

## **Black Populations Globally: The Costs of the Underutilization of Blacks in Education**

Kassie Freeman Ph.D.  
Dillard University

Beyond the details of oppressions, what do educators and researchers know about the educational challenges that Blacks encounter globally in their quest for education? What are the similarities of Black populations' experiences in their participation in education, particularly when the controlling populations are non-Black? What can be learned from research that connects experiences of Black populations globally that will help illuminate the patterns of exclusion and/or limitation of Blacks' participation in education? Most important, how is examining the shared experiences of Black populations, both during education and afterwards in the workplace, useful for understanding the individual and societal costs of the underutilization of Blacks in different countries?

To be sure, there are similarities in the experiences of Blacks globally. Yet, understandably, there are differences. As Audre Lorde (1992), in reference to the differences in Afro-German women and other Black women, indicated: "Particular histories have fashioned our particular weapons, our particular insights" (p. xiii). Yet in also indicating our sameness, Lorde posed a fundamental question: "As members of an international community of people of color, how do we strengthen and support each other in our battles against the rising international tide of racism?" (p. xiii). In response to this question, she stated: "To successfully battle the many faces of institutionalized racial oppression, we must share the strengths of each other's vision as well as the weaponries born of particular experience" (p. xiii). In no arena is the battle more apparent and similar for Black populations than in their pursuit of education.

For the purposes of this discussion, Black populations are defined using the "racial" designation. That is, the physical characteristics that identify Black populations, e.g., color, hair and/or other distinguishing physical features that designate different racial groups. Although more recently ethnicity has been used to define the identity of groups and experiences in educational research, the construct of race is used because in comparative and international research race more accurately captures the similarity of Black experiences.

Within countries as diverse as Australia, Great Britain, France, Portugal, the USA and New Zealand, Black populations have always had to fight for their right to participate in education. Globally, the dilemma that nation states now find themselves in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that after centuries of denying educational opportunities to Black populations, they are experiencing the individual and societal costs associated with having uneducated and undereducated segments of their populations. Thus, there is now a unique opportunity to study education as a commodity when comparing the similarities and contrasts of the experiences of Blacks in the USA with Blacks in other countries.

This research presented in this paper focuses on Black populations in other-than-African countries in which the controlling population is non-Black, e.g., Australia, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal and the USA. There have been substantial research studies on American Blacks in their struggle to participate in education, but very little on Black people in other countries. Even fewer comparative studies have been undertaken on the educational

experiences of Blacks after accessing participation. Therefore, this research provides the opportunity to examine similarities of experiences of Black populations in their quest to participate in education, and to assess the nonmonetary costs associated with the underutilization of Blacks in education in particular.

In support of James Anderson's (1988) position regarding the importance of the historical context, this research suggests that to better understand the experiences of Black populations, a more in-depth comparison must be made of their historical experiences and the impact of these experiences on the current educational experiences of Black populations in various countries. It is important to examine these experiences across disciplinary boundaries as well as to expand the research agenda across the borders of these countries. That is, better linkages between research agendas focused on different levels and education sectors of education (whether K-12, higher education, or different aspects of educational phenomena) need to be established. Such research is needed in order to demonstrate how each aspect of the Black experience impacts on each experience and level of schooling.

Much more research needs to be conducted to produce better understanding of the barriers constructed across cultures that maintain the underutilization of the potential human potential of Blacks in countries where non-Blacks are the controlling populations. In order to more fully understand these impediments, more research on each point where underutilization occurs has to be explored. Grasping the significance of the costs incurred at various points, particularly the nonmonetary costs (Bowen, 1977), associated with the underutilization of Black potential is imperative if countries are to better understand how and what everyone in these societies is losing.

Finally, this paper concludes that it is not enough for countries to assess the costs associated with the underutilization of the potential of Black populations. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, countries will find it necessary to develop strategies to address the societal and individual costs associated with the underutilization of the potential of Black populations. For instance Carnoy (1997) describes the way the process of increasing the spending on the underutilization of Blacks should work: "The vicious cycle of increasing social costs will gradually break. Down the road, as early-childhood investment reduces spending on adult social problems, more public funds will become available for general education and other activities that improve worker productivity and growth rates" (p. 241). However, countries have not yet been able to develop a formula for assessing the individual and societal costs and therefore to target their spending appropriately.

For globalization to be successful and socially just, within individual countries and across nations and regions collectively, the potential of all citizens must be developed and utilized. In order to balance this imperative, different paradigms and players have to be a part of the research agenda, and the agenda has to be expanded. Across cultures, there are generally common issues in Blacks pursuit of education relative to the underutilization of their potential.

To examine such issues, this research presented in this paper is divided into four, broad subtopics/themes: 1) the contrast of the historical experiences of Black populations in their pursuit of education; 2) the pattern of cultural alienation and annihilation on the part of the dominant population in the underutilization of the potential of Black populations in education; 3) the "culture of exclusion" that exists with regard to Black participation in education; and 4) the nonmonetary costs to societies in their underutilization of Black populations in education--the social (societal) and private (individual) costs.

### References

- Anderson, J.D. (1988). The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Bowen, H. (1977). Investment in learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Carnoy, M. (1994). Faded dreams: The politics and economics of race in America. Cambridge.
- Lorde, A. (1992) Foreword to the English Language Edition. In M. Opitz, K. Oguntoye, & D. Schultz (Eds.), Showing our colours: Afro-German women speak out. London: Open Letters.