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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 48 (Summer, 2005), pp. 58-77

Published by: [The JBHE Foundation](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25073246>

Accessed: 10/01/2012 18:24

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How Affirmative Action Took Hold at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton

Jerome Karabel

Editor's Note: From 1960 to 1970 the three most prestigious academic institutions in the United States underwent a profound transformation from relative indifference to the plight of African Americans to a strong commitment to include blacks as full and equal participants in their institutions.

AS THE ADMISSIONS committees of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton convened in the spring of 1960 to select the next freshman class, a wave of protests led by students from black colleges swept across the South. On February 1, four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, all of them wearing a jacket and tie, sat down at the whites-only lunch counter of a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, and asked to be served. When they were denied service, they refused to leave, using a sit-in tactic that had already been deployed in more than a dozen cities since 1957. Returning the next day, they were joined by 23 classmates; by the weekend, the A&T football team had joined the protest, insisting on their right to be served. Within six weeks, sit-ins led by students had spread to every southern state except Mississippi. By April, a conference was called by Ella Baker, the acting executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), to bring the student activists together. Out of this meeting emerged an organization that would do much to shape the decade: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The sit-in movement emerged six years after the Supreme Court's historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that declared segregated schools unconstitutional, but its roots may be traced to the tradition of direct action that began in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of a bus. A black boycott of Montgomery's bus system was organized in the following days, led by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.,



Martin Luther King Jr.
"There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled by the iron feet of oppression."

then 26 years old. Speaking before a large crowd at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, King brilliantly captured the mood of his flock: "And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled by the iron feet of oppression. There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being thrown across the abyss of humiliation where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair . . . We are here — we are here because we are tired now . . . And we are determined here in Montgomery — to

work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." By the time the struggle in Montgomery was finally won on December 21, 1956, King had become a figure of national stature.

As the struggle for civil rights intensified in the late 1950s, it became increasingly clear that racial problems threatened to undermine the position of the United States in the cold war. Soviet propaganda took special delight in publicizing every embarrassing incident, and Governor Orval Faubus' use of the National Guard in Little Rock, Arkansas, to keep black children out of school

was especially useful in its efforts to portray the United States as a citadel of racial oppression. The international situation was a central backdrop to the growing debate over the race question; even Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Princeton '08), though hardly a liberal, recognized the harm that discrimination was causing U.S. foreign relations and urged support for civil rights legislation. Senator Jacob Javits of New York summarized the situation clearly: "The great contest between freedom and communism is over the approximately 1.2 billion largely Negro and Oriental population who occupy the underdeveloped areas of the Far East, the Middle East, and Africa. One of the greatest arguments used by the Communist conspirators against our leadership of the free world with these peoples has been that if they fol-

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low the cause of freedom, they too will be subjected to segregation which it is charged that we tolerate within certain areas of the United States; federal civil rights legislation is the best answer. The people are, therefore, watching with the most pronounced concern our present international struggle on civil rights." In August 1957, the Eisenhower administration finally passed a civil rights bill, its provisions watered down by powerful southern members of Congress. Another civil rights bill followed in 1960, but it too fell far short of a serious commitment to transform America's racial order.

The men who ran Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were, of course, aware of these developments. But as of 1960, the struggle for civil rights had not led them to see why they should alter their admissions practices to include more blacks. All three institutions were, after all, formally committed to the principle of nondiscrimination, and at least at Harvard and Yale, a modest number of African Americans had graduated over the years.

As a result, blacks were barely visible on campus, constituting just 15 of the more than 3,000 students who entered Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in 1960. Harvard, which long had enjoyed a reputation for nondiscrimination, enrolled the most blacks — 9 in a class of 1,212 freshmen. Yale, which prided itself on its tradition of openness, enrolled 5 black students out of a freshman class of 1,000. And Princeton, which had not enrolled its first black student until 1945 and was still considered by far the least hospitable of the Big Three, had only a single African American in its freshman class of 826 students.

A decade later, all three institutions had been radically transformed. Over 280 African Americans were part of the freshman class — 83 at Yale, 103 at Princeton, and 98 at Harvard. No change in the history of these tradition-bound institutions — save, perhaps, the admission of women to Yale and Princeton in 1969 — had ever taken place so rapidly. How and why this radical transformation occurred is inextricably intertwined with the racial politics of the decade.

Yale: From Neutrality to Affirmative Action

In the spring of 1960, Dean of Admissions Arthur Howe Jr. received a letter from a Tennessee man inquiring whether there had been any alteration in Yale's admission policy with respect to race. Howe's response was prompt and to the point: "There has been no change in Yale's admissions poli-

cies with reference to Negroes. We shall continue to expect them to meet the same standards required of other applicants."

That same spring, the case of a black applicant from a large industrial city in the East revealed what the "same standard" principle meant in practice. A young African American had applied to Yale; he was number one in his class of 500, carried a straight-A average since the seventh grade, was the varsity quarterback, captain of the number two basketball team in the state, and the school's first black president of the Student Council. He had compiled this record in the face of extremely adverse circumstances; according to the alumni interviewer, "His parents are almost illiterate — his father an unemployed invalid and his mother a laundry worker." Moreover, the Admissions Office, which placed great emphasis on evidence of "character" and "leadership," was aware that he had so impressed members of his own community that "the area's leading Negroes are guaranteeing five hundred dollars a year towards his college expenses." But the young man had not done well on his College Boards, averaging only 488 on the SAT. Yale — which at the time was very concerned about picking the "right boy" among black applicants to ensure graduation — concluded that he was too great a risk to warrant acceptance. His rejection, an admissions officer said regretfully, was "part of the price we pay for our academic standards."

"In 1960 blacks were barely visible on these campuses, constituting just 15 of the more than 3,000 students who entered Harvard, Yale, and Princeton."

Yet even at Yale the atmosphere in the early 1960s had changed from that of just a short time earlier. For one thing, the nation had a dynamic new president in John Fitzgerald Kennedy — a man who had presented himself during the presidential campaign as an advocate of civil rights and, once in office, moved quickly to sign an executive order establishing the Presidential Commission on Equal Opportunity. For another, the struggle of the civil rights movement had continued, sometimes advancing and sometimes blocked by ferocious resistance. In January 1961, two students, one male and one female, successfully integrated the University of Georgia; four months later, Freedom Riders were beaten and arrested in Alabama.

Yale was among the first Ivy League colleges to respond to

the charged atmosphere, and in 1961-1962 Howe hired Charles McCarthy '60, a graduate of Loomis and a member of Skull and Bones, to recruit qualified blacks by cultivating relations with high schools known to enroll significant members of academically talented black students. Other Ivy League schools were impressed with McCarthy's efforts, and at the 1962 meeting of Ivy admissions officers, they asked Howe if it would be possible to share McCarthy's contacts with other Ivy League colleges. The result was the Cooperative Program for Educational Opportunity, which was joined by the eight Ivy League colleges as well as the Seven Sisters. Nevertheless, even at Yale, progress remained slow; in 1962, just six African-American freshmen arrived in New Haven.

As the "race question," in both North and South, became more salient, it increasingly drew the attention of political elites. In 1961 James Bryant Conant, still the nation's best-known educator, had famously written in his 1961 study, *Slums and Suburbs*, that America "was allowing social dynamite to accumulate in our large cities." Since then, the racial situation had, if anything, worsened, with James Meredith's attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi in September 1962 provoking a near-insurrection. So ferocious was the resistance to Meredith's presence on campus that Kennedy ultimately had to call in 500 federal troops to restore order. The toll was a measure of the fierceness of the mob's opposition to integration — 2 bystanders dead and 160 injured, 28 of them by gunshots.

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In the fall of 1962 President Kennedy summoned the leaders of five major universities, including Harvard and Yale, to the White House. Representing Yale was Kingman Brewster Jr., who attended in place of President Griswold, already gravely ill. According to Arthur Howe, who heard about the meeting from Brewster, Kennedy told the group, "I want you to make a difference . . . Until you do, who will?" By the time Brewster became acting president in April 1963, the urgency of the situation — and the potential for racial violence in the North — had become clear. One sign of the

times was the publication in early 1963 of James Baldwin's bestseller *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin, the son of a preacher, drew his title from a slave song: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign. No more water, the fire next time!" His message was unmistakable: either America would find a way "to end the racial nightmare" or racial conflagration would follow.

Like many members of the Establishment, both inside and outside academe, Brewster was deeply worried that America's unresolved racial conflicts might tear the nation apart. For this reason, as well as his deep admiration for Martin Luther King Jr.'s commitment to racial justice and nonviolence, Brewster decided to award King an honorary doctorate in 1964. At the

time, King was tremendously controversial, considered by many to be a lawbreaker and a dangerous radical, and Brewster's choice provoked outrage among many alumni. Responding to the protest of Thomas B. Brady '27, a justice on the Mississippi supreme court, Brewster wrote: "the effort to cure racial injustice should not be allowed to fester into a war between the races. Therefore it is especially important for the institutional symbols of white privilege to let it be known that they share this cause."

