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Notes from the Back of the Academic Bus

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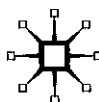
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NOTES FROM THE BACK OF THE ACADEMIC BUS

*William A. Darity, Jr.**

Racial/ethnic groups who are far more absent than present on college and university faculties face a variety of complex circumstances while entering careers as professors. I find it useful to construct a typology of departments based upon their record of inclusion and exclusion of black scholars. Borrowing from the notion of "sundown towns"—towns where no blacks were allowed to be present after sunset—I label faculties that have never had a black colleague as sundown departments. Faculties that have had at least one black faculty member in the past but have none at present can be called midnight departments. Finally, those faculties with a single black colleague are window dressing departments. It is straightforward to apply the typology to economics departments, the field among the social sciences that has proven to be the most resistant to altering their demography to include black scholars.

Sundown departments in economics include the University of West Virginia, the University of Chicago, the University of Minnesota, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the California Institute of

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Technology, the University of California at San Diego, the University of Florida, Emory University, the University of Georgia, Johns Hopkins University, Mississippi State University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Clemson University, the University of South Carolina, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, George Washington University, and Wayne State University. Midnight departments include the University of Texas at Austin, Stanford University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston University, the University of California at Riverside, and Notre Dame University. Window dressing departments include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, Georgetown University, Brown University, Harvard University, and Princeton University. Yale University with *three* black faculty members is an absolute rarity among departments at institutions that historically have had a predominantly white student body.

The worst of these departments are those that not only have no black faculty but also have a shabby record of producing black PhDs. At least some of the departments listed earlier—MIT, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UNC at Chapel Hill, and Clemson—have a recent track record of increasing the supply of black economists. But many others maintain academic segregation not only by their failure to hire black colleagues but also by their failure to expand the pool of black economists through their own graduate programs. In general, economics departments have “diversified” toward greater inclusion of scholars from other countries and toward greater inclusion of female scholars. But inclusion of black scholars, especially those who are U.S. citizens, has proven to be particularly halting in economics. Indeed, Gregory Price has demonstrated that, paradoxically, as the supply of new black doctorates in economics has gone up the probability of a PhD-granting economics department hiring a black economist has gone down.¹ This would suggest that the problem of racial exclusion in economics is not merely a pipeline problem, that is, the absence of sufficient numbers of black scholars completing PhD programs, but also a discriminatory resistance to their employment as faculty colleagues.

An additional symptom of the racial sentiment in the field of economics is the stunning evidence concerning the racial composition of the editorial boards of the seven journals published by the major organization of economists, the American Economic Association. The seven journals are the *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Economic Literature*, the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, and four new American Economic Journals: *Applied Economics*, *Economic*

Policy, *Macroeconomics*, and *Microeconomics*. Associated with these seven journals are approximately one hundred and seventy positions as editors, associate editors, coeditors, and editorial board members. *None* of the economists holding these positions is black. Regardless of whether this was an unconscious demographic oversight or a deliberate action, it is at least as unconscionable as the fact that the first female recipient of the Nobel Prize in economics received the award 50 years after it was given initially.

Conditions at the American Economic Association journals contrast with the composition of editorial boards for the leading journals in other social science disciplines. The *American Sociological Review* (ASR), the journal of the American Sociological Association, lists France Winddance Twine among its editors, and Prudence Carter, John Sibley Butler, Orlando Patterson, and Cedric Herring among its editorial board members. Indeed there is a sufficient number of black sociologists having an editorial role at ASR to yield a group embodying substantial ideological diversity—from Butler and Patterson on the right to Twine and Carter on the left. Admittedly, though, the editorial board for the *American Journal of Sociology* based at the University of Chicago strongly resembles the demographics of the boards for the American Economic Association journals.

The American Political Science Association's journal, the *American Political Science Review*, includes Claudine Gay as an editor and Robert Gooding-Williams and Melissa Nobles on the editorial board. The journal of the American Anthropological Association, *American Anthropologist*, has about fifty members on the editorial board, two of whom are Irma McClaurin and Karla Slocum, both black anthropologists. Only economics has achieved the distinction of a null set of black economists on the editorial boards of the journals published by its major organization.

* * *

The coin of the realm of an academic career is publications. The only insulation scholars have, particularly if they are engaged in ideologically challenging research or if they are from a group that is presumed to be cognitively inferior, is to build a strong publication record. In the humanities and in some branches of the social sciences—especially anthropology and political science—books published by academic presses are valued. But in sociology, and especially in economics, articles in refereed journals are what matters. Moreover, there is a ranking of journals that leads article placement to take an important role

in how a scholar's portfolio is evaluated. Some departments actually provide their faculty members with a list of periodicals in their field and indicate how many points literally will be scored by getting a hit in a particular journal.

