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The Black Church, Building Communities

America is in a position of global preeminence. Our economy remains the world's strongest, and we are at the center of a technological revolution unprecedented in human history. African Americans are sharing in the nation's prosperity. Black unemployment and poverty are down. And according to the Joint Center's latest national opinion survey, more than half of all blacks feel they are financially better off today than a year ago.

Nevertheless, by every measure of social and economic progress, blacks still lag far behind whites. Now, more than ever, African Americans must pursue their hopes and aspirations in the complex arena of public policy. We must marshal all the resources of the black community to address concerns in the areas of economic development, health care, education, civil rights, environmental justice, and political empowerment.

Leadership is critical. But we must not just rely on political and civil rights leadership, although they are vital. Today, as in other periods in our history, we must turn to the black church for the kind of overarching leadership that only it can provide as a rallying ground for activism. With its dedication to improving the quality of life for those at the economic bottom of our society, the black church has always been a force for social change. It has the moral authority to convene and lead our vast network of religious, civil rights, and service organizations, voluntary associations, and community institutions, as well as a diverse array of influential leaders.

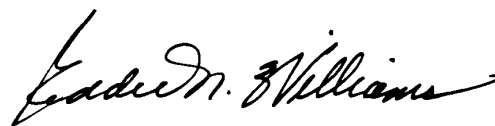
Only the black church can mobilize our organizations and leaders in a collective effort to make a long-term commitment to one another as well as a commitment to work to achieve mutually agreed upon principles and goals. Thus, the strategic vision for the black church should be to move us toward collective action in the political and policy arenas.

It is one thing to recognize the black church's potential for creating stronger, more vibrant communities. It is quite another to turn that vision into action. According to the Foundation for the Mid South, congregations and their leaders seeking to embrace new roles as community builders should develop new skills and expertise. They must know the needs of their communities and the program options for meeting those needs. And they must also develop and manage a process for change in their congregations while they address community concerns. The foundation also offered other recommendations:

- *Pastoral development.* A church's clergy is the strongest force for educating and motivating the church's members. Developing pastoral leadership is critical to all successful faith-based community development.
- *Development of interfaith partnerships with other denominations and congregations.* Community building is more than a one-organization job. Divisions based on ideology and "turf" must be discarded if the community as a whole is to advance.

- *Development of secular partnerships with government, business, and nonprofit organizations.* Community development is not just the job of government, there is also a need for corporate citizenship and philanthropy from religious institutions and other nonprofits.
- *Develop ways to teach economic development, including entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.* Business development goes hand-in-hand with community building.

These are offered as ways to strengthen the collaboration among black churches and harness their energies to attend the ills of our communities—something from which we can only benefit. ■



PRESIDENT



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Model Institutions in Science Education

An Innovative Program Is Expanding the Pool of Students From Underrepresented Populations Studying to Be Scientists and Engineers

by *Walter E. Massey*

In the early 1990s, when I was the director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), my colleagues and I began working on a plan to engage more students from the nation's underrepresented populations in entering careers in the fields of science, engineering, and mathematics. To achieve our goals, we decided, fundamental changes would have to take place in the way young Americans pursuing studies in these areas are educated, recruited onto college campuses, and supported throughout their undergraduate and graduate years.

Today, thanks to those at NSF who committed themselves to a project that came to be known as the Model Institutions for Excellence (MIE), our early vision is becoming a reality. Now four years old, the MIE program is supported not only by NSF but also by NASA and the federal departments of Agriculture and the Interior. It has four major goals: (1) to increase the number of students from underrepresented populations with majors in science, engineering, and mathematics; (2) to sustain the students through their college experience; (3) to support them in their efforts to pursue graduate education; and (4) to place them in meaningful science careers.

Addressing Inadequate Academic Preparation

Science education in colleges and universities should be more inquiry-based. It should give students opportunities to interact with role models in the public and private research sectors. And it should accommodate students from underrepresented groups in our society who need special attention to overcome inadequate academic preparation before entering college.