Even more impassioned in defending Brewster's decision was the Yale Corporation member J. Irwin Miller '31, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate who went on to get an M.A. from Oxford in 1933. A former president of the Irwin-Union Bank and the current chairman of the board of Cummins Engine Company, Miller was a religious man (he had served as president of the National Council of Churches of Christ and as chairman of the trustees of Christian Theological Seminary), and King's appeal to Christian values resonated deeply with him. In a letter to a disgruntled Old Eli, he wrote:

I am extraordinarily proud of our university for honoring Rev. Martin Luther King. I say this as a graduate, but also as a person who has been engaged in business management for more than 30 years, and as a veteran of World War II.

The menace and threat of world-wide communism is a very real one. In my opinion we combat it best by making our own country so strong and healthy . . . that the communist virus finds no fertile soil among us.

This means, among other things . . . the extension of equal freedom, dignity, and opportunity to every segment of our people. We have no sickness in our nation more apt to turn mortal than that which denies the full fruits of a free society to those of Negro ancestry. Rev. King represents in my opinion the most responsible and Christian effort of Negroes to gain what they never should have been denied.



From the perspective of Miller and of the many like-minded men of the Establishment, taking strong measures to rectify racial injustice was not simply a moral imperative; it was also a matter of enlightened self-interest at a time when the existing order was under challenge both internationally and domestically.

But awarding an honorary degree was one thing; changing long-standing, deeply embedded admissions practices another. Though Yale was now committed to recruiting more African Americans, a variety of barriers — social, academic, economic, cultural, and psychological — stood in the way.

The problem for well-intentioned institutions like Yale was that the supply of “qualified” blacks was extremely limited, given the prevailing definition of merit. According to a study conducted in the mid-1960s by Humphrey Doermann, Harvard’s director of admissions, only 1.2 percent of the nation’s male black high school graduates could be expected to score as high as 500 on the verbal section of the SAT and a mere three tenths of one percent as high as 550. Since the floor of acceptable SAT scores had been rising rapidly at Yale — by 1965 students in the tenth percentile of the freshman class had verbal SAT scores of 591 (up from 506 in 1957) — it followed that the pool of eligible black candidates was tiny: perhaps as few as 400 nationwide if a score of 550 was the cut-off point. It was therefore hardly surprising that in 1964 Yale — despite vigorous efforts to identify qualified black candidates and to help them meet Yale’s standards — enrolled only 14 African-American freshmen — fewer than 2 percent of the class.

A decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Yale and other elite private colleges found themselves at a crossroads: unless they altered their admissions criteria, they would not be able to enroll substantial numbers of black students. Having tried to increase African-American numbers through recruitment and outreach, they were coming up against the limits of these policies. Yet reconsidering their admissions criteria — which they believed (not without justification) were more meritocratic than ever before — was a step that

they were loath to take. To do so would be to raise the troubling possibility that the admissions standards of which they were so proud might not be racially neutral after all and their cherished notion of who was “fit” for an Ivy League education might have to be modified.

As late as the fall of 1964, Yale reaffirmed its commitment to “color-blind” standards; at a meeting on October 26, the Governing Board of the Committee on Admissions expressed “no interest in suddenly opening the gates solely to increase the number of Negro and foreign students, unless they were qualified according to the same criteria used to judge all other candidates.” Just ten days earlier, the Committee on Admissions had itself decided against enrolling “Negro and other underprivileged candidates” by lowering admissions standards, with Georges May, the dean of Yale College, expressing “strong opposition” to using a double standard for admission.

What changed after 1964 was that Baldwin’s “fire next time” suddenly ignited in several urban centers. The pivotal event was the Watts riot in Los Angeles in August 1965. Though there had already been disturbances in New York; Philadelphia; Rochester; Paterson, New Jersey; and other (mostly eastern) cities in the summer of 1964, the scale of the rebellion in Watts was

terrifyingly different. Over the course of six days, 34 people were killed and 1,072 injured (the great majority of them black), 4,000 arrested, and 977 buildings destroyed or damaged. To restore order, 14,000 National Guardsmen, 700 sheriff’s deputies, and 1,000 Los Angeles police officers were deployed — a show of force necessitated by the more than 30,000 people estimated to have engaged in the riot, surrounded by at least 60,000 sympathetic spectators. Ominously for the prospect of racial peace, the Watts riot began just five days after President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the symbolic high point of the civil rights movement’s struggle to remove legal barriers to racial equality.

The growing social disorder — embodied also by racial disturbances in 19 other cities, the assassination of Malcolm



Yale president Kingman Brewster
“He was a master at co-opting
the student body.”

X in January 1965, and growing antiwar and student movements — provided an important backdrop to Kingman Brewster's decision to appoint Inky Clark as Yale's dean of admissions. Clark realized that a change in the definition of merit was required if black enrollment was to increase substantially: either more flexible academic standards would be applied to black candidates or Yale would remain overwhelmingly white. Given Clark's and Brewster's priorities, the latter was unacceptable, and they moved rapidly to make their promise of a more racially diverse Yale a reality.

The most important step was to admit that Yale's seemingly neutral academic standards were, in the end, not neutral at all. For the first time, the Admissions Office acknowledged that a candidate's academic profile was profoundly influenced by the opportunities that had been available to him. By 1965-1966, the first year of the Clark era, the Admissions Committee made it standard procedure — at least for African Americans — to “seriously consider the possibility that SAT scores might reflect cultural deprivation rather than lack of intelligence.”



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Coupled with this new recognition of the social context was a willingness to undertake “risks” that had been unacceptable a few years earlier. Amid the racial turmoil of the mid-1960s, rigid adherence to the status quo began to look risky. Only reform, reasoned enlightened patricians like Brewster, could preserve the essentials of the American way of life at a time that racial violence was threatening to tear the nation apart. Even the faculty, whose fervent commitment to high academic standards had pushed Yale toward greater meritocracy, was willing to depart from established practices in the changed atmosphere. “We must be prepared,” wrote the Admission Policy Advisory Board, “to take more risks than we would with students whose whole home and school backgrounds have prepared them for college and for college entrance exams.” And in justifying its position, the faculty used the same argument made by Brewster and Clark; in fulfilling its “national obligation to participate actively in the education of Negroes . . . it is nec-

essary to allow for the handicaps of inferior preparation and to look behind the usual quantitative measures of academic achievement for high intellectual capacity and motivation.”

Empowered by Brewster and the faculty to be flexible in considering minority applicants, Clark moved quickly.

Expanded recruiting was integral to his plan; in 1965-1966,

15 admissions officers, including the first black member of the Admissions Committee in Yale's history, visited close to 1,000 secondary schools in search of “talent.”

With timely assistance from the federal government, which initiated Educational Opportunity Grants for exceptionally needy undergraduates, Yale also sharply increased its financial aid as part of its commitment to genuinely need-blind admissions. And as part of its search for promising African-American

applicants, Yale began working more closely with organizations that targeted minority students, including the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, A Better Chance program (ABC), and the New York College Bound Corporation, as well as the Cooperative Program for Educational Opportunity.

The result of all these efforts was that black numbers at Yale reached a record high, with 35 African Americans in the 1966 freshman class — a significant increase over the previous high of 23 in 1965. Yet even this number fell well short of Clark's goals, for African Americans still made up only 3.4 percent of entering students. Even more distressing, further progress proved difficult; in 1967 the number of black applicants declined slightly, as did the number of black admits and matriculants. Two years into Clark's term and despite energetic efforts to recruit a more diverse student body, just 31 African Americans enrolled at Yale — barely 3 percent of the freshman class.

Meanwhile, national developments were increasing the pressure on Yale and other leading private colleges to do something about America's deteriorating racial situation. In the summer of 1967, an unprecedented wave of race riots shook the nation; by year's end, 82 racial disturbances had erupted in 71 different cities. On July 12, a riot broke out in Newark — a declining eastern industrial city not unlike New Haven that lasted 6 days, took 23 lives, and required 3,000 troops to quell. In the immediate aftermath, William Lichten, a Yale physics professor, wrote to President Brewster, noting the shift among northern Negroes from “apathy . . . to peaceful protests and demonstrations to . . . riots and violence” and

pointing to the rapid growth of New Haven's black population, which raised the prospect of Yale's becoming "a white island in a black sea." As a matter of both elementary justice and institutional self-interest, Yale, he argued, had to do more.

Just days after Lichten's letter arrived, an even bigger race riot exploded in Detroit. In 8 days, 43 people died (33 blacks, 10 whites), 2,500 stores were looted, burned, or destroyed, and 7,200 people were arrested — double the number arrested in Watts. Whole sections of the city were burned, and order was not restored until units from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions of the U.S. Army as well as National Guard troops were deployed. After this uprising, *Newsweek* described the riots as "a symbol of a domestic crisis grown graver than any since the Civil War." *U.S. News & World Report* asked simply: "Is Civil War Next?"

By 1967-1968, signs of a new mood among African Americans were visible everywhere. At the symbolic level, the term "Negro" was giving way, especially in militant circles, to "black" — a shift attributable in no small amount to the rise of "black power," which Stokely Carmichael introduced in June 1966. Perhaps most troubling to liberals like Brewster, the civil rights movement's commitment to nonviolence was increasingly being contested by firebrands who promised to use "any means necessary," including violence, to achieve racial justice. New groups willing to brandish weapons in public, like the Black Panthers, became prominent; at the same time, old groups such as SNCC dropped their commitment to nonviolence and increasingly adopted a stance of racial separatism. These developments seemed to suggest that the idea that America might be on the brink of a new civil war was not outlandish.

