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Realizing the Intended Outcomes of *Brown*

High-Achieving African American Male Undergraduates and Social Capital

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Equitable access to social mobility and advancement through education were among the intended outcomes of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and related legislation. Despite this, scholars have illuminated the ways in which colleges, universities, and schools continually disadvantage African American male students. Although the evidence overwhelmingly confirms that many of the goals and promises of *Brown* remain unfulfilled, a different perspective is offered in this article. Specifically, ways in which high-achieving African American male undergraduates gain, negotiate, and benefit from access to powerful social networks on predominantly White campuses are presented herein. Findings from interviews with 32 high achievers at six large public research universities show a clear nexus between campus leadership, active out-of-class engagement, and the acquisition of social capital. The ways in which the participants leveraged their access to social networks and activated their social capital for goal actualization during and immediately after college are also discussed.

Keywords: *achievement; African Americans; Brown v. Board of Education; college men; higher education; social capital*

Beyond making unlawful the practice of de jure racial segregation, the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (*Brown*; 1954) case was intended to eradicate a multitude of inequities that had long disadvantaged African Americans in schools and society. Racially separate and markedly disparate educational venues were to no longer exist, and equitable access to opportunities, within and beyond the context of schooling, was envisioned as a long-term outcome of the *Brown* decision (Fine, 2004). Regarding the latter, the Supreme Court Justices collectively imagined that unrestricted access to quality education regardless of race would yield greater opportunity for social and economic advancement, increased diversity within American schools, and a richer educational experience for colored boys and girls and their new White schoolmates (Balkin, 2001; Bell, 2004; Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994; Green, 2004; Paterson, 2001). Desegregation was to remedy the cyclical perpetuation of White supremacy and the racial disadvantages manufactured by educational exclusivity.

Despite these intended outcomes, Bell (2004) called attention to the failure of *Brown* to fully integrate our nation's schools. He noted that most African American students still attend racially homogenous and economically distressed public schools with limited educational resources (e.g., outdated textbooks), facilities that are barely conducive to learning, high dropout rates, and low levels of achievement on most educational benchmarks (e.g., standardized test scores, graduation rates, students' continuation on to college). Similarly, Guinier (2004) offered the following critique of *Brown*:

The fact is that fifty years later, many of the social, political, and economic problems that the legally trained social engineers thought the Court had addressed through *Brown* are still deeply embedded in our society. Blacks lag behind Whites in multiple measures of educational achievement, and within the Black community, boys are falling further behind than girls. (p. 92)

In the post-*Brown* era, racial and gender inequities in school achievement are particularly problematic in areas where there are larger concentrations of African Americans (e.g., Southern states and urban centers). For instance, Holzman (2004) found that New York and Chicago public schools, enrolling nearly 10% of the nation's African American males collectively, fail to graduate more than 70% of those students within 4 years of high school attendance. Trends such as these support the perspective that the promise of *Brown* remains unfulfilled (Bell, 1996, 2004; Carson, 2004; Days, 2001; Donelan et al., 1994; Eckes, 2004; Green, 2004; Guinier, 2004; Klarman, 1994; Tushnet, 1991). However, Willie and Willie (2005) characterized the ongoing implementation of *Brown* as a "work in progress" and argued that some gains have been made for African Americans as a result of the case and related legislation.

As most considerations of *Brown* have focused on de- and resegregation trends in K-12 public schools, limited attention has been placed on the intended outcomes of the ruling within the context of higher education. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 extended *Brown* to colleges and universities by prohibiting institutions that discriminate on the basis of race from receiving federal funds. Despite this, Orfield, Marin, and Horn (2005) described the persistent challenges of the "color line" in higher education, particularly in the areas of college access and achievement. Although racially integrated educational institutions were supposed to emerge from *Brown* and Title VI, most public, predominantly White colleges and universities have remained just that—predominantly White. Harper's (2006a) analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education confirms that access for African American male collegians at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is especially troublesome. Accordingly, though African American males represented 7.9% of the 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. population, on average they were 2.8% of undergraduate students at the public flagship universities across the 50 states in 2004. At no flagship university did African American male enrollments exceed 5.2%. Furthermore, Harper notes that African American men made up only 4.3% of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education in 2002, the same as in 1976.

Given this evidence of persistent inequity, scholars have placed tremendous emphasis on increasing African American student access to higher education (Allen, 1996, 2001, 2005; Brown, 2004; Harvey, Harvey, & King, 2004; Heller, 1999; Nettles, 1988). Because equitable access continues to be an unrealized goal of legislation related to *Brown*, conversations and empirical investigations have defaulted, perhaps unintentionally, to the illumination of negative consequences and broken promises. As such, little effort has been devoted to the examination of productive outcomes that have accrued as a result of the expansion of access (however limited it has been) to PWIs, particularly for African American men. Cuyjet (2006) summarized the challenges concerning African American male students on college and university campuses. Among them are alarming retention, graduation, and degree attainment rates. For example, more than two thirds (67.6%) of all African American men who start college do not graduate within 6 years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005), which is the worst college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006a). When combined with the aforementioned enrollment disparities, these figures might suggest that few, if any, educational advantages have been afforded to African American male collegians since *Brown*.