These perceptions have been borne out by my experiences as a student, scientist, and college administrator. I can trace my concern about science education, especially for underrepresented students, to 1968, when I had just accepted a position at the University of Illinois as an assistant professor of physics. As I encountered a number of African American students in my freshman physics class, I found some of them poorly prepared and lacking in the fundamentals of mathematics. This convinced me that institutional changes were necessary.

At the University of Illinois—where I became the first chairman of the Black Faculty and Staff Association and an advisor to the Black Student Association—I devoted as much time to issues concerning the educational needs of

African American students as I did to my own research. Later, at Brown University, I developed a program in which college students were trained to teach science and mathematics in urban public schools.

By the time I took the reins of the National Science Foundation, my thinking on how to change education in science, engineering, and mathematics had evolved significantly. My colleagues at the NSF and I developed the Model Institutions for Excellence program to address a broad range of educational needs in ways that are tailored to the particular requirements of each participating institution. MIE supports student scholarships and helps enhance facilities, develop faculty, upgrade academic training, and strengthen management capabilities, among other activities. There was a clear understanding that the commitment to participating institutions would have to be sustained over the long term and that the program would have to be sufficiently funded. For those reasons, we determined that the program should be established at a small number of institutions rather than allow its resources to be diffused among many.

In 1993, when several federal agencies agreed to sponsor the MIE program, they invited institutions of higher learning to compete for opportunities to participate. Colleges and universities that had a proven track record of educating underrepresented populations in science, engineering, and mathematics, or schools that had the potential to do so, were solicited. Fifty-seven schools competed and six were selected: Bowie State University, in Maryland; Oglala Lakota College, in South Dakota; Spelman College, in Georgia; Xavier University, in Louisiana; Universidad Metropolitana of Puerto Rico; and The University of Texas at El Paso, in Texas.

Links to Labs

The National Science Foundation has made resources available to create a formal network that links the MIE institutions to nationally recognized graduate schools, research laboratories, and corporations. One example of this collaboration was a meeting hosted in the fall of 1998 by the Ernest Orlando Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory at Berkeley, California. Representatives of the MIE schools at this meeting explored opportunities for their students to participate in collaborative research at national laboratories.

Corporate support has been strong as well. Both Texas Instruments and IBM are providing technical assistance to MIE schools to help them build relationships with the

Dr. Massey, the president of Morehouse College, is the former director of the National Science Foundation and Argonne National Laboratory.

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research community. These companies have committed staff expertise, hosted seminars for participating schools, and sent representatives to visit MIE institutions to determine their needs.

From the federal government, the U.S. Bureau of the Census recently announced that it will solicit technical assistance from the MIE schools for the year 2000 Census, expanding research opportunities for MIE students. Faculty and students will collect data and help mobilize community and volunteer efforts to increase participation in the census. In exchange, the Bureau will offer students job and internship opportunities, giving students a chance to hone their computer and math skills by studying demographic issues.

Spawning Innovative Initiatives

As originally hoped, the MIE program is giving the participating universities a free hand to develop academic solutions that best meet their institutional needs. This independence has fostered some innovative and promising initiatives. At Bowie State, a small, historically black university located just outside of Washington, D.C., the MIE program has facilitated a doubling of the enrollment and increased the graduation rate of its science, engineering, and math students by 50 percent in its initial stage. Bowie State's Summer Academy gives a boost to incoming freshmen by giving them special attention in math and information technology. The university also uses a computerized system to track student progress. In partnership with NASA, Bowie State has developed a curriculum in mission control and operations and has set up a NASA satellite control center. The only facility of its kind in the country, the center controls and operates a satellite that transfers data to earth. Participating students earn NASA's command controller and space analyst certification.

The Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, South Dakota, mainly serves American Indian students on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. This college is building a telecommunications network with MIE assistance to address its unique challenge of educating a decentralized, reservation-based student body spread out over nine campuses.

Through Oglala Lakota's telecommunications network, each campus can access distance learning through five video conferencing systems that allow two-way audio-video instruction. More than a dozen courses in the areas of science, engineering and mathematics are expected to be offered to members of the consortium through this technology. Oglala Lakota also has increased the size of its faculty with MIE support, hiring new instructors in the fields of chemistry, math, biology, earth science, and physics.

