements were generally that the teachers should have, for the secondary schools and junior colleges, the master's degree or one year of graduate work. The city requirements are even more specific than the State requirements. While the subject of Education bulks large in these requirements, subject-matter courses predominate. The experiences of the graduates of some of the Negro colleges show that they desired and needed further graduate study. Comments by the graduates themselves show this trend in Negro education. A student in social sciences suggested the following as one of the reasons why he has not advanced more rapidly: "When vacancies occur the master's degree is required." Another states, "School officials refused to employ a person in my field, romance languages, who did not have at least the master's degree." A third student wrote, "I needed the minimum of one year's graduate credit in my major field (science)." Still another states, "I was kept from advancement by the lack of an advanced degree." Numerous instances indicate the same fact, namely, that students who are now

in the teaching field need the master's degree for teaching in the secondary schools and junior colleges and in order to obtain some type of advancement. These requirements may be expected to increase.

II

In the meantime, efforts were made by Negroes to obtain graduate education through application for admission to several State universities and through the addition of graduate studies for the master's degree in certain strategically located Negro institutions. The first of these efforts was undertaken in 1933, when Thomas R. Hocutt, a Negro who had attended the State College for Negroes at Durham, North Carolina, applied for admission to the School of Pharmacy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hocutt was refused admission to the University by its registrar. Court proceedings were instituted by attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The University was asked to show cause why a citizen of the State, qualified in all respects except that he was a Negro, should not be admitted to a tax-supported institution conducted by the State. The suit was lost on the technicality that Hocutt had not complied with all the regulations for admission. The immediate question seemed settled in this way. The legislature of the State then began the consideration of a bill for the payment of the expenses of Negro students who desired graduate and professional education in Northern institutions. This bill passed the lower House but failed of adoption in the Senate. The basic question still remained unanswered. Even when Miss Pauli Murray, a native of North Carolina, and a graduate of Hunter College, New York City, applied in 1939, a negative reply was received.

A second case arose in 1935, when Donald Gaines Murray, a Negro graduate of Amherst College, applied for admission to the Law School of the University of Maryland. The applicant was denied admission. Suit was instituted on April 8, 1935, in the City Court of Baltimore. The case was carried to the Court of Appeals of the State of Maryland. This Court rendered its decision on January 15, 1936, which states, "The case, as we find it, then, is that the

State has undertaken the function of education in the law, but has omitted students of one race from the only adequate provision made for it, and omitted them solely because of their color. If these students are to be offered equal treatment in the performance of the function, they must at present be admitted to the one school provided." Under the pressure of this decision, Murray was admitted to the Law School of the University of Maryland and was graduated from this school in June 1938.

As a result of this contest, a scholarship law was later adopted by the legislature providing for graduate and professional education of Negroes outside of the State of Maryland. A similar result occurred in Tennessee when admission to the School of Pharmacy of the University of Tennessee was denied to a Negro student. The State legislature then passed a scholarship act which became effective on May 22, 1937.

The final step in this series of cases was taken when Lloyd L. Gaines, a Negro graduate of Lincoln University at Jefferson City, Missouri, applied for admission to the Law School of the University of Missouri. A writ of mandamus was filed against the University on January 24, 1936, and on December 12, 1938, by a decision of 6-2, the Supreme Court of the United States reversed and remanded the decision of the Supreme Court of Missouri denying the right of admission to Gaines, and rendered the positive opinion that he was entitled to be admitted to the Law School of the University and that the scholarship law was not an evidence of equality of opportunity. This decision has implications of far-reaching significance for Negro education. It seems to suggest at the same time the legality of the admission of Negroes to State universities and the approval of separate institutions for Negroes, if they are maintained on a basis of "equality" with those for white students.