The apprehensions that these events provoked in the heart of the Establishment were manifest in one of the landmark documents of the period: the Report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, a body that had been appointed by President Johnson in the immediate wake of the Newark and Detroit riots. Chaired by Otto Kerner, the Democratic governor of Illinois and a graduate of Brown, the committee had as its vice chairman one of the leading lights of the liberal Establishment: John V. Lindsay, the mayor of New York City and a fellow of the Yale Corporation. The other members made up something of a *Who's Who* of the power elite: Senator Edward W. Brooke (Republican, Massachusetts), the first black man to serve in the

Senate since Reconstruction; Senator Fred Harris (Democrat, Oklahoma), a well-known liberal; Charles B. Thornton, the CEO of Litton Industries; Roy Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and I.W. Abel, president of the United Steelworkers of America. Given the prominence of the members of the commission and the urgency of its topic, its report was guaranteed to receive enormous publicity.

The group issued a summary of its report (which quickly became known as the Kerner Report) on March 1, 1968, and the full text two days later. Within three days, Bantam Books' first edition of 30,000 copies had sold out. By July, more than 1.6 million copies had been sold. This was an extraordinary outpouring of public interest, but even more remarkable was the bluntness of the commission's conclusions. "Our nation," warned the report on its first page, "is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal." The danger posed to the nation could hardly have been greater: "Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American."

"Yale was becoming a white island in a black sea. As a matter of both elementary justice and institutional self-interest, Yale had to do more."

Most shocking of all was the commission's conclusion that blame for the nation's social troubles rested squarely on the doorstep of white America. In one of its most memorable passages, the report insisted: "What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negro can never forget — is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it." Considering the riots themselves, the report stated bluntly, "White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II."

"The frustrations of powerlessness," it warned, "have led some to the conviction that there is no effective alternative to violence as a means of expression and redress, as a way of 'moving the system.'" Yet the situation was not without hope, for even the rioters "appeared to be seeking . . . full participation in the social order and the material benefits enjoyed by the majority of American citizens."

Because of this desire to "share in both the material

resources of our system and its intangible benefits — dignity, respect and acceptance . . . deepening racial division is not inevitable.” But reversing the movement toward separation would require vigorous measures dedicated to “the realization of common opportunities for all within a single society.” And in this effort, colleges and universities had a critical role, for the integration of the educational system and the expansion of opportunities for higher education was, the commission insisted, “essential to the future of American society.”

The Kerner Report came out at precisely the moment that Yale was accepting the class that would enter in the fall of 1968, and it accurately captured the new mood of militancy — and urgency — on the campus. A Black Student Alliance of Yale (BSAY) had been formed in 1964 (initially the organization had no name) primarily as a social organization for the 14 black freshmen who entered that year, but by 1967-1968 it had grown both in number and in racial consciousness. By the fall of 1967, it issued a critique of the Yale curriculum, telling the administration that much of what was offered had a “lily-white” complexion. After a breakfast meeting in December 1967 with John Hay Whitney ’26, a fellow of the Corporation and the publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune*, a full-scale meeting was called on February 15, 1968, of the BSAY and top administrators, including Brewster and Clark. Among the students’ many complaints was their dismay at the inefficiency of Yale’s efforts to recruit African Americans; according to them, either the “admissions process isn’t turning up or isn’t admitting qualified black students.”

The result of this mobilization by the BSAY, which included roughly 90 percent of the black undergraduates, was an unprecedented effort to bring more black students to New Haven. Approximately 1,200 schools were visited in 1968 (up from fewer than 1,000 in 1966), and recruitment in inner-city schools was expanded. As a result of student pressure, the BSAY “became actively involved in recruiting black students with the full blessing and cooperation of the Admissions Staff.” The number of black applicants shot up by 34 percent, rising to a record 163; according to the director of admissions, the increase could be “attributed, to a great degree, to the activities of this special group.” The net impact was that 43 African Americans enrolled in the fall of 1968 — still just 4 percent of all freshmen, but a record number nonetheless.



Stokely Carmichael
“Go home and get your
guns. When the white
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coming to kill you.”

Yet just as Yale was completing its selection of the most racially diverse student body in its history, an unprecedented outbreak of riots shook the nation’s cities — resulting in 39 deaths and 20,000 arrests — apparently confirming the worst fears of the commission. The precipitating event was the April 4, 1968, assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., America’s preeminent civil rights leader and the best hope for those who remained committed to nonviolence. Certainly, the response to King’s assassination in the nation’s ghettos gave little comfort to those in the civil rights movement, both black and white, who sensed that King’s mes-

sage was being superseded by the loudening chorus of voices embracing violence as a legitimate means in the struggle for liberation. To suppress the disorders — the worst since the Civil War — 75,000 federal troops and National Guardsmen were called up.

But statistics alone do not describe the fear that the riots evoked in the nation’s power centers. In Washington, D.C., senators and congressmen could see smoke rising from the multitude of fires set not far from the White House; some were so worried that they wanted the president to declare martial law, and they fretted that the Marines surrounding the Capitol had not been issued ammunition. According to *Newsweek*, within hours of the assassination, “roving bands of teenagers . . . were already darting into Washington’s downtown shopping district” and “fires were beginning to light the night sky.” On the scene was Stokely Carmichael, a bitter opponent of King’s nonviolent stance, brandishing what looked like a pistol and urging the crowd to “Go home and get your guns. When the white man comes,” warned Carmichael, “he is coming to kill you.” “The plundering and burning lasted until dawn, then subsided,” wrote *Newsweek*, “only to resume with far greater intensity [the] next day.”

By morning, the situation was so far beyond the control of Washington’s 2,900-man police force that President Johnson had little choice but to call out federal troops. A defiant mood prevailed among the rioters, with looting and burning sweeping 14th Street and 7th Street, two of the city’s main thoroughfares. An eyewitness account captured the atmosphere: “Parts of Washington looked as though they had been hit by enemy bombing planes. Huge columns of smoke rose hundreds of feet. The shriek of sirens on police cars, the constant tinkle of shattering glass, the acrid smell of the tear gas

— all helped give the scene in the capital of the U.S. the appearance of an inferno.” Looting came within two blocks of the White House itself; troops had to be stationed on the White House grounds. Surveying the uprising in Washington and elsewhere, a British journalist wrote, “The riots were on a scale unprecedented except for a country on the verge of revolution.”

Just two weeks after the rebellion in Washington was brought under control, self-styled student revolutionaries at Columbia University staged their own uprising. Taking place at an Ivy League institution in New York City, the media capital of the world, the revolt at Columbia generated enormous publicity. By the time the insurgency ended, the SDS slogan of “Two, three, many Columbias” reverberated not only across America’s campuses but around the world.

The events at Columbia showed that the student movement had reached a new level of militancy and one that posed a genuine threat to the power of the university authorities. The revolt began on April 23, 1968, when radical students occupied Hamilton Hall, locking the dean in his office (he was released 26 hours later). One of the students’ demands was an end to war-related research, but the issue with the most traction was the demand that Columbia end the construction of a gymnasium in a public park next to the campus, in Harlem. The gym, which was offering just 15 percent of its facilities for the use of the residents of the densely populated ghetto neighborhood, actually planned a separate entrance for them. From the perspective of the student militants, the entire project reeked of a “quasi-colonial disdain for the black community.”

In no small part because of the gymnasium, Columbia’s black students became thoroughly involved in the protests despite their decided skepticism about the white radicals. Though the predominantly white students of SDS had led the initial occupation of Hamilton Hall, the black students of the Student Afro-American Society (SAS) soon asked them to leave, finding them too unruly for their taste. The white students complied and showed their solidarity by following the advice of the SAS, which told them, “If you want to do something that’s relevant, grab as many buildings as you can.” Meanwhile, the black students continued their occupation of Hamilton.

Though fearful that calling in the police might trigger a riot in Harlem, the Columbia administration did just that after the eighth day of the occupation. The black students, who had

consistently been more organized than their white counterparts, showed the same discipline in ending the sit-in, marching out in drill formation to waiting vans — where the police arrested them. But the white students in the other buildings resisted (passively in most cases, but in one case attempting to block the door), and the police responded violently. In the end, more than 200 people were injured and 705 arrested (524 of them students). As Daniel Bell, then on the Columbia faculty, pointed out, almost 10 percent of the undergraduates at Columbia had been arrested.

“Of the blacks who entered Yale in 1966, 35 percent did not return after their freshman year.”

For the men who ran Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and other elite universities, the revolt at Columbia was sobering. It was not simply a matter of a rebellion at a fellow Ivy League institution (though that was disturbing, to be sure); equally distressing was the manner in which the revolt unfolded, complete with the use of force, the appearance of an ominous (if fragile) alliance between black and white militants, and — not least — the total collapse of gentlemanly notions of “civility.” As campus revolts, including building occupations, spread nationwide over the next few weeks to virtually every type of institution — among them, such prestigious colleges as Stanford and Northwestern — the thought that they might well be next was very much on the minds of each member of the Big Three.