At historically black Spelman College, a highly selective liberal arts college for women in Atlanta, fully 35 percent of its students are in the sciences, a high enrollment. MIE funding has enabled the chemistry department at Spelman to redesign its laboratories to facilitate the use of computer-aided microscopes, to make courses more interactive, and

to create an instructional climate that promotes analytical learning by more closely integrating laboratory findings into classroom work. Summer research programs have increased opportunities for students to participate in advanced research under leading experts in a variety of science fields. Spelman is also addressing the issue of student retention by providing freshmen with tutoring in introductory science and math courses.

Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans is the only African American Catholic university in the country. The nation's number-one ranked university in placing black students in medical school, Xavier also produces the most African American physics, chemistry, and biology graduates in the country. At Xavier, MIE funds primarily have been used to improve infrastructure. The university has broken ground for a 106,000-square-foot addition to the science building, which will house a Center for Environmental Programs and the biology, chemistry, computer science, and physics/engineering departments. It will include laboratories and teaching facilities with some of the most advanced equipment available.

Founded in 1969, the Universidad Metropolitana (UMET) of Puerto Rico has evolved from a community college to a major urban institution serving more than 4,500 commuter students. Through partnerships and agreements with various industry and research institutions as well as with national laboratories, UMET is becoming recognized for its programs in biology and computer science.

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) serves a high concentration of Hispanic students on both sides of the Mexican American border. This urban, largely commuter, majority-Hispanic campus produces more Hispanic students who seek doctoral degrees than any other university in the country. UTEP uses a portion of its MIE funds for a program designed to help acclimate freshmen to the demands of college life. "Clusters" instruction is provided to groups of students in English, math, and science by a team of professors who are familiar with the academic progress of each student, making students better able to coordinate course assignments. The Cluster program emphasizes teamwork among the students, who are encouraged to study together. Students in the Cluster program are more likely to graduate on time and to finish with higher grade point averages than students outside the program. UTEP has also used its MIE funds to help develop a multifunctional, state-of-the-art facility to serve the needs of undergraduate engineering and science students.

Because studies have shown that extending the time commuter students stay on college grounds can enhance academic performance, UTEP decided it was essential to build its Academic Center for Engineers and Scientists (ACES) as a magnet that would keep students on campus. The 5,000-square-foot building serves as a learning center as well as a place where students can meet with campus recruiters or learn about new job opportunities.

The Model Institutions for Excellence program is still in its infancy. But early returns from the participating institu-

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Soft Skills: Bridge or Barrier to Employment?

Studies Show That the Social and Communication Skills Necessary to Succeed in the Workplace Can Be Taught to Those Who Lack Them

by Cecilia A. Conrad and Wilhelmina A. Leigh

As America's economic boom continues, unemployment rates in some regions of the country have dipped below 2 percent. Nevertheless, many young African Americans still cannot find jobs. According to some researchers, one of the reasons is that they lack "soft skills," the personal traits and social adeptness that are distinct from but often as important as specific job skills. Unfortunately, policymakers, community service providers, and the job seekers themselves often do not know what these soft skills are, much less how to acquire them. Under a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Joint Center has investigated three fundamental questions about soft skills:

- What are soft skills, and do they really matter?
- Are entry-level minority workers less likely to have these skills than entry-level workers of other races? If so, does this deficit help account for the persistent disparities among whites, blacks, and other racial and ethnic groups in hiring, promotion, and other employment experiences?
- What training programs are available to help minority workers develop soft skills, and are they effective in helping workers find and keep jobs?

What Are Soft Skills, and Do They Matter?

Soft skills as defined in scholarly literature are nontechnical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in a specific employment environment to: deliver information or services to customers and co-workers; work effectively as a member of a team; learn or acquire the technical skills necessary to perform a task; inspire the confidence of supervisors and management; and understand and adapt to the cultural norms of the workplace.