Little is known about African American men who persist through baccalaureate degree attainment, especially those within the group who choose to maximize their experiences on campuses that were once racially exclusive. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies focus on high-achieving African American college students in general (Freeman, 1999; Fries-Britt, 1998, 2002, 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Griffin, 2006), and male high achievers specifically (Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2004, 2005, 2006b, 2006c; Harper & Quayle, 2007). Most researchers have justifiably opted to call attention to the conditions that continually yield inequitable access and produce stifled outcomes. Notwithstanding, the pervasiveness and popularity of the deficit approach to studying African American students—focusing on why they fail—has done little to honor and acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of *Brown*. In fact, the disproportionate focus on African American male underachievement in the published research may lead to the erroneous conclusion that the promised fruits of *Brown* have not been enjoyed by any. Thus, the ways in which high-achieving African American male undergraduate student leaders acquire and leverage access to social networks at predominantly White public universities are presented in this article.

Theoretical Framework

Given that equal access to social opportunity and advancement through education were among the intended outcomes of *Brown*, social capital is the theoretical concept in which this study is grounded. Stanton-Salazar (1997) defined *social capital* as

relationships with institutional agents and the networks that afford access to resources and information for social progression and the accomplishment of goals. The concept is derived from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1987) and American sociologist James Coleman (1988). Only Bourdieu's work is considered in the current framework, as it offers a clearer theoretical link to the scope, aims, and purposes of the current study. Furthermore, Coleman's definition places disproportionate emphasis on the role of families (which is not considered herein) and ignores the student's ability to negotiate access to institutional resources and information on her or his own (Morrow, 1999).

Bourdieu's conceptualization is supported by theories of social reproduction and symbolic power, with a focus on norms and access to institutional resources. Regarding the latter, Dika and Singh (2002) offered this explanation of Bourdieu's perspective:

He defined social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. This group membership provides members with the backing of collectively owned capital . . . social capital is made up of social obligations or connections and it is convertible, *in certain conditions*, into economic capital. (p. 33)

Social reproduction theory seeks to explain how various actors and institutions reproduce the social relationships that yield class distinctions, varying degrees of access to sociopolitical power, and socioeconomic inequities (Bourdieu, 1987). Moreover, Bourdieu (1986) maintained, "the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (p. 249). Prior to *Brown*, these networks were thought to exist exclusively in White neighborhoods and schools, which placed African Americans at a disadvantage in their quests for upward socioeconomic mobility.

Three key components of Bourdieu's concept of *social capital* are noteworthy: (a) capital is cumulative and can potentially produce social benefits and profits, (b) relationships can afford previously excluded individuals access to information and resources enjoyed by the dominant group in power, and (c) the quality and quantity of such relationships can determine the convertibility of capital (Dika & Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998). Stanton-Salazar (1997) asserted that "capital can be converted into socially valued resources and opportunities (e.g., emotional support, legitimized institutional roles and identities, privileged information, access to opportunities for mobility)" (p. 8). Those with more capital fare better in schools than their peers with less. Stanton-Salazar warned that many social networks promote exclusion and only certain institutional actors are able to negotiate membership. Notwithstanding, the accumulation of such capital seems important and value added for African American men on a predominantly White campus.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) argued that previous studies of social capital have placed too much emphasis on the factors that lead to inequality but have offered limited insight into the ways by which individuals convert access to social capital into educational advantages. Despite their recognition of the richness and value of Bourdieu's contributions, Lareau and Horvat cited three specific oversights in prior research. First, the value of capital is largely context bound. That is, networks and relationships that prove beneficial in one context may not be as valued in another. Second, some people may possess capital and have access to networks but may decide against activating or leveraging their capital for upward mobility. And third, "rather than being an overly deterministic continual process, [social] reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually renegotiated by social actors" (p. 38). Furthermore, like Stanton-Salazar (1997), Lareau and Horvat also described moments of "social inclusion" and "social exclusion" within the context of schools wherein different groups are either privileged or disadvantaged depending on the level of access afforded to valuable social networks.

Stanton-Salazar (2004) submitted that learning, development, and persistence to degree completion are dependent on social integration and active engagement in school. Connections to "significant others" such as school administrators, faculty, and peers help shape what he calls "proacademic" identities, which lead to the production of desired outcomes and a greater likelihood for social progression. It is reported that one's ability to acquire and activate social capital and leverage access to information networks has enduring economic implications. "The concept of capital cannot be understood apart from the larger economic relations that dictate the control of society's principal material resources [and] the conversion of such resources into forms of wealth, power, authority, and social influence" (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, p. 24). Although school administrators often serve as gatekeepers, Stanton-Salazar made clear that peers also play an important role in mediating access to the information networks and social relationships with significant others that ultimately lead to the possible acquisition and leveraging of capital.

The juxtaposition of the literature on social capital with the unidimensionality of existing studies on African American male achievement (the almost exclusive focus on problematic outcomes) led to the exploration of the following research questions: (a) How do high-achieving African American male undergraduate student leaders acquire social capital and negotiate access to social networks at PWIs; (b) how do African American male achievers activate and leverage their capital for social advancement; (c) what value is attached to this capital within the context of their predominantly White campuses; and (d) how sustainable, convertible, and transferable is social capital during and immediately after the college years for high-achieving African American male student leaders? Insights into these questions may provide some evidence of the positive effects of *Brown* and related legislation on the experiences and long-term outcomes of high-achieving African American men.