At Yale, the Brewster administration was strongly committed to the proposition that flexible reform and an atmosphere of open communication could avoid the kind of disorder that had shaken Columbia and Berkeley. But as the 1968-1969 academic year began, it soon became apparent that Yale was not immune to the mood of racial militancy visible on other campuses. Early that fall, a group of militant blacks marched directly to Brewster’s home and demanded that Yale increase the number of black students to be admitted that year. Brewster, who excelled in face-to-face meetings, convinced the students that their cause was his cause and enlisted their help. As Kurt Schmoke ’71 (later a Rhodes scholar and the mayor of Baltimore) recalls their meeting: “Brewster was absolutely a master at co-opting the student body. There is no other way of putting it.”

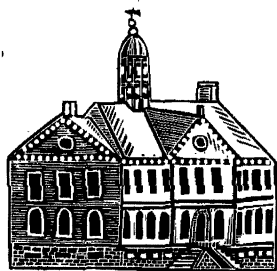
Yet the matter of exactly how Yale would increase black enrollment that fall had still not been resolved. In early

January, 30 BSAY members met with Dean Clark, demanding that 12 percent of the incoming class be blacks (roughly the black proportion of the population nationwide). In addition, they demanded that the Admissions Office fund BSAY members to visit urban neighborhoods to ensure that the number of African-American applicants would increase to a level that would make it possible for Yale to attain the 12 percent goal.

"Yale's vigorous effort to recruit blacks was one of several policy shifts which estranged large segments of alumni costing Yale a not inconsiderable sum in lost donations."

These were radical demands, but after a series of meetings with Clark and Brewster, an accord was reached. Though Clark had agreed in early January 1969 that 12 percent of the incoming class would be black if enough qualified candidates applied, Brewster — who had always opposed quotas — made clear in a letter to the BSAY that the 12 percent figure was not a guarantee: "While we do believe in these special efforts, we cannot hold out the promise of achieving any target if it would mean admitting students who, in the eyes of the admissions committee, would not be likely to meet Yale's requirements." Nevertheless, he left open the possibility that the next freshman class might be 12 percent black and, in the meantime, acceded to the demand that Yale fund the recruiting trips requested by the BSAY. Brewster and Clark also agreed to extend the normal January 1 application deadline to February 24 — a major concession, reflecting the threat of disruption that lurked not far in the background.

The BSAY mobilization, coming at a moment of tremendous social and political turmoil, pushed Yale farther than it had ever gone before and propelled black enrollment to an unprecedented level. Spurred in part by the post-deadline recruiting trips, applications from African-American men numbered 387, more than double the 163 just a year earlier, accompanied by 138 black women in what would be Yale's first year of coeducation. Black admissions also rose to record heights: 120 men (compared to 55 in 1968) and 35 women. All in all, 96 blacks (71 men and 25 women) — 8 percent of the freshman class — entered Yale in 1969. Only four years earlier, just 2 percent of the freshman class was African American.



The remarkable increase in black enrollments that took place during the Clark years was not without its costs. Searching vigorously in ghetto schools previously well outside the Yale orbit and willing to take risks that would have been unthinkable during the Griswold-Howe administration, the Admissions Committee was now taking students whose backgrounds made their adjustment to Yale — where affluent white students still set the tone — quite difficult. Of the blacks who entered Yale in 1966, 35 percent did not return after their freshman year; how many left in subsequent years is unknown. Yet if Brewster's and Clark's goal was to create a new stratum of black leadership, their objective was realized. By the early 1970s, a steady flow of African-American Yale alumni was streaming into the nation's top graduate and professional schools and moving into important positions in the professions, business, and government.

The shift toward a more racially diverse student body was also not without financial cost. Need-blind admissions, which was expensive, had been a precondition for the diversification of the student body. And black scholarship recipients were, on average, poorer than their white peers. By 1970-1971, "Yale was spending over \$800,000 a year for blacks . . . about half its financial aid budget." There were hidden costs as well, for Yale's vigorous effort to recruit blacks was one of several policy shifts during the Clark years that estranged large segments of the alumni, costing Yale a not inconsiderable sum in lost donations.

Nevertheless, once Yale had made its commitment to increase black enrollment, the policy proved irreversible, spreading rather quickly to other racial and ethnic minorities. Already, in Clark's first year as dean, Yale was looking for students from a variety of historically underrepresented groups; according to a *New York Times* article on Ivy League admissions in 1966, "The New Haven college will have a few Puerto Ricans in its Class of 1970, and a full-blooded American Indian too." By 1968, in addition to recruiting in inner cities and in Puerto Rico, Yale was actively seeking Native Americans, even sending representatives to Indian reservations.

By 1969-1970, Asian Americans were also included among the groups whose recruiting trips were paid for by Yale — a product of vigorous protests by the Asian-American Students Association (AASA). The AASA had complained about Yale's admissions policies in a letter to the

Undergraduate Admissions Committee in November 1969; by January, it reported that it was “deeply concerned about the Committee’s failure to recognize that the majority of Asian-American high school students come from lower-income brackets and predominantly Third World communities.” The letter went on to declare: “We demand that these students be judged on criteria other than ‘white middle-class’ since they have faced the same inadequacies in their secondary education as other minority groups.” In his report for 1970-1971, the dean of admissions proudly noted that 31 Asian Americans had matriculated at Yale that fall alongside 77 blacks, 22 Mexican Americans, and 6 Puerto Ricans. As the 1960s came to an end, affirmative action at Yale was no longer for blacks only.

The Integration of Old Nassau

In the early 1960s, it was no exaggeration to describe Princeton as a de facto segregated institution. Though Old Nassau no longer actively discriminated against black applicants, it did nothing to seek them out. Given Princeton’s terrible reputation in the black community, few blacks even bothered to apply. In 1960, just 1 African American entered in a freshman class of over 800; 1 more matriculated in 1961.

Yet some undergraduates were dissatisfied with Princeton’s racial composition, and in January 1962 a student conference at the Woodrow Wilson School passed a resolution calling for “an energetic program of recruiting qualified American Negro students.” While acknowledging that “the University does not intentionally discriminate in considering the applications of Negroes,” it maintained that “many qualified Negro students are not aware of the fair consideration which their applications would find here.” Specifically, the students proposed that the class that would enter in 1963 be “at least two percent” Negro.

Though modest and carefully worded, the proposal received a lukewarm response from the administration. Insisting that “we try to keep everything as fair as possible,” one university official argued that “rather than discriminate against the colored student, there is more of a danger here of us leaning forward to accept him and then running the risk that he won’t be able to remain here.” Adopting the same stance as Yale at the time, the official warned that failure for blacks was especially problematic: “When a

Negro student flunks out here, it is a tougher loss for us than, for example, a John Jones.”

Questioned about the small number of blacks on campus, one Princeton official said, “If we’ve got six, that’s fine with me,” adding that “I know that they were admitted regardless of their color.” Even President Goheen, a man known for his decency, shared the lack of concern that pervaded the campus, once calling the NAACP the “N.A. double-C.P.” and another time misnaming the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, a key organization for colleges interested in increasing their black enrollment. Goheen’s response to the undergraduates’ proposal of at least 2 percent black students, though modulated, was in the end negative: while in favor of “the admission of well-qualified Negro students to Princeton,” he sharply criticized any notion of a numerical goal. Echoing the position of color-blindness then shared by northern liberals and conservatives alike, he reaffirmed that “the fundamental operation of the University’s admissions policy . . . must be toward the individual — towards individuals as persons — not toward social statistics.”

“In 1960 just one black entered Princeton in a freshman class of over 800.”

Yet patterns that were acceptable to men like Goheen in 1962 had become unacceptable by September 1963 — a shift due to the bloody events in Birmingham (including the deaths of four black schoolgirls in a church bombing) and the sense of urgency conveyed by the historic August civil rights march on Washington. In the fall of 1963, in the annual “Report to Schools” sent to 4,000 of the nation’s secondary schools, the Office of Admissions announced for the first time in its history that “Princeton is actively seeking qualified Negro applicants . . . Efforts of school people in steering toward Princeton qualified Negroes will be appreciated.” After the call went out, President Goheen gave it his personal endorsement, noting, “For the past decade, we have been terribly concerned about what we could do for students from undeveloped countries. It took a shock [the civil rights crisis] to make us realize our problems at home.”

Princeton’s newfound willingness to seek out black students coincided with the arrival of E. Alden Dunham ’57 as director of admission. Conant’s special assistant for four



years, Dunham was keenly aware of America's racial problems and the potentially explosive situation in the nation's ghettos. Yet like his mentor, Dunham was a cautious man, believing that only incremental change was possible.