III

While these struggles were going forward in the courts, graduate work had been undertaken at several Negro institutions. The results of a survey of this work in 1936-37 as reported to the Association of Negro Colleges and Secondary Schools showed that Howard

University, Washington, D. C., had 284 graduate students, the largest number of any of the Negro colleges giving graduate work. Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, enrolled 107 graduate students; Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, the only Negro institution on the approved list of the Association of American Universities, enrolled 71; Xavier University, New Orleans, Louisiana, had 17; and Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia, had 10. Hampton Institute gave graduate courses in its Summer School, in which there were 57 graduate students. The departments of study represented were 17 at Howard University, 10 at Atlanta University, 9 at Fisk University, and 4 at Xavier University, 1 at Virginia State College and 1 at Hampton Institute. At the 1937 commencements of these schools, 101 masters' degrees were conferred—48 by Atlanta, 37 by Howard, 13 by Fisk, and 3 by Hampton. None of these schools has undertaken work for the doctorate. During its 16 years of conducting graduate study, prior to 1937, Howard has awarded 246 masters' degrees, Atlanta has awarded 141 masters' degrees during its 8 years of graduate work, Fisk has awarded 83 masters' degrees during its 10 years of graduate work, Xavier has awarded 9 in its 4 years of graduate work, and Hampton has awarded 18 such degrees in the 10 years of its graduate study. It is significant that the number of degrees, 101, which were granted in 1937, was about one-fifth of the total number of degrees, 497, granted in all the previous years. This figure shows the trend which has begun toward graduate work for Negro students. The growth of enrollment is an additional indication of the trend toward graduate study. In 1938-39, there were seven Negro institutions which enrolled 448 graduate students in their regular sessions and 528 in the 1938 summer session. These figures show that the number of regularly enrolled graduate students in Negro institutions was just about large enough for one or two first-rate graduate schools. Two other Negro institutions have announced that they will undertake graduate work during the current year: Prairie View State College, Prairie View, Texas, and Southern University, the Negro State University of Louisiana at Scottsville.

Since libraries are admitted necessities to graduate study, it is in-

teresting to note that the total number of volumes in the Negro institutions of the South is approximately 600,000 volumes. Howard University has over 111,801 volumes, while Atlanta and Hampton have approximately 60,000 volumes each. Xavier and Southern in Louisiana have together about 80,000 volumes. The poverty of this situation from the graduate point of view becomes more apparent when it is realized that there were 5,121,115 volumes in 37 Southern college and university libraries in 1937, and that Harvard and Yale have 6,641,359 volumes. While the libraries of Southern Universities fall far below these two institutional libraries, the libraries of Negro institutions fall still lower.

✓ The fields of study for graduate students in these Negro institutions are as follows: *Education*—Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Hampton, Virginia State, Xavier, Prairie View, and Southern; *English*—Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Xavier; *Biology*—Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Xavier; *French*—Atlanta, Howard; *Mathematics*—Atlanta, Fisk, Howard; *Music*—Fisk; *Physics*—Atlanta, Howard; *Latin*—Atlanta; *Religious Education*—Howard; *Botany*—Howard; *Bacteriology*—Howard; *Psychology*—Howard; *Zoology*—Howard; *Political Science*—Howard; *German*—Howard.

A glance at this survey shows that Howard University at Washington has held a place of leadership for several years among these institutions. It has become in fact as well as in name a university. In 1937-38 it enrolled 2240 students from 42 States and 15 foreign countries, 70 per cent coming from the Southern States. Of the total enrollees 932 were graduate and professional students and 326 were graduate students. At the June Commencement of 1938, there were 132 undergraduate degrees awarded, 45 masters' degrees and 69 professional degrees in 7 professional schools. The number of graduate students has increased from 3 in 1926-27 to 326 in 1937-38.

Graduate schools in the Northern States usually admit qualified Negro graduate students. Some State universities in the North, however, declare that they will admit no student who is not admitted to the institutions of his own State. This regulation operates against the admission of Negroes who are not admitted to the universities of the States in which they reside. The University of Washington

catalogue rules, "no such graduate shall be admitted who would not be accepted by the university of his own State." Several private and public institutions follow this example. The result is that another door of opportunity can be shut in the face of the Negro who is seeking to pursue graduate work. However, it has been estimated that there are about 500 Negroes who are pursuing graduate work in Northern universities. With the 500 now in Negro institutions, this would make a total of approximately 1000 Negro graduate students in the nation.