Defining High Achieving

In the current study, *high achieving* was characterized as having earned cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale; establishing records of leadership and involvement in multiple campus organizations; earning the admiration of their peers (as determined by peer elections to campus leadership positions); developing relationships with high-ranking campus administrators and faculty outside of class; participating in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad programs, internships, learning communities, and summer research programs); and earning numerous collegiate awards and honors. Using these criteria, African American male undergraduates were identified and selected for participation in the study.

Method

This article is based on a larger qualitative data set regarding the experiences of high-achieving African American undergraduate men. The phenomenological study sought to understand what it is like to be a high-achieving African American male student leader at a large, predominantly White university. Questions regarding the gains and outcomes accrued and relationships cultivated as a result of the participants' leadership and campus involvement were included. The phenomenology tradition in qualitative research focuses on understanding and describing the "lived experiences" of the participants involved in the study (Moustakas, 1994). This type of qualitative study usually provides full, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The aim of the current study was to capture—in the high achievers' words—what they had gained and how relationships were negotiated in the context of PWIs.

Sites

The current study was conducted at six large, public research universities in the Midwest: University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, and Purdue University. These six institutions are similar in terms of size, age, reputation, and selectivity. Moreover, they are also in close geographic proximity to each other and are affiliated with the same athletic conference. Collectively enrolling more than 189,000 undergraduates, these six institutions are all classified as Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2000). On average, 6.3% of the students at the institutions were African American during the time at which the data were collected, with African American undergraduate enrollments ranging from 3.1% to 8.8%. Approximately 34% of the African American students at these universities were male.

Sample

Key administrators on the six campuses (e.g., deans, vice presidents, and directors of campus programs) were asked to identify high-achieving African American male students who had made the most of their college experience. The sample included 4 sophomores, 12 juniors, and 16 seniors, representing a wide variety of academic majors. The mean GPA for the sample was 3.32. All of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 22 years and were single with no dependents. Twelve participants grew up in single-parent homes, and the remaining 20 were from homes with two parents. Regarding the educational levels of their parents, the participants reported the following: both parents attended college ($n = 9$), one parent attended college ($n = 10$), and neither parent attended college ($n = 13$). Collectively, the 32 participants had been awarded more than \$489,000 in merit-based scholarships, awards, and prizes for their college achievements. The participants expressed high educational and career aspirations, with 72% indicating the intent to someday earn a doctoral degree. The remaining 28% planned to pursue master's degrees, mostly MBAs from top business schools.

None of the participants in the current study were college student-athletes. Nominators reported that these 32 high achievers were the only African American male undergraduates on the six campuses who satisfied the aforementioned criteria established for participation in the current study.

Data Collection Procedures

Each of the 32 African American men was asked to participate in a 2- to 3-hr face-to-face interview, and at least two follow-up interviews via telephone. I visited each campus at least once to conduct the first-round individual interviews; four campuses were visited twice. A semistructured interview technique was used in the face-to-face interview sessions, which simultaneously permitted data collection and authentic participant reflection (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Although standard questions and interview protocol were used in the interviews, discussions often became conversational, thus allowing the participants to reflect on the experiences and relationships they deemed most significant. Full transcripts from all sessions were sent to each participant for confirmation within 8 weeks following his interviews.

Data Analysis

Step-by-step techniques prescribed by Moustakas (1994) were used to analyze the data collected from interviews with the 32 participants. I first bracketed my initial impressions and assumptions as I read each line of the participants' transcripts. The margins of the transcripts were marked with reflective comments regarding my own suppositions and preliminary judgments about the data. After bracketing, the

transcripts were sorted, and key phases were linearly arranged under tentative headings using the NVivo Qualitative Research Software Package. This process resulted in the identification of 36 invariant constituents (Moustakas), which were subthemes that consistently held true for at least 84.4% of the sample. The invariant constituents were helpful in understanding the participants' shared experiences and were later clustered into thematic categories. Before the categories were solidified, a textural summary (what the high achiever experienced) and a structural summary (how he experienced the phenomenon of being a high achiever at a PWI) were written for each participant. Seven thematic categories were identified that captured the essence of the participants' shared experiences, one of which related directly to the role of and access to valuable social networks on their predominantly White university campuses. Only findings from that theme are reported herein, as they are most relevant to the research questions under investigation in this article.

Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

Several steps were taken to ensure quality and trustworthiness in the current study. Lincoln and Guba (1986) offered four measures for evaluating methodological rigor and accuracy in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four measures "replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity" used to ensure quality in quantitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Credibility was addressed through member checks, follow-up interviews via telephone, and referential adequacy (e.g., the storage and accessibility of cassette tapes from the interviews, full transcripts, and confidential documents). An informant team consisting of at least two participants from each institution was established for member checks. This team representing more than 25% of the sample read and provided feedback on my written interpretations of their collective experiences.

In addition, feedback from six peer debriefers who are experienced qualitative researchers and are familiar with African American men's issues was solicited to ensure credibility. Debriefers were given raw transcripts, as well as the individual textural and structural descriptions I wrote for the study participants. Debriefers and I engaged in a series of ongoing discussions regarding the tentative meanings I made of the high achievers' experiences throughout the data analysis phase of the study. Transferability is ensured by the earlier description of sites from which data were collected. Findings from the current study will likely transfer agreeably to other large predominantly White public research universities. Last, dependability and confirmability were ensured through audits conducted by members of the aforementioned peer debriefing team, a diverse team of four senior faculty colleagues, and one additional qualitative research methodologist.