Nevertheless, Dunham was genuinely committed to bringing more African Americans to Princeton, and he was able to increase the number of black applicants from 20 in 1963 to 72 in 1964. Yet in 1964, only 12 blacks entered Princeton's freshman class. Dunham was forthright in admitting that Princeton was facing an uphill battle in its efforts, citing three reasons for the small number of black matriculants: "First, Negroes are a minority, so that there are fewer to begin with. Second, they tend to congregate on a low rung of the socio-economic ladder, a fact that further reduces the number of qualified candidates. This is a socio-economic phenomenon, not a matter of race. Just as there are few qualified whites from slum areas, so there are few qualified Negroes. The net result is a small pool of able boys to be spread among many colleges. The third factor is the long Southern tradition at Princeton, together with a small-town atmosphere. Given a choice, many Negroes prefer Harvard or Yale, where abolitionism was much stronger and where the anonymity of a large city is close at hand."

"Rather than discriminate against the colored student, there is more of a danger here of us leaning forward to accept him and then running the risk that he won't be able to remain here."

Though Princeton no longer overtly discriminated against black students, its entire atmosphere was inhospitable. In the early 1960s, its social life was still dominated by eating clubs, and blacks were relegated to the periphery of campus life; as late as 1963, none of the three black upperclassmen (out of five black undergraduates) were members of an eating club. Extracurricular life could be equally unwelcoming; in 1964, a student group ironically called the Princeton Committee to Promote Racial Reconciliation was formed to promote the conservative viewpoint that argued that informed people could favor continued racial segregation. As its first action, the committee placed a book on sale — *Race and Reason*, by Carleton Putnam '24 — that argued that the genetic limitations of blacks made successful integration impossible. Though the committee had only 15 members, its leader, Marshall I. Smith '66, claimed that

more than a third of the student body supported its stand on racial matters. As evidence, he cited a recent debate at the prestigious Whig-Clio Club where over a fourth of those present endorsed a resolution affirming the existence of racial difference.

Convincing black students to attend such an institution was not going to be easy, but Old Nassau pressed on. In 1964, Princeton hired Carl A. Fields as the first black administrator at an Ivy League institution — a clear sign that it wished to break with its unhappy racial history. In 1965, Dunham issued a strong public defense of Princeton's policy of seeking out "qualified Negroes" in the alumni magazine, arguing that Princeton had long "felt a responsibility to be responsive to the nation's need for men who can fulfill important leadership roles" and that, "from the national point of view, the call for Negro leadership at this time in our history is clear." The same year, the Admissions Committee institutionalized special consideration for black applicants by giving them a special category (and round in the admissions process) next to such groups as alumni sons and Naval ROTC candidates.

In 1966, Dunham publicly endorsed the same position on the evaluation of the academic qualifications of African Americans as that articulated by Brewster and Clark at Yale: "There is a special concern about evaluating applications from disadvantaged students. Just as the College Board takes pride in its record of providing through its testing program a means for upward mobility on the part of middle-class Americans, there is now a realization that the nature of present examinations may impede the extension of educational opportunity for the disadvantaged. Test score interpretation becomes ever more difficult for these students than for the typical applicant." By interpreting the scholastic records of "disadvantaged" applicants in the context of the opportunities available to them, Dunham provided the latitude to define "merit" flexibly in assessing black candidates — a necessity if Princeton was to have any chance of substantially increasing the number of its African-American students.

The result of this more contextual definition of merit was that Princeton, which had long given preference to traditional elite constituencies, now had a rationale for giving special consideration to blacks and other "disadvantaged" candidates for admission. Legacies, prep school boys, and athletes, Princeton was well aware, had traditionally been admitted with far weaker academic qualifications (at least as

measured by such indicators as average SATs) than that small segment of the class admitted on almost exclusively academic criteria. In the mid-1960s, they were joined by African Americans. Many of the black students admitted under Dunham were in fact doubly disadvantaged: the majority of them, in sharp contrast to their classmates, came from working-class backgrounds. Not surprisingly, their SAT scores were lower than the Princeton average: roughly 550 verbal and 590 math for blacks who entered Princeton from 1963 to 1966, compared to about 650 verbal and 695 math for the class as a whole.

When Dunham took office, he wrote that all educational institutions, including Princeton, had “an opportunity and responsibility [to] do what they can toward upgrading the state of the Negro in our free society.” Two years later, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. King, he expressed his hope that Princeton could help “in a small way” to meet “the call for Negro leadership.” Yet despite Dunham’s efforts, the number of blacks at Princeton increased only modestly. By 1965, the freshman class included 16 African Americans; in 1966, the number increased to 18 — still just 2 percent of the class.

Nevertheless, when Dunham left Princeton in 1966 to join the Carnegie Corporation, he left behind a changed institution. Though the well-rounded man was hardly a creature of the past, a different ideal — that of “the well-rounded class” — had come to frame admissions policy. In place of the socially adept, well-rounded man, specialist types from increasingly diverse backgrounds now made up much of the student body. So different was the atmosphere that the prestigious Big Five Clubs — Ivy, Cottage, Cap and Gown, Colonial, and Tiger Inn — could not find enough “suitable” boys and had to use other criteria, such as athletics and special talents. Club seniors were already unanimous by 1965 in appraising the first class admitted by Dunham as “the worst ever.” As a result of changes in the composition and character of the student body, social distinctions in Princeton’s tradition-laden eating clubs were becoming increasingly blurred.

Meanwhile, though still only a very small proportion of the student body, black students were for the first time present in sufficient numbers to constitute an organized group. In the spring of 1967, about two thirds of the 40 African-American undergraduates formed the Princeton Association of Black

Collegians (PABC). Their choice of “black” rather than “Negro” reflected the growing mood of militancy among the African-American students, and the PABC soon staged its first protest. When Alabama’s governor George Wallace came to address the Whig-Clio Society and began his customary racist attack, the black students rose in a body and left the auditorium. That spring, when the number of blacks accepted unexpectedly dropped from 32 to 23, a number of students in the PABC made their displeasure known to members of the administration.

“Though Princeton no longer overtly discriminated against blacks, its entire atmosphere was inhospitable.”

By the time school resumed in the fall of 1967, the atmosphere had grown palpably more tense. Over the summer, the situation in racially divided Newark — New Jersey’s largest city, less than an hour’s drive from Princeton — had exploded into a full-scale riot. The rebellion in Newark lasted six days and involved so many sniping incidents (152 by one count) that the scene in parts of the city resembled guerrilla warfare. Order was not restored until the National Guard was deployed, and by the time the riot was finally suppressed, 26 people had died. Less than a week after relative calm returned to Newark, the even larger riot in Detroit broke out.

Princeton responded to the tumultuous events of the summer of 1967 by issuing, early in the fall in its annual “Report to Schools,” another call for more African-American applicants — the first such appeal since 1963. Delicately noting that “the need for Negro leadership is particularly urgent at the present time,” the Admissions Office promised “to interpret fairly credentials of students from non-traditional backgrounds, realizing that their test scores, academic records, and leisure time activities are often different.” Meanwhile, even Princeton was showing itself to be not immune to the surge in campus radicalism sweeping the nation. In October, the Princeton chapter of SDS, just two years old, organized its first disruptive protest — a sit-in at the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA), a nonprofit corporation conducting research for the Pentagon on university land in a building leased from the university. Claiming that the IDA was an off-campus facility, Princeton allowed the police to handle the sit-in. Thirty students were arrested, “most of whom went limp and had to be dragged or thrown into police vehi-

cles." At tradition-bound Princeton, which prided itself on a gentlemanly tradition of civility, the specter of a serious campus uprising led by student radicals was now on the horizon.

Whatever the concerns aroused by SDS, it was the threat of black radicalism, both on and off campus, that was the moving force behind the intensification of Princeton's effort to recruit more black students in 1967-1968. Under pressure from both the PABC and the events of the previous summer, Princeton made a decision to move decisively to increase black enrollment. In a clear sign of change at the Admissions Office, Princeton not only accepted late applications from black candidates but actively encouraged them; in the end, 143 blacks applied in 1968, up from 83 in 1967. These applicants, in turn, received special consideration and greater flexibility in the interpretation of their academic records; the result was that the African-American admissions rate soared to 53 percent — almost double the rate of a year earlier. In 1968, 44 blacks entered Princeton — a radical change for a college that had just one black entrant in 1961 and had never before exceeded 18 in a single class.

Princeton's public statements left little doubt that the increasingly violent racial disturbances that shook the nation's cities in the summer of 1967 were the main cause of the change in its admissions policy. The 1968 "Report to Schools" noted: "After 1967, the year of the riots, the increases [in] . . . the number of black students admitted and enrolled in selective colleges . . . were dramatic." In his second report as director of admissions, John T. Osander '57, who succeeded Dunham in 1966, noted that Princeton "admitted a larger number of black students than our larger and more liberal-minded competitors, Harvard and Yale" and expressed his hope that "what we did in 1968 should provide some indication to the black community that we take the Civil Disorder Commission's charges of white racism seriously. At the most practical level, if integration and non-violence are in the best self-interests of the white community," Osander wrote, "then it is essential that strong programs of action are taken to provide truly equal rights and truly equal conditions for all people."