In economics the typical list will locate journals such as the *American Economic Review*, the *Economic Journal*, *Econometrica*, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (QJE), the *Journal of Political Economy* (JPE), and the *Review of Economics and Statistics* at the top. These are so-called "general" journals that ostensibly consider papers in all areas of economics in contrast with the so-called "specialty" journals that accept work in narrower subfields of economics, for example, the *Journal of Human Resources* for labor economics or the *Journal of Economic History* for economic history. A few of the "specialty" journals—such as the two just mentioned—are held in very high regard on the usual ranking list, but the most prestigious journals are, more often than not, "general" journals.

The QJE and the JPE also function as "house" journals. They are intimately connected to the economics departments at Harvard and at the University of Chicago, respectively. For a scholar to place a paper in either one of these journals it is vital to have a connection to one of those departments, either as a faculty member, as a former graduate student, or as a presenter at a seminar there. So these two journals while highly prestigious are not genuinely "open" journals.

The openness of any journal is contingent on the perspective and practices of the editor, associate editors, and editorial board. A cautious editor committed solely to "normal science" will be reluctant to take seriously submissions that do not conform to conventional standards of quality and acceptability. More adventurous editors are more likely to be found heading journals that are not among the very top ranked. They will take greater risks with the papers they accept, sensing that perhaps one of those more creative papers somehow will have an impact and affect the direction of inquiry in the field. It only takes one or two papers from a less prestigious periodical to make a splash over the course of three to five years to alter the profile of the journal.

What is tricky here is the fact that the articles in the more prestigious journals tend to have a wider audience. Many more economists will at least scan the cover of the *American Economic Review* to determine whether there are one or two articles they actually will read in a given issue than say, one of my favorite journals, the *Journal of Socioeconomics*. This is partially because the *American Economic Review* automatically goes to all members of the American Economic

Association as a benefit of their dues payment. But it is also because the stature of the journal means that the workaday economist can convince himself or herself that they have a sense of what is happening in the field by at least reviewing the *Review*. They may never know that far more interesting and provocative articles are being published in the *Journal of Socioeconomics*.

To the extent that the assessment of a scholar's portfolio is not solely dictated by the placement of their articles but also by citation count, the authority of the existing array of highly ranked journals is reinforced. Since more people see them, placing an article there raises the odds that the article will have a higher than average citation count. The brave editor of the less prestigious journal is hoping that the madly original article he or she has decided to accept and publish will make waves and garner citations, but it will have to do so without a boost from the journal itself. The author of the madly original article probably tried initially to place it with Big Journal but failed and, following the wise rule that it is better to publish somewhere than not to publish at all, turned to Small Journal. With some self-promotion and serendipity the article in Small Journal may still gain wide visibility. But it is less likely.

For black scholars oriented toward a mainstream research agenda, placing papers in the top journals largely will be a question of producing work that is technically of a high quality and of developing the networks that will give their work a real hearing at the higher ranked journals. For the black economist who is challenging orthodoxy things are more difficult. Indeed, they become especially difficult if the black economist is not only challenging orthodoxy but doing research on race.²

Jewish scholars studying their people or Asian scholars studying their people do not tend to run into the same skepticism and resistance for their work as black scholars studying their people. If the black scholar produces a paper that says black-white disparities are due primarily to internal black cultural or behavioral dysfunctionality the article may get published readily, even in a premier journal. If the black scholar produces a paper that concludes that black-white disparities are primarily attributable to white racism and the operation of white privilege, he or she probably will have to move from Big Journal to Small Journal to get a fair hearing for their work. Indeed, I would contend that a white scholar reaching similar conclusions would have better odds of placing the work in Big Journal.

Two anecdotes are pertinent here. First, I recall a referee report that Rodgers and Spriggs received when they had a paper rejected at

Big Journal that subsequently was published in the *Review of Black Political Economy*.³ The referee said pointedly that a major problem with their paper was the fact that they seemed to be assuming that blacks and whites had equal intelligence. Second, I recall submitting a paper to Big Journal that reported on estimates of the magnitude of racial discrimination in American labor markets between 1880 and 2000 and having the paper returned to me by the editor without it even being sent to referees, allegedly because it was not of sufficient "general" interest for the readership of the journal.