Limitations

Despite efforts to ensure trustworthiness, three methodological and analytical shortcomings are readily apparent. The most glaring limitation of the current study is my inability to ascertain the quantity of capital with which each high achiever entered his university, which would have been difficult and arguably inappropriate to attempt in a qualitative study. Although all of the participants described who they were before they began college and discussed the networks to which they gained access after becoming actively involved at their respective institutions, there was no systematic or qualitatively sensible way of determining how much social capital they brought with them to the six campuses. A second major shortcoming pertains to the limited transferability of the findings from the current study. High-achieving African American male student leaders at single-sex institutions, historically Black universities, small liberal arts colleges, and other institutional types might acquire and expend social capital differently, and their degrees of access to resources and information networks may vary across contexts. And third, how all of the participants in the current study used the social capital acquired in college to actualize their post-undergraduate educational and career goals is unknown. At the present time, only 25 of the 32 high achievers have been followed since the initial data collection phases of the current study.

Although not necessarily a limitation, as one who regularly employs critical race theory in my research I feel compelled to clarify the conceptualizations of capital used in the current study. Yosso (2005) advocated a shift from deficit views of communities of color as places of cultural and social poverty. She critiqued Bourdieuan interpretations that presuppose people of color lack the capital required for social progression. Specifically, Yosso noted that Bourdieu's theory "has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor" (p. 76), thus privileging White middle-class social circles as the norm by which people of color are to aspire. Admittedly, the current study focuses on African American male undergraduates gaining access to social and information networks that have long been enjoyed by White college goers. Notwithstanding this framing, I concur fully with Yosso's view that these students already possessed their own unique forms of capital that would have likely enabled them to thrive in various ways during and after college. Therefore, I too reject the cultural poverty framework and caution readers against assuming the 32 participants in the current study enrolled at their respective universities with no sociocultural assets.

Findings

Insights from interviews with the 32 high-achieving African American male student leaders are offered in this section. Specifically, the social capital they acquired on the six campuses, the manner through which their access to capital and

information networks was garnered and negotiated, and the ways in which they activated their capital are reported herein.

Access Granted: Relationships and Information

The participants described the access they were afforded to key people and privileged information about scholarships, internships, awards, and various opportunities. Regarding the former, nominators were asked to identify African American male high achievers on the six campuses that satisfied the aforementioned criteria, including those who had developed meaningful relationships with high-ranking campus administrators and faculty outside of class. These nominators often identified students whom they knew well and had prior engagement. The participants reflected on the value and benefits of such interactions and connections. Relationships with their university presidents were most treasured.

Many participants enthusiastically recalled having dinner at the president's home, attending one-on-one or exclusive committee meetings with the president, calling the president's direct extension or cellular phone, and being able to solicit recommendations for graduate school and various awards directly from the presidents of their universities. "The president actually has my cell phone number and calls me whenever he needs something or there is someone important on campus he wants me to meet," one participant from Ohio State reported. In reflecting on his access to the president of Michigan State, Amondo noted that few students, African American or otherwise, could actually call the president and get him on the phone.

In addition to the campus chief executives, the participants also consistently spoke of relationships they built with other top administrators at their universities. "Having the opportunity to work side-by-side with the Provost . . . not many students can say they've worked with the Provost because you know Provosts are usually very distant people." Vice presidents, deans, and directors of various offices and programs were among the key people with whom the high achievers had cultivated meaningful relationships. Perhaps the extent of their relationships with these campus officials warrants some explanation. The students indicated that several administrators knew them well, were aware of the value they added to their universities through leadership in student organizations, and were quite familiar with the ways in which they excelled in the classroom.

The participants were afforded multiple opportunities for engagement with these key campus officials and in many cases considered them mentors. Christopher, an Indiana University student, commented:

Dean McKaig, the vice chancellor for student affairs, and I are really good friends. I feel like I can go to the guy with anything—whether it's about issues in the Greek system, union board, or student government. When I was on union board, he was the representative on the board from the administration. That's where we got to know each

other. Now, if I run into him in the student union or out on campus he knows my name. I feel like if I needed something I could go to him. Plus, he was the one who gave me a heads up about lots of opportunities that I have taken advantage of.

Other Indiana University students spoke positively about relationships they formed with other top administrators. For instance, Marshawn established a strong relationship with the vice president for Student Development and Diversity through their constant interactions during his tenure as Black Student Union president. Because of their close relationship and frequent interactions, the associate director of the Minority Achievers Program at Indiana nominated Brian for several awards and honors. "I wouldn't have even known about all of these awards and other stuff if I didn't have such a close relationship with her . . . other students miss out on these sorts of things."

Participants from the other five campuses also reflected on access to and valuable relationships with administrators. David claimed the top four administrators in the Aviation Program at Purdue knew him by his first name because they were advisors to the organizations in which he held leadership positions. DeJuan believed he was well known by many administrators, including the senior advisor to the president, because of his leadership and active engagement on the Michigan State campus. Raymond had the following to say about his relationship with an administrator at the University of Michigan: "The dean of the School of Education has been like my Godfather. He is teaching me the ropes and setting me up with what I need to prepare myself for 10 years from now." Due in part to this relationship, Raymond was offered admission and a full fellowship to the master's program in educational administration and policy at the University of Michigan, one of the best in the nation. It should be noted that full-time, postundergraduate teaching experience is usually requisite for admission to that particular graduate program.