Princeton's vigorous affirmative action policy was part of a broader effort to change what Osander called its "conservative, upper-class image." Diversifying the racial composition of the student body was necessarily at the center of this effort, and by the late 1960s, Princeton had broken decisively

ly with its past. The academic year 1968-1969 saw, if anything, an even more energetic effort to transform the racial character of the student body than 1967-1968, itself a record year. Hovering in the background was the threat of disruption; in the spring of 1968, Princeton's black students threatened to close down the campus when Goheen initially rejected their proposal to cancel classes and hold seminars as a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. on the day of his funeral, and in March 1969, 51 students in the PABC organized an eleven-hour occupation of an administration building to protest Princeton's refusal to rid itself of investments in corporations doing business in South Africa.

Amid an atmosphere of increasing student militancy and social breakdown in the nation's cities, Princeton altered its admissions policies yet again. The most visible change was the historic decision to admit women, but 1968-1969 was also the year Princeton began to recruit Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans and expanded its efforts to recruit more "disadvantaged" whites. After years of attempting to change its image, Princeton's efforts were finally bearing fruit; once again, the number of African-American applicants more than doubled, rising from 143 to 325. This increase allowed Princeton to become somewhat more selective in assessing black candidates, dropping their rate of admission to 34 percent from 53 the year before.



"In 1968, 44 blacks entered Princeton, a radical change for a college that had just one black entrant in 1961 and had never before exceeded 18 in a single class."

A mere decade earlier, alumni sons were the main beneficiaries of "affirmative action." By the late 1960s, special consideration, largely the province of the privileged in previous decades, had been formally expanded to blacks and other minorities. Of the 120 African Americans admitted in 1969, 75 had academic ratings of 4 or 5 — a pattern made possible by the increasingly contextual definition of "merit" that had been put in place over the past few years.

Princeton's efforts to recruit blacks peaked in 1970, when the African-American proportion of the freshman class reached 10.4 percent — the highest figure ever attained, before or since, at a Big Three institution. From a stance of strict neutrality in 1962, Princeton had moved in a few short

years to a strategy of using all the means at its disposal to increase black enrollment: appeals to secondary schools for more applicants, recruiting visits to areas with large minority populations, expanded contacts with community organizations, and the direct involvement of undergraduates from the PABC in recruiting students. A minority presence was now built into the admissions process itself, with blacks on the Admissions Committee and a single member of the staff writing assessments of all candidates deemed "disadvantaged." Finally, and most significantly, the criteria by which black and other disadvantaged candidates were judged now took into account the limited opportunities that they typically had had to acquire the kind of academic record that would lead to admission under ostensibly color-blind criteria.

"From a stance of strict neutrality in 1962, Princeton had moved to a strategy of using all the means at its disposal to increase black enrollments."

Having started the decade well behind Harvard and Yale, Princeton was now ahead of them in recruiting African Americans — no small accomplishment for a college that did not take its first black until 1945 and failed to enroll a single black freshman for three consecutive years in the 1950s. Princeton's success in transforming itself was part of a conscious decision to alter its admissions practices fundamentally. Reinforcing this decision was the recognition that a critical mass of black students would do a great deal to address the continued perception that Princeton was, as Osander bluntly put it, "wealthy, conservative, isolated, rural, indolent, snobbish, and non-intellectual." This image problem, he noted, was compounded by "the Princeton eating and social system [which] made it harder to attract a meritocratic rather than an aristocratic student body." If, in the increasingly ferocious competition for top students of the late 1960s, a traditionalist image of upper-class gentlemanliness was a serious handicap, Princeton's decision to recruit black students demonstrated better than any other change that "Old Nassau" was no more.

The incorporation of blacks into Princeton was the leading edge of a broader strategy of transformation. Long perceived as a bastion of the WASP upper class, Princeton became a pioneer in institutionalizing special consideration for all disadvantaged students, including whites. By 1969, 29 students classified as "non-black disadvantaged" were admitted; 20

of them chose to enroll. Other minorities were also becoming visible at Princeton; by 1971, the Union Latino-Americana was, according to the Admissions Office, providing "an excellent model for student involvement in admission recruiting work." The 1971 admissions report presciently predicted that "as the numbers of Latinos, American Indian, Asian, and other minority group students on campus increase, we can expect such students to be interested in increased enrollment for all Third World student groups." A year later, Princeton was issuing statistics on the number of freshmen from five separate minority groups: Latino (22), Chicano (14), Oriental (27), Indian (5), and black (113). Together, these Third World students, as they were then called, made up 16.5 percent of the freshman class of 1972 — a clear refutation of Princeton's deeply ingrained image as a white institution.

Despite these dramatic changes, Princeton had retained its traditional character in other ways. Unlike Yale, which had radically reduced the degree of preference for alumni children, Princeton continued to treat them delicately, offering them admission at a rate roughly 2.5 times higher than that of other applicants between 1966 and 1970. Overall, these students who entered Princeton in these years remained a strikingly privileged lot; among the freshmen in 1970, just 8 percent had fathers who were workers (skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled) or farmers — groups that still constituted a majority of the labor force. Two thirds came from families with incomes over \$15,000 — a level reached by just 18 percent of American families in 1970. At the time the least wealthy of the Big Three, Princeton could not offer financial aid to all admits who needed it. Though admission was officially need-blind, Princeton lacked the resources to make it "full-aid"; in 1968, it had to deny financial aid to 70 admits who, by its own calculations, were in need of scholarship assistance.

Harvard and the Black Question in the 1960s

Of the eight Ivy League colleges, none enjoyed a better reputation in the African-American community in 1960 than Harvard, which had a long history of being open to blacks dating back to 1865, when Richard T. Greener entered the college. Between 1865 and 1941, approximately 165 black students enrolled at Harvard, slightly more than two a year. The level of black enrollment increased markedly in the 1940s and 1950s, with at least 97 blacks matriculating

between 1939 and 1955. Though this meant that just six or so African Americans a year entered classes generally numbering well over 1,000, it was the largest group at any Ivy League college.

"Between 1865 and 1941, 165 black students enrolled at Harvard, slightly more than two a year."

Harvard's "favored status within the Negro community," wrote the author of a 1962 paper on "Negroes in the Ivy League," was primarily due to "the reputation she gained from her many successful Negro graduates and from her long tradition of equality on the campus." Though Harvard's record was in truth not without blemishes, especially during the Lowell years, it had largely been free of the overt racial discrimination seen at Princeton and many other elite colleges. By the late 1950s, Harvard was actively (if quietly) seeking to increase the number of African-American students on campus. One of its principal assets in this effort was a close relationship with the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS). In the final years of the Bender administration, which ended in 1960, perhaps as many as half of Harvard's black students had learned about the college through the NSSFNS.

In Bender's last year, Harvard established an innovative program that looked for students (especially from the South) from economically and culturally impoverished homes. Funded in 1959 by the Taconic Foundation in New York and nicknamed the "Gamble Fund," the initiative was not specifically targeted at blacks. But they were major beneficiaries, with 18 black students — a majority of them supported by the fund — enrolled in the program's first three years. To help them adjust to college, Harvard sent the students to Andover in the summer before their freshman year. In a few cases — especially for those who had attended particularly weak schools — students were sent to Andover for a full year of preparation.

According to one well-informed observer, something like what came to be known as affirmative action was already institutional policy: "Without question Harvard does go out of its way . . . [and] will take a boy with inadequate test scores if there are indicators he will develop." Many of the African Americans admitted in these years were disadvantaged by class as well as race; in 1961, 90 percent received scholarships, compared to 25 percent of all undergraduates.

Between 1959 and 1961, 10 low-income (family income under \$5,000) black students entered Harvard; 6 graduated on schedule and a seventh within six years.

By 1963, Harvard had enough black students — 55 undergraduates, by one estimate — to stimulate the formation of the Association of African and Afro-American Students (generally known at Harvard simply as "Afro"). In the next few years, Harvard continued to make significant, if gradual, gains in black enrollment — an achievement facilitated by the Glimp administration's conscious decision to seek greater social and racial diversity and to "give less weight to the so-called objective factors (rank in class and test scores) and more weight to other evidence, not only of intellectual promise but of other qualities and kinds of promise as well."

In 1965, 42 black freshmen matriculated at Harvard — an impressive figure compared to Yale (23) and Princeton (12). All of them scored above 500 on the verbal section of the SAT, and their median score was about 600 — relatively high figures, given that only about 1.2 percent of all black high school graduates had scores over 500. The black freshmen were from far less advantaged backgrounds than their white classmates; in 1965, when roughly a third of Harvard freshmen received scholarships, the figure among African-American freshmen was 88 percent. Especially by Harvard's standards, many of the black freshmen were outright poor; almost half came from families with incomes under \$5,000 — putting them in the bottom 30 percent of American families. Harvard's pioneering efforts in the early and mid-1960s thus made an important contribution not only to racial diversity on the campus but also to class diversity.

"Harvard's admissions ideology, which spoke frequently of the disadvantaged and of diversity, generally avoided any specific mention of race."

Further progress proved difficult, however; black enrollment at Harvard stagnated between 1965 and 1968. Indeed, after a small increase in 1966, the black proportion of Harvard's freshmen declined slightly in 1967 and again in 1968. The reasons are not clear but increased competition from other elite colleges may have been a factor. Perhaps also relevant was Harvard's admissions ideology, which spoke frequently of the "disadvantaged" and of "diversity" but generally avoided any specific mention of race. Harvard was certainly searching for talented black students, but it

was doing so quietly and cautiously within an official ideology of "color-blindness."