A raw careerist might have reacted to these types of rebuffs by altering what their research says. I do not profess to have high integrity in all arenas, but my research program is one where I try to maintain my allegiance to the pursuit of truth as strongly as I can. So an opportunistic change in position is not an option for me. But I can continue to attempt to place work of mine that is less charged—work that is not necessarily on racial inequality—in Big Journal while finding a home for my more charged research with more receptive editors at less highly ranked journals. Of course, such a strategy requires double duty—doing work on both fronts simultaneously. The black scholar's additional burden?

* * *

Black scholars who do obtain faculty positions must be willing to move. At minimum they must be willing to move until they receive tenure; they may still need to be willing to move thereafter. This advice applies to nonblack scholars as well, but there is a uniquely precarious position faced by black scholars. Things happen to black scholars that do not happen to nonblack scholars. I know firsthand of two instances during the past academic years where black assistant professors undergoing second-year, pretenure reviews were told that the reviews are pro forma, everyone gets a positive one, and there was nothing to worry about. In both cases the young scholars received brutal reports from their department chairs, detailing expectations of them that went far beyond the accomplishments of the existing faculty. In one case the faculty styles themselves as politically progressive and certainly would be stunned by any intimation that their actions are racist. My advice to both of the junior scholars is to move.

After all, the other item of currency in the world of the university is mobility. It is valuable for your department to know that there are other places that want you. Of course, a scholar's degree of mobility

is closely related to their research portfolio. Publications or imminent publications are vital to this process.

I think that every assistant professor should be on the market the year before their tenure decision is made by their department and university, for at least two reasons. First, the odds of receiving an external offer are greater if one is in the market before the tenure decision is made. A negative tenure decision creates a scarring effect that may make it much more difficult to obtain an offer from another department. Second, having an external offer in hand increases the likelihood that a scholar will receive tenure at their home institution.

Keep in mind, though, that once you enter the market you have to be willing to leave. If your home institution does not at least match the offer you received from another school, it is time to go.

* * *

The exclusionary practices that are so pronounced in the field of economics have an obvious subtext—the implicit (and occasionally explicit) belief in the inferiority of the black scholar. I warrant that the rhetoric that would be used to justify the complete absence of black scholars from the editorial boards of the American Economic Association journals would have something to do with the notion that the economists invited to serve were all selected on the basis of "merit." This is simply another instance of the fetishization of "merit" as a rationalization for discriminatory outcomes. It presumes that there would be no improvement in the quality of the editorial practices of the journals and ultimately their content if the composition of their editorial boards were different. Other disciplines in the social sciences have begun to reach a different conclusion. Economics remains the most backward discipline on this score.

In this context, it is worth noting how many key theoretical concepts would be missing from the social sciences, especially economics, if not for the contributions of black scholars. Just to name a few: discounted dynamic programming, stereotype threat, oppositionality, surplus labor, the dual economy, the plantation economy, color-blind racism, programmed retardation, modernity, blaming the victim, educational subnormality, deficit models, resiliency, social capital, legacy effects, neocolonialism, postcolonial melancholia, double consciousness, preemptive extermination, racialization, and cultural representation.

NOTES

1. Gregory N. Price, "The Problem of the 21st Century: Economics Faculty and the Color Line," *Journal of Socioeconomics* 38.2 (2009): 331-343.
2. Patrick I. Mason, Samuel L. Myers, Jr., and William Darity, Jr., "Is There Racism in Economic Research?" *European Journal of Political Economy* 21 (2005): 755-761.
3. W. M. Rodgers and W. E. Spriggs, "What Does the AFQT Really Measure?: Race, Wages, Schooling and the AFQT Score," *Review of Black Political Economy* 24.4 (June 1996): 13-46.

CONSTRUCTING JUNIOR FACULTY OF COLOR AS STRUGGLERS: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TENURE AND PROMOTION¹

*Stephanie A. Fryberg**

Shortly after I became an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Arizona, my graduate advisor emailed me a speech by the President of Princeton University, Shirley M. Tilghman. The speech, "Changing the Demographics: Recruiting, Retaining, and Advancing Women Scientists in Academia," focused on the underrepresentation of women in science and engineering. President Tilghman, a microbiologist, espoused the benefits of increasing diversity for the sciences and for the country more generally, all the while emphasizing the academy's "moral obligation" to change:

For every girl who dreams of becoming a scientist or engineer, there is a moral obligation on our part to do everything we can to even the playing field so her chances rest on her (dare I say innate?) abilities and her determination, just as it does for her male counterparts. It is not sufficient to shrug our shoulders, invoke all the historical reasons for the situation, call upon the leaky pipeline, or bemoan the difficulty of changing culture.²

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