Soft skills fall into four categories: problem solving and other cognitive skills; oral communication skills; personal qualities and work ethic; and interpersonal and teamwork skills. Problem solving and other cognitive skills involve the identification of problems and the formulation and evaluation of alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits. Oral communication skills include both the ability to speak well and the ability to listen well, embracing the ability to give and understand instructions and to communicate in ways appropriate to the situation and the audience. Personal qualities important to job performance include self-esteem, self-management, responsibility, and motivation. Interpersonal and teamwork skills are those

needed to negotiate with others, to participate as a member of a team, to serve clients and customers in a way that meets their expectations, and to resolve conflicts maturely.

In a survey of four major metropolitan areas in different regions of the country—Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles—Harry Holzer, an economist at Michigan State University, found that more than 50 percent of entry-level jobs required social and interpersonal skills. A survey conducted in Los Angeles and Detroit by Phillip Moss and Chris Tilly, economists at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell, determined that 86 percent of employers included soft skills among their most important hiring criteria. National inventories consistently find that employers list skills in communication, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving along with personal qualities such as self-esteem and motivation as critical for workforce productivity.

Soft Skills and Black Workers

Soft skills are difficult to measure. Most pre-employment tests are of little value in assessing interpersonal or teamwork skills. Even in personal interviews, employers must rely on body language and facial expressions to assess such qualities as self-esteem and motivation. Faced with this lack of information, many employers are likely to make judgments based on stereotypes. This is unfortunate for young urban African Americans from low-income families, because employer stereotypes about them are mostly negative.

In 1991 and 1992, Moss and Tilly conducted 66 interviews with representatives from 55 businesses in Detroit and Los Angeles. About one-third of those interviewed characterized black men as defensive, hostile, and having a "difficult attitude." Two-fifths characterized black men as unmotivated employees. This mirrored the results of a previous survey by sociologists Joleen Kirshenman of the University of Chicago and Kathryn Neckerman of Columbia University. They found that about two-fifths (38%) of employers in Chicago and Cook County in 1988 and 1989 ranked blacks last in work ethic compared to whites and Hispanics. Another eight percent of employers ranked blacks and Hispanics as sharing last place.

Because soft skills are difficult to assess, the measures used to gauge them have been problematic. A few researchers point to lower average scores on standardized tests as evidence that African Americans have poorer problem-solving skills than others. Exactly what the test scores measure, however, is the subject of intense dispute.

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Dr. Conrad is associate professor of economics at Pomona College and adjunct scholar at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Dr. Leigh is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.

Soft Skills

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Among employers, the most prevalent criticism of black workers concerns their work ethic.

One way to look at work ethic is to measure a worker's willingness to take a job. Economists do this by identifying a worker's "reservation wage"—the lowest wage a worker will accept to take a job. In surveys, young black males report reservation wages similar to those of their white counterparts, when asked if they would accept a specific low-skilled job, such as dishwasher, at various hourly rates. However, when they are asked about the wages they would accept for the jobs they are currently seeking, their reservation wages are 11 to 13 percent above those reported by whites with similar qualifications. Although some observers believe this finding confirms one prevalent notion—that young blacks are not generally interested in working for a living—it isn't clear that responses to hypothetical job offers provide any information about actual behavior.

Tardiness and absenteeism provide another way to measure willingness to work. According to Ron Ferguson, an economist at Harvard University, and Randall Filer, an economist at Hunter College of the City University of New York, black youths are absent from work more often than white youths. However, a study of postal workers by Craig Zwerling and Hilary Silver, sociologists at the University of Iowa and Brown University respectively, found that black employees in this field were less likely to be absent from their jobs than were their white counterparts. Some of the racial differences in absenteeism may be explained by differences in job characteristics. Absenteeism is higher in jobs that are unpleasant or dangerous, and black workers are more likely than others to occupy such jobs. Indeed, research that controlled for job characteristics, work experience, and marital status found that blacks were no more likely than whites to be tardy for work. Thus, there isn't much evidence that African American youth have fewer soft skills than other entry-level workers, but the stereotype persists.