At Harvard, as on so many other campuses, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 precipitated a crisis. Tensions were evident at the service held shortly after King's death at Memorial Church. Inside were 1,200 mourners, almost all of them white; outside, 80 blacks held an alternative service organized by Afro. At the end of the service, in a tense confrontation, the students presented the administrators walking out of the church with a list of demands. Among them was a call for changes in Harvard's admissions policy toward blacks.

"Harvard will take a boy with inadequate test scores if there are indicators he will develop."

Afro wanted Harvard to "admit a number of Black students proportionate to our percentage of the population as a whole" — roughly 12 percent. Harvard did not accede to this demand, but Chase Peterson '52, the new dean of admissions, quickly agreed to meet with the angry students. Admissions decisions had already been made for the class that would enter in the fall of 1968, but Harvard could alter its admissions practices for the next year. By April 29 — less than four weeks after King's death — Peterson announced his commitment to enrolling a substantially higher number of black students in a joint statement with the Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students.

Concretely, the agreement reached between the administration and the students called for the better representation of blacks on the Admissions Office staff, direct involvement of undergraduates in recruiting African-American students, and bringing more black candidates to visit Harvard before admissions decisions. These were important concessions, but the most crucial victory was the extraction of a specific promise to increase substantially the number of black students. While insisting that "we are not responding to a crisis so much as to a void that exists at Harvard," Peterson was in fact negotiating in an atmosphere in which the threat of campus disruption was palpable.

Though Peterson affirmed in his annual report for 1967-1968 Harvard's long-standing position that it "will never admit a young man simply to fill a quota," the decision had already been made to raise by a sizable margin the number of black students who would enter in 1969. While continu-

ing to oppose quotas publicly, the Admissions Committee privately accepted the notion that a "critical mass" of black students would be needed to provide one another with moral and social support. If formal quotas had been rejected, numerical targets would nonetheless frame Harvard's admissions policy toward blacks.

In 1969, admissions decisions were made in an atmosphere of acute racial and political tension. So tangible was the threat of a student revolt that, as Peterson said, "There was a serious question as to whether the admissions office itself would be attacked and whether we would be able to complete our procedures and mail our letters by April fifteenth." His concern was understandable; on April 9, radical students had occupied University Hall, where they remained until the police forcibly expelled them the following day in a bloody assault in which 48 people were injured seriously enough to require medical care. In all, the police arrested 196 people, 145 of them Harvard or Radcliffe students.

Shortly after these tumultuous events, a confrontation took place between militant black students and the administration over the form of a proposed Department of Afro-American Studies. Though the crisis ended on April 22 when the Harvard faculty voted, 251-158, in favor of a proposal acceptable to the students (and considered an "academic Munich" by some of the faculty), there was little doubt that some sort of "militant action" would have followed had it been rejected. Even an armed takeover of a building — an action that had shaken Cornell just a few days earlier — was not out of the question.

Threatened as never before by militant students, both black and white, the Admissions Office — though not a specific target of either of the spring confrontations — fundamentally altered its practices. In a first step toward making good on its promises, it hired its first black admissions officer, John Harwell, a former Chicago public school teacher then working for the Urban League. Harwell — who apparently had been recommended by Jeff Howard '69, the head of Afro — was personally called by Peterson. After some initial skepticism, he became convinced that he could make a contribution, and came to Harvard in the fall of 1968. At the same time, black students helped to recruit African-American applicants, assisted by committed alumni who visited inner-city schools never before approached by Harvard.

Though no official policy change was announced, the



admissions criteria were altered to take still greater account of the limitations of background and schooling that shaped the qualifications of many black candidates. A student who had “survived the hazards of poverty” and who showed that he “is clearly intellectually thirsty” and “still has room for more growth” would be given preference. The presence of such students, Peterson argued, would make the campus both more diverse and more intellectually stimulating. Diversity, both racial and social, was thus not only a social necessity but an educational one.

With the “diversity rationale” for affirmative action firmly in place (the very rationale that would later carry the day in the historic *Bakke* decision in 1978), Harvard set about making good on its promise to increase the number of black students. The first class admitted after the agreement, selected in 1969, had far more black students than any previous class. Of the 1,202 freshmen who enrolled at Harvard that fall, 90 were African Americans — a 76 percent increase over the 51 black freshmen in 1968.

The next two years showed that 1969, far from being an aberration, marked the beginning of the institutionalization of blacks as a powerful interest group in the competition for slices of the admissions pie. Though there does not seem to have been a quota in the strict sense of the word, a target of at least 100 black admits seems to have been established. In 1970, 108 blacks were admitted, of whom 98 chose to attend. The following year 109 blacks were accepted; 90 matriculated. Though Harvard continued to deny that it had a quota, the African-American proportion of the freshman class leveled off at around 7 percent after 1968 — almost double the previous high.

In honoring the agreement on black admissions that it had made in the tumultuous atmosphere of 1968, Harvard had little choice but to accord to African-American candidates the same special consideration previously reserved for groups such as alumni sons and athletes. In 1971 — a representative year — legacies and athletes were admitted at rates 2.3 and 2.1 times higher, respectively, than nonathletes and nonlegacies; blacks were admitted at a rate just 1.2 times higher than nonblacks.

A more revealing measure, however, is the probability of admission once one controls for the academic rating given candidates. In 1971, of all the applicants rated 2 or 3 (on a scale of 1–5, with 1 as the highest), alumni sons and athletes

were admitted at 2.2 and 2.8 times higher than their “unmarked” counterparts. From this perspective, the degree of preference accorded black candidates rated academic 2 or 3 — who were admitted at a rate 2.6 times higher than non-black candidates — was slightly less than that given athletes but a bit more than that accorded legacies.

As with other groups given special consideration, blacks had somewhat weaker academic credentials than average Harvard freshmen. But unlike many other preferential categories — notably legacies and graduates of leading boarding schools — blacks came, on average, from families far less economically and culturally advantaged than most Harvard students. In 1969, when the effort to recruit inner-city blacks

was at its peak, as many as 40 percent of African-American freshmen came from lower-class backgrounds. As at Yale and Princeton, the median SAT scores of

black freshmen were lower than those for the class as a whole: 1,202 in 1969 compared to 1,385 for all entrants. Yet admissions at Harvard had for some time been determined at least as much by nonacademic factors as academic ones, and black applicants — perhaps reflecting the fact that they generally had overcome more obstacles on the way to college than white candidates — received higher “personal ratings” than whites. In 1971, for example, 30 percent of black candidates for admissions received personal ratings of 1 or 2 — a level reached by only 19 percent of nonblack applicants.

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Though Harvard worked hard to identify outstanding candidates, both black and white, whose exceptional personal strengths might compensate for relatively weak academic records, its efforts to reach out to disadvantaged students were not without complications. In a highly controversial 1973 article in the Harvard alumni magazine, Martin Kilson, one of the few tenured African Americans on the Harvard faculty, estimated that as many as 40 percent of black freshmen arrived in Cambridge with academic deficiencies. To prove his point, Kilson cited statistics showing that only 48 percent of black students made the Dean’s List (ranks I–III) while 82 percent of their white classmates did so.

But by the time Kilson’s article appeared, Harvard was



already moving away from its attempts to recruit blacks from the inner city and impoverished rural areas. According to the Office of Admission, roughly 75 to 80 percent of the blacks admitted in 1973 were not from disadvantaged backgrounds. As early as 1970, Peterson noted, "We have learned . . . that we cannot accept the victims of social disaster however deserving of promise they once might have been, or however romantically or emotionally an advocate (or a society) might plead for him." Having gone to the ghetto, Harvard quickly realized that blacks from relatively privileged backgrounds made the transition more easily than the working-class and poor blacks to what was still an overwhelmingly white institution.

Well ahead of its Big Three rivals in its openness to black students in 1960, by the decade's end Harvard had lost its advantage. Even before its retreat from its efforts to recruit inner-city blacks, Harvard had been characteristically cautious in its affirmative action policy lest it stray too far from its traditional practices. In 1970, Princeton achieved its highest percentage of blacks — 10.4 percent. Harvard, which had more distinguished black alumni than any other elite college, was just 8.1 percent black. In the competition for the top African-American students, Yale, which had long trailed well behind Harvard, was closing the gap; indeed, in the competition for National Achievement Scholars, Yale enrolled 75 in 1970 compared to Harvard's 81 — a virtual tie. Given the smaller size of Yale's student body, it may very well have meant that Yale had forged ahead in Achievement Scholars per capita. Harvard remained, by any standard, a popular choice among the most sought-after black students, but its status as the most racially diverse college in the Ivy League was by 1970 a relic of the past.

Race, Political Mobilization, and Institutional Change

Few changes in the history of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton have been more profound than those produced by the black struggle for racial justice in the 1960s. In a short decade, the Big Three had become exemplars of racial diversity by 1970, enrolling not only a critical mass of blacks but also growing numbers of Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Invisible in 1960, blacks — and, increasingly, other minorities as well — were now "insiders," serving as members of the Admissions Committee and as student recruiters for colleges that had more and more come to con-

sider racial diversity a critical component of institutional excellence.