IV

What are the possibilities which grow out of these events and trends? There are several courses which may develop: (1) the admission of Negroes into State universities; (2) the development of graduate departments in the State colleges for Negroes; (3) scholarships in privately controlled institutions for Negroes within the State; and (4) co-operative action by faculties of universities for the maintenance of separate graduate courses for Negro students outside of the State or private university. Let us examine briefly these possibilities.

(1) The admission of Negroes to the graduate schools of the State universities for white students has received recent consideration. Support has been given to this proposal by the action of the white student bodies in several of these schools. At the University of North Carolina, a poll of student graduate opinion was taken, in which one out of every four graduate students participated. The vote resulted in a poll of 120 ballots out of a possible 405 students registered. Of this number, 82 students were in favor of the admission of Negroes to the University's Graduate School and 38 were against their admission. It is reported that over 86 per cent of these students are from Southern States. This poll was repudiated by the student *Daily Tar Heel* as inaccurate. Another poll conducted by the Carolina Political Union showed an overwhelming opposition and an opinion contrary to the first vote. There were 387 against and 51 for the admission of Negro students. A student organization at the University of Missouri has also voted to approve the admission

of Negro students. Some of the students of the University of Kentucky are reported to be willing to accept Negro students. The admission of a Negro to the University of Maryland and his ready acceptance by the white students are indications of the trends of student views. There are similar individual indications of the same attitudes in other States. Student opinion, however, does not entirely control the situation. There are State laws which have been upon the statute books of the States for years providing for the separation of the races in education. The mores of the States concerned have established this separation in the public mind. It will take several years for the eradication of the attitude. The older minds in control of the legislatures and universities are going to move more cautiously than the younger ones. However, the maintenance of a dual system of education is already a heavy one for the Southern States. The "equality of right" demanded by the Supreme Court could be met on the separate racial basis only at staggering costs. Such additional burdens would not be readily accepted. It is not probable, however, in spite of court decisions, and the possible costs of duality, that Negroes will be admitted immediately to the State universities of the South, with general public opinion concerning the races in its present state, unless there is some kind of social revolution. There has been improvement in respect to Negro education, but there is still a long distance to travel before graduate education for Negroes can reach the same status as graduate education for whites.

(2) The development of graduate departments as additions to the State colleges for Negroes is a more immediate probability. There are movements on foot for the establishment of such additions in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Missouri. The *Baltimore Sun* of January 12, 1939, pointed out that the State Commission on Scholarships for Negroes had recommended two years ago that the State take over Morgan College and make it a State university for Negroes. The Supreme Court decision has caused this question to be raised again. This Commission recommended on January 11, 1939, that Morgan College be transferred to the State of Maryland and be made a State university of higher learning for Negroes with courses paralleling those in the University of Maryland. In October

1939 Morgan College became a State institution for Negroes. Proposals have been made for State support of graduate and professional education at Negro land-grant colleges. A bill to provide graduate education at the State College for Negroes at Durham, North Carolina, and at the A. and T. College at Greensboro, North Carolina, has been introduced in the North Carolina Legislature. Graduate courses are now established at the former institution. Proposals have been made for a law "chair" at the South Carolina College for Negroes at Orangeburg, and graduate work has been undertaken at Prairie View College under the act of the Texas Legislature. The State of Missouri has provided \$200,000 for the establishment of a Law School for Negroes at Lincoln University, the State school for Negroes. This is its answer to the Gaines case. Similar proposals are under consideration in other States. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People insists that these proposals are unAmerican and will be opposed.