Teaching Soft Skills

Regardless of whether African American youth are more lacking in soft skills than others, effective training for those who lack these skills is needed. Also, those who do acquire soft skills through training programs need certification of that fact to combat employer stereotypes.

A recent study conducted by the Joint Center found great variety among the 54 soft skills training programs examined. Although 63 percent of the programs offered training in all four soft skills categories, virtually all of the programs offer training in two of the categories: personal qualities/work ethic and interpersonal and teamwork skills.

The programs differ, however, in the populations served and in the structure of the training offered. Nearly 70 percent of the programs target youth, while 60 percent are aimed at adults. Welfare recipients are the focus of 40 percent of the programs, and 15 percent are designed to

meet the needs of disabled and homeless persons. Although a number of the programs serve more than one of these populations, only four percent serve all of them.

Some of the programs surveyed rely primarily on classroom instruction, including Added Chance, in Chicago, and Jobs for America's Graduates, which has a national network of local affiliates. Other programs provide a mix of classroom and experiential learning. YouthBuild Rockford (Illinois), a program that prepares young high school dropouts for careers in the construction trades, divides its program week into two days of on-site job training, two days of academic or job skills training, and one day of community service. The Factory program, operated by the Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center in Chicago, devotes the first half of each day of training to individualized academic instruction and the second half to vocational education and hands-on skills training. Most programs are not residential, although one important exception is the Job Corps.

Several programs offer training in both technical skills and soft skills. Goodwill Industries of Lane County, Oregon, offers training in soft skills to complement its vocational training for welfare recipients and other low-income adults. For example, in the training for production and manufacturing jobs Goodwill includes instruction in teamwork skills, while training for telephone and customer services emphasizes the development of cognitive and communication skills. The daily training routine for welfare recipients at IndEx, Inc., in Tulsa, Oklahoma, includes four hours of work experience plus four hours of customized classroom education. As part of their paid work experience, IndEx enrollees receive training in pneumatics, hydraulics, and electronics, as well as in customer services, computer use, and light manufacturing.

The vast majority (87 percent) of the programs studied by the Joint Center offer follow-up services for their graduates, which include future job placements, job counseling, and additional training. Most follow-up services are available for at least a month, although some are provided for much longer periods. The Center for Employment and Training in San Jose, California, which has trained the unemployed and underemployed since 1967, places no time limit on these services.

Documented Success

Given the array of soft skills training programs and the variety of methods and procedures they employ, the challenge is to assess which ones are doing the best job of helping workers acquire these skills. Job placement rates are perhaps one of the best measures of success, and several programs have been highly successful in placing their trainees in jobs. Placement rates in the range of from 50 to 80 percent have been recorded from programs that reported their results. For example, the Chicago Commons West Humboldt Employment Training Center and the Factory program, also in Chicago, both achieved rates of 50 percent. The STRIVE program's East Harlem Employment Service was at the high end of the spectrum with a placement rate of 80 percent of their graduates.

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Leon Higginbotham—The People’s Judge

*One of America’s Most Prominent Federal Jurists, Legal Scholars,
and Advocates for Civil Rights Dies*

by David C. Ruffin

On December 14, A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., one of the nation’s most distinguished jurists, died in Boston after suffering a stroke. He was 70. Self-described as a “survivor of segregation,” Higginbotham not only was an outstanding federal judge, he was also an influential legal scholar, historian, and champion of affirmative action and civil rights. In recognition of his service to the nation, in 1997 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor. “He was the epitome of the people’s lawyer,” said a friend, Harvard University law professor Charles J. Ogletree, Jr. “Despite his individual merits and accomplishments, he never hesitated to lend a hand to the poor, the voiceless, the powerless and the downtrodden.”

Higginbotham sat on the federal bench for 29 years. From 1990 until his retirement, he presided as Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, which has jurisdiction over Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the Virgin Islands. Only three other African American judges have headed a circuit court, whose rulings have more influence on the law than those of any other judicial body except the U.S. Supreme Court.