How was it that African Americans — who constituted well under 1 percent of the student body in 1960 — came to take their place beside such privileged categories as legacies, graduates of top boarding schools, and athletes? The conventional explanation — that "a rising concern over civil rights" led the elite colleges to begin recruiting blacks — is true as far as it goes, for the civil rights movement did stimulate a deeper awareness of racial injustice among the men who ran the nation's leading colleges. Nevertheless, as late as 1964 — a full decade after *Brown v. Board of Education* and nine years after the Montgomery bus boycott — the Big Three remained less than 2 percent black. Clearly, the civil rights movement, morally compelling though it was, had not in and of itself been enough to fundamentally alter the admissions practices of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

What changed after 1964 was the growth of disruptive activity, both on and off campus. The watershed event was the Watts riot of 1965, but it was not until the uprisings in Newark and Detroit two years later that it became clear that Watts had foreshadowed an even greater breakdown in America's major cities. Then, in the spring of 1968, when more than a hundred cities broke out in riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., it seemed as if the entire nation was on the verge of unraveling.

"Clearly, the civil rights movement, morally compelling though it was, had not in and of itself been enough to fundamentally alter the admissions practices of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton."

Meanwhile, the New Left was also challenging the status quo on and off campus. By 1968, the opposition to the Vietnam War had become a genuine mass movement, and growing segments of it were adopting disruptive tactics. SDS, in particular, had a powerful presence on many campuses and focused increasingly on issues of racism and university complicity with the war.

Administrators at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had struggled for a decade to admit a critical mass of black students. So when the black students mobilized in 1968 to fight for more admission slots for African Americans, they were not pushing in a different direction from the one that the Big Three had already embarked upon. Instead, they were sim-

ply demanding a bigger slice of the admissions pie — or so the men who ran these colleges could tell themselves. That, in contrast to some of the calls for revolutionary change coming from the predominantly white New Left, was a demand they could accommodate.

There is little question that the mobilization of black students on campus was a major factor behind the sharp increases in black enrollment in 1968 and especially 1969. Yet the mobilization would not have had nearly as powerful an impact in the absence of the urban riots that preceded it. Indeed, it was Princeton, shaken by the riots in Newark and Plainfield in the summer of 1967, that moved first to transform its admissions practices toward African Americans. Explaining in its annual report for 1967-1968 that “the events of last summer nationally, and the appeal of the National and State Commissions made it imperative that we move off . . . [the] plateau [of 15 or so black matriculants annually],” Princeton more than tripled the number of blacks in the entering class of 1968, enrolling a record 44.

Though the terrifying wave of riots in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination took place too late to affect the freshman class that entered that fall, it did jolt the educational establishment. In 1969, the number of black admits at the Ivy League colleges surged a record 89 percent — a dramatic testimony to the power of the riots to alter established

practices. Pressured by militant black students capitalizing on the momentum for change produced by the riots and the threat of further disorder, Harvard and Yale joined Princeton in altering their normal procedures in the search for more African Americans. The result was a 101 percent increase in black admits at Harvard and a 121 percent increase at Yale. In the fall of 1969, 224 blacks matriculated at the Big Three — a remarkable 386 percent increase over the 58 who enrolled in 1964. What the civil rights movement had been unable to accomplish — a fundamental alteration of racially neutral admissions practices that had the effect, if not the intent, of limiting black enrollment to token levels — the riots had made possible.

To accomplish their goal of rapidly increasing the number of black students, the Big Three had no choice but to modify the increasingly academic definition of merit that had come to predominate in the 1950s and 1960s. The dilemma facing them was embodied most visibly by rising SAT scores. At Harvard, for example, the median verbal SAT score had risen from 563 in 1952 to 697 in 1967. But black SATs were on average a standard deviation lower than those of whites. Clearly, if merit was to be defined by applicants’ scores on the SAT, then blacks would be few in number at the Big Three.

But the conflict between “meritocracy” and what came to be known as “affirmative action” was in many ways more apparent than real. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had never been pure academic meritocracies, and each of them had long given considerable weight to nonacademic qualities in admissions decisions. In the past, however, departures from purely academic criteria had generally served to further advantage the already privileged or to facilitate the admission of candidates who served institutional interests. What was new about the admission policies of the late 1960s was that special consideration was being deployed in a systematic and vigorous way on behalf of the historically excluded. In this specific sense, the institutionalization of preferential treatment for African Americans alongside other privileged categories was a genuinely historic change, for it marked a shift away from the logic of “social closure” toward one of social inclusion.

In explaining why they were willing to take such a major step, the Big Three colleges made much of the notion of “diversity” and occasionally referred to the historical injustices visited upon African Americans. But the dominant

The Academic Reputation of the Big Three at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

“If intellect was not highly valued at turn-of-the-century Yale, it was perhaps even less esteemed at Princeton. Headed since 1888 by Francis Landley Patton, a Presbyterian theologian noted for his administrative laxity and his failure to enforce disciplinary and academic standards, Princeton had a reputation as the least academically serious member of the Big Three. Patton himself hardly helped matters when he reportedly said at a faculty meeting: ‘Gentlemen, whether we like it or not, we shall have to recognize that Princeton is a rich man’s college and that rich men do not frequently come to college to study.’ Patton also made a remark that was to haunt Old Nassau’s reputation for years to come: Princeton was ‘the finest country club in America.’”

— Jerome Karabel
The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton
(Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

theme in the texts of the period was neither diversity nor compensation for past injustices, but rather the need for "Negro leadership."

Institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had, of course, been in the business of training leaders for centuries, and there was little doubt at the time that more of the nation's future leaders would be African American than ever before. Yet what gave the call for Negro leadership its urgency was a sense that a fateful struggle for the soul of the nation's black population was being waged in the 1960s. On one side of this struggle stood the apostles of nonviolence and integration, led by Martin Luther King Jr.; on the other stood the proponents of violence and separatism — an increasingly influential current embodied by such diverse figures as Malcolm X and (later in the decade) Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Huey Newton.

"The black struggle for inclusion contributed to the emergence of admissions policies at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton that were far more meritocratic in 1970 than in 1960."

As early as 1964, farsighted leaders such as Brewster saw what was at stake and decided to come down decisively on the side of nonviolence and integration. The awarding of an honorary doctorate to Dr. King that spring, despite fierce opposition from a segment of the alumni, was a powerful symbol of Yale's stance. In explaining his decision to an irate Old Blue from Georgia, Brewster made clear his worry that an increasingly restive black population might go down the wrong path: "King, like Wilkins," he wrote, "is violently opposed by the hoodlum wing of the colored spokesmanship and is looked upon as the one Negro leader whose opposition to violence has not lost him the following of the majority of the colored population."

In committing themselves to substantially increasing black enrollment, the Big Three were demonstrating that they were serious about helping to construct a black leadership stratum in business, government, and the professions. But the black leaders that reformers like Brewster and Clark had in mind were to be "responsible" rather than "extreme" and to serve as bridges between the white establishment and the increasingly disaffected black population of the nation's ghettos. The construction of such a leadership stratum, they hoped, would serve to improve the collective condition of African

Americans and to bring about racial justice. At the same time, the very existence of a visible black elite was also designed to strengthen both the stability and the legitimacy of an increasingly beleaguered social order. Geoffrey Kabaservice has put it well: "by expanding equality of educational opportunity, elite universities such as Yale would . . . act as a countermeasure to revolution by furthering social mobility and strengthening the case for change within the system."

The changes in admission practices introduced in response to the demands of the black movement had profound and reverberating effects on the character of the Big Three. The most obvious of these was the incorporation of other "people of color"; with the doors opened to blacks, it was just a matter of time before other minorities, including Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, would mobilize and demand their share of the admissions pie. At Yale, which had been a leader in the inclusion of nonblack minorities, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans together made up 7.4 percent of the freshman class in 1972; at Princeton, these same groups constituted 5 percent of the freshman class. Harvard lagged behind its rivals in reporting statistics on nonblack minorities, but finally did so in 1976; that year, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans contributed 109 students (6.7 percent) to the freshman class.

The most profound and far-reaching impact of the black struggle for racial justice was to delegitimize long-standing admissions practices that favored the privileged. In an atmosphere in which the claims of the excluded occupied the moral high ground, it became increasingly difficult to justify policies that favored WASPs over Jews, prep school students over high school students, and the affluent over those who needed scholarship assistance. With the notable exception of alumni sons, whom the Big Three deemed still essential to their vital institutional interests, 220 elite constituencies that had long been given preference in the admissions process saw their privileges considerably eroded in the 1960s. At the same time, groups that had traditionally been discriminated against — Jews, graduates of public high schools, and scholarship applicants — came to be treated in a far more evenhanded fashion. Paradoxically, then, the black struggle for inclusion — often thought to be in fundamental conflict with the logic of meritocracy — contributed to the emergence of admissions policies at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton that were far more meritocratic in 1970 than in 1960.

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