The high achievers recognized the benefits associated with their connections to top campus administrators, and most were convinced that they would sustain those relationships after graduation from the six universities. They considered themselves fortunate, especially because their uninvolved peers were not afforded the same degrees of engagement with these administrators and the corresponding access to privileged information about resources and opportunities, including scholarships and internships. As mentioned previously, the 32 participants were collectively awarded more than \$489,000 in merit-based scholarships, awards, and prizes. From their perspectives, they would have been ineligible for many of these awards were it not for their leadership, active engagement, and relationships with various administrators on their campuses. Regarding the benefits of his relationships at Ohio State, Cullen shared the following:

President Kirwan was like "let me know if you want a letter of recommendation." It is a blessing for me to know the president that well. And it's not just the president—Dean

McGee in engineering, my advisor and other reputable faculty in mechanical engineering, the director of African American Student Services, the director of the Cultural Center, the director of the Honors Program, the director of Undergraduate Admissions . . . the list goes on and on. I have all of these people passing information my way and supporting my applications with recommendations.

When combined with their exceptional academic records and resumes, recommendation letters from their university presidents, deans, and other high-level administrators usually made the participants' applications for scholarships and awards noticeably more competitive and impressive than those submitted by other applicants, they believed. Moreover, being so involved and having endorsements from top administrators made their applications stand out and sometimes compensated for less-than-perfect GPAs, which other applicants sometimes had. "I may not have a 4.0, but I can get a letter from the Provost, which I know carries a lot of weight," Robert added. In addition to scholarships, the participants also gained access to important information about fellowship and employment opportunities. The ways in which this access was negotiated are described in the next section.

Breaking In: On Negotiating Access and Acquiring Social Capital

Access to information about various opportunities was offered to the participants via other African American male achievers (older peers) and through their own leadership in student organizations and active engagement in campus activities.

When I was a freshman, those guys stayed in my face and encouraged me to get involved in both Black and mainstream clubs here at Michigan . . . more importantly, they were the ones who introduced me to the administrators they had already built relationships with. (Daniel)

Likewise, most of the other high achievers noted that older, more seasoned African American male student leaders reached out to them early in their college careers (mostly when they were 1st-year students), introduced them to involvement opportunities on campus, and personally facilitated a connection between them and campus administrators. Several sophomores and juniors from Michigan State mentioned the senior high achievers in the study and other African American male student leaders who personally introduced them to campus administrators. Apparently, a cycle had been established.

Through their longer standing relationships with administrators on the six campuses, the older African American male student leaders also had access to information that had not always been made available to others. Jibreel asserted, "Thanks to them, I know a lot more now about how to navigate this place and locate all of the resources needed to be successful. Now, I can pass that down to other brothas' [*sic*] to help them get ahead." The high achievers believed their

White counterparts had historically been offered greater access to information and opportunities. Therefore, they deemed it important to tap into those networks, acquire the information for their own advancement, and pass the information along to other African American men. Leadership and active out-of-class engagement are the primary ways through which such access was negotiated and transmitted.

"My involvement on campus has gotten me noticed by members of the Purdue University administration who would not have opened themselves up to me in the ways they have or given me the 'inside scoop' on different opportunities," Gerrard claimed. Others spoke at length about how membership, service, and leadership in various student organizations were the ways in which relationships were established with administrators and others who had access to information networks. Regarding his election to the board of trustees at the University of Illinois, Keely offered, "I can get a meeting with any administrator relatively quickly . . . I just had lunch with the other members of the board of trustees, which is something 36,000 other students do not get the opportunity to do."

Because of the relationships they built with administrators and faculty outside of class, the high achievers said they had no problems finding out about "exclusive" awards, receiving assistance in preparing applications, and being offered gleaming recommendation letters. Many students were also nominated for awards by faculty and staff who were familiar with their skills and contributions. "I'm always getting nominated for stuff. Some administrator is always sending me e-mails telling me that I've been nominated for this and nominated for that, or that I should apply for this award because I exceed the criteria," one University of Michigan student added. The relationships cultivated through involvement, not just the involvement record itself, tended to yield the most favorable outcomes for the high achievers as they competed for different awards and honors.

As a result of having so few African American male students on the six campuses with similarly comprehensive profiles, the participants believed faculty and administrators gave them even greater attention than others, including White student leaders. An Ohio State participant put it,

I get to have the president's ear more often than the undergraduate student government president, who is White. There are so few of me, but so many of them [Whites]. Therefore, I stand out to administrators and they slide more opportunities my way.

Moreover, their leadership in predominantly Black and minority student organizations offered the high achievers a unique brand of access. Specifically, presidents, deans of students, and other administrators would often invite the high achievers to serve on major university committees to represent the needs and perspectives of racial/ethnic minority students. David shared the following perspective:

Some may call it tokenism, but for me it is about being a voice that otherwise wouldn't be represented here. Plus, I benefit too because these campus leaders get to know me and

can speak on my behalf when I need them to. And I get to know them, I get to see how their network functions behind closed doors, and I get to tap into that network as an African American student.

David was aware that he was invited to serve on these committees specifically because he worked in the Black Cultural Center and held leadership positions in the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), the Association of Minority Science Students, and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity at Purdue University.

In addition to leveraging their leadership and active engagement for access to administrators, the participants also tapped into information networks through the programming and activities sponsored by the various student organizations with which they were affiliated. University of Michigan student Edwin stated, "I used to wonder how all of these White kids knew about all of these different scholarships, internships, and whatnot. Now that I am involved in all of these student organizations, I know how." It is reported that much information flowed through clubs and organizations, and the officers were among the first to gain access. Furthermore, their resumes offered them access to opportunities for which the disengaged or solely academic achievers (as opposed to well-rounded students with good GPAs) are usually not considered.