Higginbotham did not come from a background of privilege. His working-class parents struggled to give him a chance to rise out of the impoverished Ewing Park neighborhood in Trenton, New Jersey, where he attended segregated schools. Experiences with racism served to steel Higginbotham in his opposition to discrimination. He recounted that after graduating from Yale Law School in 1952, he received an invitation to interview for a position at one of Philadelphia’s premier law firms. When he appeared in person, he was received with something less than warmth. Apparently, the firm assumed that this Yale graduate would be white. The interviewing attorney, though impressed with his resume, told him, “Of course, you know there’s nothing I can do for you.”

Higginbotham turned to public service, becoming assistant district attorney in Philadelphia. He later developed a private law practice, and from 1960 to 1962 he was president of the Philadelphia chapter of the NAACP. Black presidential advisor Louis Martin brought Higginbotham to the notice of President John F. Kennedy, and in 1962 Kennedy appointed him the first African American to sit on the Federal Trade Commission. He was named to the Federal District Court in Philadelphia in 1964, at age 36, by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter elevated him to the U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit, where he assumed the post of chief judge in 1990 when Judge John J. Gibbons stepped down from that position. In 1993 Higginbotham retired—in his fashion—from the bench. An admitted workaholic, he remained active, teaching at the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard, as well as serving as a director on several corporate boards. In 1994, Nelson Mandela asked Higginbotham to serve as a mediator during South Africa’s first elections in which blacks could vote.

Higginbotham will also be remembered as an influential legal scholar. In his book, *In the Matter of Color*, published in 1978, he examined the legal underpinnings of slavery and racial oppression in America going back to the colonial era. This volume was followed by *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process*, in 1996.

In recent years, Higginbotham became alarmed at efforts to reverse the civil rights gains he’d fought for so ardently both on and off the bench. He eloquently expressed his concerns in an open letter to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas which he published in 1991 after Thomas publicly denigrated the value of the civil rights movement. He wrote, “In my lifetime I have seen African Americans denied the right to vote, the opportunities to a proper education, to work and to live where they choose. I have seen and known segregation And I have seen brave courageous people, black and white, give their lives for the civil rights cause....But today...I wonder whether their magnificent achievements are in jeopardy. I wonder whether (and how far) the majority of the Supreme Court will continue to retreat from protecting the rights of the poor, women, the disadvantaged, minorities and the powerless.”

Active in public affairs to his last days, on December 1 Higginbotham testified before the House Judiciary Committee’s impeachment inquiry. He joined other legal experts in expressing the view that there were no grounds for the impeachment of President Clinton.

Throughout his life, Leon Higginbotham remained an idealist, optimistic that America could be made fairer and more caring as a nation. Joint Center President Eddie N. Williams says, “As a jurist, scholar, advocate, and national leader, Leon made lasting contributions to law and social justice in America. We are indebted to him for his wisdom, passion, and persistence in advancing the cause of civil rights and making America a better place.” ■

Science Education

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tions suggest that it holds promise for increasing the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups in our society pursuing studies in the fields of science, engineering, and mathematics. It has been tremendously fulfilling for me to have played a role in getting this program off the ground. Moreover, I am gratified that this program is expanding the pool of young scientists and engineers who will soon be available to join the public and private research communities and the corporate sector, and who will thereby serve our nation. ■

Soft Skills

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Clearly, these programs are doing something right. Features that have enabled them to achieve such success include: combining both group and individual instruction; employing teachers and peer counselors whose backgrounds are similar to those of the trainees; and making use of job coaches, people who offer support and feedback to newly hired workers and give them advice on work related problems and other issues. Both Goodwill Industries of North Florida and Home Care Associates of Philadelphia pair their new employees with job coaches for three months. Home Care requires monthly meetings between employees and coaches during this period.