From all indications, these additions to the Negro colleges may be of the makeshift variety unless the fair-minded citizens of the State are active in demanding equality of opportunity in fact. State support for the undergraduate work in these colleges has been far below the needs, so that their undergraduate work is by no means equal to the standard of the colleges for white students. It would take thousands of dollars and trained faculty members in large numbers to bring these institutions up to the place where they would be rated on the same Class A rating as the State institutions for whites. The Negro graduate faculty member faces the additional obstacles of inadequate libraries and laboratories and the barriers of race in the Southern States. The addition of graduate work through the appropriation of a few thousand dollars to these schools would be a travesty upon the purpose of graduate study. It would seem to be far better for the Negro colleges to dedicate themselves to the raising of the standards of their undergraduate work than to turn to the inadequacy presented by legislative enactment for a graduate school.

(3) It is quite possible that the States could establish for the present scholarships in privately controlled Negro colleges within the States. Some of these private institutions have higher scholastic

ratings and have better-trained faculties than the State-supported schools for Negroes. There can be no doubt about this situation as it concerns Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. It is doubtful, however, that Negro leadership in the State-supported schools for Negroes would remain silent in the face of such proposals. They would want this scholarship fund, and in this way standards would be lowered.

(4) Co-operative action by the States for the establishment of university additions to Negro universities may receive some consideration. Many State institutions for whites are still most inadequate on the graduate and professional levels. Only 3 of the 29 institutions which are members of the Conference of Deans of Southern Graduate Schools are members of the Association of American Universities. At the same time, 24 of these 29 members of the Conference offer the Master of Arts degree and 14 offer the Ph.D. degree. Others give only two years of medicine and still others are inadequate in buildings and laboratories for professional courses. It has been thought, therefore, that several States could co-operate in the establishment of separate units for the two races on the regional basis. State pride and clannishness would have to be overcome before consideration could be given in a practical way to this proposal. Experiments are now being made in shifting professors in State universities to certain graduate classes for Negroes either in the Negro institutions in the same city or at these institutions miles away. Such a plan is in operation at present in North Carolina. The problems of libraries and laboratories have still to be met, as well as the development of the idea of freedom in education in such a sideshow.

As the demands increase in the Negro colleges for trained leaders and for knowledge to be applied to the needs of Negro life, the most probable proposal, in order that racial separation may be continued on these higher levels, will be made by the legislatures to develop graduate and professional units in the land-grant colleges now supported by the States for Negroes. Nothing could be more tragic under the name of education. The limited resources for the maintenance of trained faculties of scholars in laboratories and libraries would retard the development of graduate work in these schools,

especially in view of their below-the-standard undergraduate work. By necessity they would be compelled to confine their work to a small number of fields of study. Moreover, such ventures in graduate work in the State institutions are likely to be confined, for many years, to a fifth year of baccalaureate work for the master's degree, due to the lack of trained scholars and inadequate research facilities.

Negro colleges calling themselves universities and leaders in American education should be led to realize that graduate work centers around outstanding scholars in individual fields of study. These universities in the South do not have such scholars on their faculties and have not been able so far either to develop or to attract them. In spite of buildings and possible appropriations, it would be reasonable to assume that graduate schools in Negro State institutions would be mainly in the catalogue, placed there largely to meet the requirements of a court decision. With graduate education for white students on a subnormal level in the Southern States, where only three universities—North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—are members of the Association of American Universities and with so few qualified to give the Doctorate, it cannot be expected that graduate education for Negroes will be of a very high standard in these States.

So long as segregated schools continue to exist in the United States, it will be necessary to supply educational opportunities for Negroes at all levels. There are three or four centers which have possibilities of developing adequate units for graduate and professional studies for Negroes. University centers are already established at Howard University in Washington, Fisk University in Nashville, at Atlanta University in Atlanta, and at both Dillard and Xavier Universities in New Orleans. The dilemma now faced by Negro education is the continued development of these centers, on the one hand, and on the other, the recognition of the State's responsibility for education within its own boundaries. The dilemma is complicated further by the court's recent adherence to the principle of the separation of the races in the schools and its announcement of their equality of legal right and opportunity. It will be interesting to observe the proofs which may be advanced by the States to show just what constitutes "equality" in graduate and professional education.