Several stories about how the high achievers secured summer internships and full-time jobs were shared in the interviews. DeJuan noted, "Businesses look at your resume and they're looking for more than just a 4.0—they want someone who's involved and has people skills and leadership. African American males who aren't involved cannot convince employers that they have it all." The other participants were also conscious of the fact that involvement increased their employability, as it had afforded them the opportunity to gain and sharpen the skills necessary for career success. They frequently referred to the lessons they learned, conflicts they resolved, and value they added to their student organizations in employment interviews, which usually impressed company representatives. "Being involved at this level has increased my ability to compete with White people and everyone else," Paul believed. The leadership and organizational skills they gained often set the high achievers apart from other applicants. Ted, a student at Purdue, had six interviews for summer internships in 2002—he received six offers. He added:

My grades and leadership positions on campus did a lot for me as a Black man in the internship search. With so much talk about racism, which I know firsthand still exists, who would have thought that I'd compete so successfully in the internship search with these big companies?

With the exception of Indiana University (which does not offer a degree in engineering), NSBE played an influential role in the participants' access to information regarding internships. NSBE chapters on five of the campuses sponsored several company presentations, as well as internship and graduate school fairs for their

members. It should be noted that the sample included two NSBE presidents, a vice president, a secretary, and a fund-raising chair, as well as several general non-office-holding members. Officers of the chapters interacted most closely with company representatives during the program planning/ coordinating stage and during their visits to campus. Consequently, they were often granted “first dibs” on job opportunities. Others noted that companies that were looking for racial/ethnic minorities, particularly African American men, would often come to NSBE and other academically related minority student organizations (e.g., the National Association of Black Accountants and the Society of Minority Managers). It was also common for company representatives to seek referrals from administrators and faculty members. A Purdue student noted that administrators frequently offered his name as a prime candidate for employment. “It wouldn’t surprise me if they came flat out and said, ‘you’re looking for a minority? This is the person you want to take. He’s a great student leader, take him.’”

Many participants indicated that involvement sometimes superseded and cancelled out factors that have been traditionally deemed important in job and internship searches, like courses taken, academic major, and previous field-related experiences. Christopher, an English major at Indiana University, talked about the internship he had been offered (which subsequently led to a full-time job offer) in the Human Resources Division of Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Listing my involvement here at Indiana University I think definitely gave me an edge up on others I was competing with for the internship position last summer. I am not a Business major; I have had no Human Resources classes, which are business classes; nor have I had any Human Behavior or Psychology courses, which are directly linked to Human Resources. I think I interviewed well, but I also think that when they looked at my resume they said, “well you know this kid has really been involved in college, let’s give him a shot.”

Others strongly agreed that numerous career opportunities had come their way as a result of their leadership and involvement. “I am the first Black student I know who’s graduating from here and will make \$65,000 with a bachelor’s degree. It wouldn’t have been possible if I were not a leader on campus, especially as a Black man.”

The impact of involvement on future career opportunities did not stop at the internship and job searches, as several other participants shared stories of how their out-of-class experiences contributed to their admission to top graduate and professional schools. As previously mentioned, Raymond was admitted to a graduate program at the University of Michigan that usually requires full-time teaching experience because he had good grades, was extremely active on campus, and had a meaningful relationship with the dean of the School of Education. Bryant, also from the University of Michigan, was involved in a community-based after-school tutoring program for middle school students in Ann Arbor. Coincidentally, the director of

that program served on the admissions committee for the School of Public Health at the university, which happened to be the school to which Bryant was applying for graduate studies. Keely was confident that he would be admissible to an Ivy League law school after spending a year as student trustee for the University of Illinois.

The participants also recognized the long-term career-related benefits associated with the decisions they made regarding the expenditure of their out-of-class time. Lenny believed the networks he had established with other student leaders and officers of student organizations at Purdue would sustain themselves beyond the college years. More specifically, he was confident that he could call one of his fellow student leaders in the future (and vice versa) for leads on jobs or career opportunities within their companies. "All I have to do is dial a phone number and I probably won't even have to interview for the job," he commented. Several others acknowledged that associating with other students who were highly likely to succeed would reap long-term benefits. They began to take advantage of these relationships and resources while in college.

Activating Social Capital for Advancement

Beyond simply gaining access to key stakeholders and information networks, the participants leveraged their relationships to get ahead during and after college. When administrators and others told them about various scholarship, fellowship, and internship opportunities, they applied. Likewise, when they were invited to serve as student representatives on major campus committees that would afford them even greater access to influential persons, they accepted the invitations. Moreover, though several opportunities came their way, the participants also felt comfortable proactively approaching administrators and their fellow student leaders (including Whites) to get more information and to negotiate access to their networks. "Even though he's White, I am always asking the USG president to get me connected to the different networks he's connected to—I am not ashamed to do that. And he always comes through," Mike shared.

As mentioned earlier, Marshawn had established a relationship with the vice president for Student Development and Diversity on his campus. Here is one example of how that connection was used to advance Marshawn's educational goals:

Dr. Nelms was instrumental in me finding out about the opportunity to study abroad in Ghana. Once I found out what it cost, I went back to him to ask for help financing the trip. Of course he gave it to me; I saved a lot of money just because I had that relationship with him.