Although the debate continues over whether a soft skills deficit exists among African American youth, many employers certainly believe that it exists. As long as employers harbor this belief and act on it, the harm to young African American workers will continue. Many programs around the country provide soft skills training with documented success in the placement and retention of their graduates. These programs are effective in reducing this barrier to employment for the unemployed and underemployed. ■

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TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

Federal Judgeships Left Hanging

As the 105th Congress adjourned, unfinished business in the U.S. Senate included 21 federal judicial nominees that were sent back to the White House after the Senate failed to confirm them by the end of the session. More than half of these nominees were minorities and women—including four African Americans, two Latinos, and one Asian American. In all, 55 Article Three seats in the federal judiciary remain vacant, including district and appellate judgeships. Article Three refers to the area of the federal Constitution with jurisdiction over the judicial branch of the government. Currently there are 846 Article Three federal judgeships in the country.

The Republican-controlled Senate has been particularly uncooperative with President Clinton over judicial nominees. The situation is not as bad as it was a year ago, however, when 85 federal judgeships—one out of every 10—were vacant. At the end of 1997, the Senate had only confirmed 36 of the president's Article Three nominees, leaving 51 (including eight African Americans) to be sent over to the second session of this Congress. Last January, conservative Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist

chastised the Senate for its inaction. He charged that the high number of vacancies threatened to erode "the quality of justice that traditionally has been associated with the federal judiciary." In 1998, the Senate confirmed 63 Article Three judges.

One of the unconfirmed black nominees, James A. Beaty, was selected by Clinton to serve on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. A 1974 graduate of the University of North Carolina Law School, Beaty practiced law in Winston-Salem, N.C. In 1981 he was appointed Special Superior Court Judge and, in 1989, Resident Superior Court Judge, for Forsyth County. In 1994, Clinton appointed Beaty as U.S. district judge for the Middle District of North Carolina.

The other three black nominees were up for confirmation as judges in the federal district court system. Their resumes follow.

William James Hibbler received his law degree from DePaul University and began his legal career in public service in 1974, working as assistant state's attorney for Cook County (Chicago). In 1977 he left to go into private practice. In 1986 Hibbler became associate judge in the Cook County Circuit Court, where he still serves. For the last nine years, Hibbler has also taught at the Chicago/Kent College of Law.

Ronnie L. White earned his law degree from Kansas City School of Law in 1983, and upon graduating went to work as a trial attorney for the Office of the Public Defender in St. Louis. After several years he left the public defender's office to join a private law firm, but shortly thereafter he ran for and won election to the Missouri House of Representatives, where he served from 1989 to 1993. After leaving the legislature he served as city counselor for the City of St. Louis and later as judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals for the Eastern District. He currently sits on the bench of the Missouri Supreme Court.

Legrome Derek Davis received his law degree from the Rutgers-Camden School of Law. Davis served for three years as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia, and in 1987 joined a Philadelphia law firm. He currently teaches at the Temple University School of Law's Trial Advocacy Program and serves on the board of several community based organizations in Philadelphia.

Since the 21 nominations were not acted upon in either session of the 105th Congress, they have been returned to the White House. It is now up to the President to decide whether he will forward their names again in the 106th Congress. Conservative judges appointed by Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush have tipped not only the Supreme Court but many appeals

and district courts across the country to conservative majorities. Between them, Reagan and Bush appointed 580 federal judges, most of them white males; their appointments include five of the nine sitting Supreme Court justices. Only about three percent (20 individuals) of their judicial appointees were African Americans. Minorities have good cause to be concerned by the ideological and racial imbalances in the judiciary that are the legacy of the Reagan-Bush appointments: decisions by these new majorities have already undermined many vital precedents in the areas of affirmative action, voting rights (legislative redistricting), minority business set-asides, equity in criminal justice, and environmental law.

Other Unfinished Business

When the Congress reconvenes, a major item on its agenda will be addressing the future solvency of the Social Security system. Another important issue, which we looked at in the June issue of *FOCUS*, but was largely unreported elsewhere, is the unresolved problem of 15 years of discrimination against thousands of black farmers.