Similarly, Paul mentioned the conferences he had been allowed to attend in different parts of the country. "All I do is ask and the money is always given . . . not every student can access the funds to travel as much as I have." Several others

elaborated on their pursuit and acquisition of university resources to fund conference travel. In addition to financial support, the participants also relied on campus administrators for recommendation letters, even if the administrators never extended the invitation to be solicited. This was best captured in one participant's reflection:

I got up the nerve to ask the chancellor to write a letter for my grad schools apps and she said yes. Even though she never offered, I just felt like I had a close enough relationship with her that I could ask without it being weird. Not only did she write it, but she showed it to me and I was like "damn" . . . it was so moving and compelling that I literally cried right in front of her. Just imagine if I had never asked her to write it.

Others comfortably listed administrators as references on employment applications and sometimes used their access to make connections at other institutions. "My dean called the dean at . . . on my behalf" was frequently reported in the interviews among those who had applied to graduate and professional schools.

As a result of the capital they acquired, several participants from public universities ultimately enrolled in and received funding to pursue postbaccalaureate degree opportunities at elite (and expensive) private universities. Immediately after earning his bachelor's degree from Ohio State, Cullen enrolled in a PhD program in mechanical engineering at Stanford University with full funding. Keely Stewart attended law school at the University of Chicago, Jibreel Lockhart enrolled in the MBA program at Harvard, Edwin McDonald began medical school at Northwestern, and Amondo Redmond started business school at Emory. Moreover, Raymond, the participant who was admitted to the master's program in educational administration and policy at the University of Michigan, earned that degree and immediately began doctoral study in educational leadership at the University of Southern California, a private university at which he was awarded a fellowship to attend. Among those who went to work, some high achievers gained access to prestigious companies such as Deloitte & Touche, JPMorgan, VHI Networks, Bristol-Myers Squibb, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Kimberly Clark, to name a few. "Do you think a Black dude who wasn't this involved and this connected would have gotten to work for a company as prestigious as the one I am about to work for?" one participant asked. "He wouldn't even know where to get information about how to break into the networks for access to these companies."

Discussion and Implications

One student's story captures the essence of the findings that emerged in the current study. Arnold grew up poor in a crime-laden urban neighborhood and under normal circumstances would have been deemed inadmissible to college. Specifically, he graduated from high school with a 1.9 GPA but was given the chance to earn admission to Indiana University through an 8-week summer bridge program. By his own admission, he entered the institution with very little capital, social or otherwise. It is

reported that he had no connections and very little money on arrival. Like the other 31 high achievers, Arnold became connected in ways that offered access to resources, people, information, and opportunities for upward mobility. From his perspective, this all occurred through his leadership and engagement in student organizations. Despite having never left his home state previously, Arnold studied abroad at the University of Mauritius during his junior year, an experience that he attributed to his connection with a White student leader who had access to information about the opportunity. He ultimately graduated from one of the best undergraduate business schools in the country with a 3.7 GPA, an impressive set of credentials on his resume, and an extensive list of "significant others" with whom he had established sustainable relationships that would enable him to actualize his long-term entrepreneurial goals. Arnold's story epitomizes the intended outcomes of *Brown*.

As previously mentioned, discourse on the effectiveness of *Brown* has been lopsided and disproportionately focused on unfulfilled promises of the case and related legislation (Bell, 1996, 2004; Carson, 2004; Days, 2001; Donelan et al., 1994; Eckes, 2004; Green, 2004; Guinier, 2004; Klarman, 1994; Tushnet, 1991). Although racial segregation, disparities in educational outcomes, and inequitable access to opportunities remain problematic (Orfield et al., 2005), it seems important to acknowledge that some African American students (male undergraduates in this case) can gain access to what remains exclusive social networks. It has been made clear in the current study that leadership and active involvement in clubs, organizations, and activities on predominantly White campuses are the ways through such entrée is negotiated. Without exception, the 32 high achievers stated that they would not have established the connections to administrators nor would they had been made privy to information about resources, scholarships, internships, awards, and jobs were they not actively involved outside of class.

Although they had come to enjoy many privileges and perks, widespread provision of access for the larger population of African American men had not ensued. That is, the participants recognized that they were afforded opportunities that were typically not extended to African Americans, and in some instances, students in the White majority on their campuses. Notwithstanding, there was no evidence that these students were privileged at the expense of others. It is reported that their dis- or less-engaged African American peers were unaware of the existence and salience of these social networks. This belief warrants additional exploration, as some African American students may be cognizant of the benefits associated with these networks, but still for various reasons decide against pursuing access. Cuyjet (2006) and Harper (2005, 2006b) attributed a portion of the African American male attrition dilemma to low levels of educationally purposeful engagement, inside and outside of the classroom. Findings from the current study confirm the need to market more aggressively to African American male undergraduates the gains, outcomes, access, and capital associated with out-of-class engagement. If more African American men

were made aware of the privileges afforded to student leaders like the 32 in the current study, perhaps more would seek membership and leadership in student organizations. As Amondo shared, few students can call the president's direct extension or cellular phone—probably even fewer realize that they can cultivate relationships with administrators that would lead to this level of access. As a cautionary note, the importance of academic engagement (e.g., studying, completing homework assignments, preparing for class, and interacting with faculty on class-related matters) must accompany messages of encouragement to become actively involved in leadership positions and out-of-class activities.

The role of predominantly Black and minority student organizations in the acquisition of social capital is noteworthy. Some may erroneously conclude that the only way to gain access to social and information networks is through alignment with White culture and perhaps even exclusive membership in predominantly White organizations. Although they were involved to varying degrees in mainstream clubs and activities, the participants' leadership and engagement were overwhelmingly situated in Black student organizations on the six campuses. Consequently, they were often invited to serve as members on major university committees and on advisory councils for top administrators. They received high levels of attention in these venues, as few non-White students were seated around the tables. Therefore, administrators and others were more likely to extend to them even greater attention and personal/private access. A cautionary note should be offered here: Though tokenism was not deemed problematic by the participants in the current study, it could be perceived as such and internalized differently by others.

Lareau and Horvat's (1999) description of "social inclusion" and "social exclusion" merit some consideration here. Inclusiveness was negotiated through involvement in the current study. That is, the African American student leaders established for themselves track records that compelled university administrators and faculty, White student leaders, and others who had access to privileged information to include them in information networks that led to the manufacturing of productive outcomes. The participants did not give the impression that they would have been otherwise included, which is an important point. African American men who spend their time in perceivably less productive ways and choose not to become involved on campus are reportedly excluded from these social networks. It appears that the onus is on the student to become actively involved—he who decides otherwise usually misses out. This too warrants some additional research, as high academic achievers (those with strong GPAs, but who are not involved) may become connected to their professors in ways that lead to inclusive access to information about graduate school, awards, and career opportunities. For this group, however, inclusion in social networks with administrators and student leaders would be considerably less likely. According to the participants in the current study, it is through these networks that most information and opportunities for advancement flows—being included has a multitude of privileges.

Some students may acquire social capital but decide against activating it for personal, professional, or economic advancement (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). That was clearly not the case in the current study. The high achievers were well aware of the available privileges and the networks into which they had tapped; they took full advantage of this access. This is due in part to the role modeling offered by older African American male student leaders who preceded them on the six campuses. Stanton-Salazar (2001, 2004) contended that peers help mediate access to the information networks and social relationships with administrators and significant others, which is consistent with findings in the current study. Older student leaders introduced the high achievers to top administrators. Seeing upfront the value of such access and how previous cohorts of African American male college achievers leveraged their relationships with these significant others to get ahead compelled the participants to do the same.

Stanton-Salazar (2004) also discussed the nexus between social capital and economic progression. As previously mentioned, more than \$489,000 in merit-based scholarships, awards, and prizes were awarded to the 32 participants; many competed successfully for high-paying jobs right after college; and several gained admission to the most prestigious private institutions for graduate and professional study (which typically enhances one's ability to compete for the most coveted career opportunities). This illustrates the magnitude of the social and economic capital relationship. The participants reported that their applications were enhanced because they could garner strong recommendation letters from their presidents or have their deans contact deans at other institutions. In Keely's case, his interactions with fellow members of the board of trustees at the University of Illinois—all of whom were influential and well-connected in their respective social circles—was beneficial as he applied to well-regarded law schools with low acceptance rates and high starting salaries among their graduates.

Five major recommendations can be derived from the current study. First, aggressive and strategic efforts should be enacted to increase African American male student access to higher education, as greater representation within the campus population will likely yield increased numbers of students who acquire and activate social capital. As mentioned previously, the nominating administrators asserted that the 32 participants were the only African American men on campus who satisfied the criteria for participation in this study—at the time 4,954 African American male undergraduates were enrolled at the six universities, which leads to the second recommendation. Obviously, more effort must be devoted to increasing African American male student engagement in clubs, organizations, and educationally purposeful activities. Harper (2006b) offered an extensive list of practical strategies for doing so, which includes empowering actively involved African American male student leaders to recruit their disengaged same-race male peers to student organizations; systematically collecting data to determine how African American men spend their time outside of class and why their engagement in campus activities is

low; and forming an African American male engagement task force comprising stakeholders from across the campus.

Third, support (financial and otherwise) for predominantly Black and minority student clubs is imperative, as those organizations serve as the primary venues through which African American male leadership is developed, gets noticed, and becomes potentially useful to administrators who seek racial/ethnic minority student representation on important university committees. Fourth, campus administrators and others who work with African American male student leaders in advisory capacities should invite those students to introduce to them to their younger African American male peers. This point is important because it was older student leaders who often facilitated the initial introductions that ultimately evolved into rewarding relationships and access to social capital for the participants in the current study. Last, administrators should offer as much personal access and as many opportunities for meaningful interaction as possible to African American male student leaders on their campuses. The enthusiasm and appreciation with which the 32 high achievers spoke of such relationships was particularly striking.

Conclusion

The intended outcomes of *Brown*, Title VI, and related legislation were realized on the six campuses at which data were collected for the current study. The problem is that only 32 African American men came to enjoy those outcomes. Although their acquisition and expenditure of social capital and their access to information networks and resources are certainly worthy of illumination and celebration, replication and expansion are necessary next steps in the actualization of *Brown*. The participants in the current study confirmed that access to socioeconomic opportunities and sociopolitical progression are indeed possible and negotiable on predominantly White campuses. The opportunities, network access, and social inclusion they were afforded align nicely with the vision and stated purposes of *Brown*. However, that so few African American men leave public universities with as much social capital makes clear that tremendous work remains to be done before some intended outcomes of *Brown* are realized more fully and the effects are more widespread.

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