Fixing Social Security

By all accounts, the Social Security system is projected to experience serious funding shortfalls by the early decades of the 21st century. If Congress takes no action soon to head off the insolvency of the system, millions of Americans who will rely on Social Security for their retirement will be hurt. This is of particular concern to African Americans, who during their retirement years are generally more dependent on Social Security payments than whites because they are less likely to have private pensions and private

savings to complement these payments. According to Wilhelmina Leigh, a senior research associate at the Joint Center, the projected shortfall in Social Security funds is likely to be met by either reducing benefits or increasing revenues—or a combination of the two.

Fix #1: Proposals to reduce Benefits include: increasing taxes paid on benefits; raising the age of eligibility for benefits sooner than is currently scheduled; reducing benefits for disabled workers and for women who have never worked outside the home; reducing the growth of benefits by freezing annual cost-of-living adjustments; altering the benefit formula to reduce benefits for all future beneficiaries; and making Social Security means-tested.

Fix #2: Proposals to increase revenues include: increasing payroll taxes on both employers and employees above the 6.2 percent each currently pays; expanding coverage to include all workers, especially state and local government employees, one fourth of whom currently are not covered; and privatization, allowing government or private individuals to begin investing a portion of their assets in the stock market. There is concern, however, that full privatization would eliminate much of the safety net provided by Social Security and could put low-wage workers and less-sophisticated investors at risk.

Fairness for Black Farmers

Last summer, the Congressional Black Caucus successfully pushed Congress to pass an initiative that would permit the government to address a backlog of 18,000 discrimination complaints filed by black farmers against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The complaints stemmed from the unfair treatment they received from local, white-dominated units of USDA that

administer farm loans for land, equipment, seed, and fertilizer. The black farmers properly filled out the paperwork for the loans, but were discriminated against on the basis of their race and were disproportionately denied loans.

For 15 years, the USDA accepted these discrimination claims, and told the farmers that their claims were being processed. The farmers were also discouraged from calling to check on the status of the complaints. It was recently learned, however, that in 1983 the administration of President Ronald Reagan secretly dismantled the civil rights division responsible for handling these complaints. The Bush Administration also ignored the complaints, so no claims were processed for 15 years.

Even after the extent of USDA's discrimination had been made public, USDA refused to redress the claims because the two-year statute of limitations provided for in the Equal Credit Opportunity Act had expired. The government's position was that it had no obligation to pay the vast majority of black farmers for admitted discrimination.

The Black Caucus succeeded in incorporating language into the Agriculture Appropriations bill that would have waived the statute of limitations, permitting USDA to begin to address the 18,000-case backlog. But little progress has been made so far to redress the complaints. To compensate the farmers, Congress may have to appropriate more funds in the 106th Congress for that purpose. ■

ECONOMIC REPORT

by Margaret C. Simms

Social Security Update: What Role for Small Business?

In 1999, The new Congress is scheduled to address Social Security reform, a subject whose debate was kicked off at the White House Conference on Social Security this past December. In conjunction with the December conference and subsequent policy discussions, information covering a range of policy options has been released in documents designed to inform both policymakers and the general public. [See box.]

The hottest issue, as seen by both proponents and opponents, is the privatization of Social Security. On the day of the White House Conference, the Washington-based Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) released the findings of an EBRI survey on an issue that many have

overlooked—how the creation of individual Social Security accounts would affect small business. The survey of 500 employers, with workforces in the range of five to 100 workers, reveals that small business owners are generally in favor of these accounts but they do not want to bear a heavy administrative burden. Over one-half (57%) of the employers favored allowing individuals to use a portion of Social Security taxes to establish individual accounts. However, two-thirds of them (64%) had not thought about the fact that they may have to provide administrative support in terms of record keeping and report distribution. Nearly one-half (48%) did not want to have such a role. Even those in favor of these accounts were reluctant to pay for the administrative work required; 18 percent did not want to cover any such costs, while another 14 percent were willing to pay costs but placed a ceiling on them of \$500 per year. EBRI noted that these costs do not even address the cost burden of educating employees on investment options, which employers currently administering 401K plans do.

Accumulating Wealth

Proponents of different schemes to privatize all or part of Social Security argued that this approach would allow individuals, especially low-income and minority households, to acquire wealth. Even with a public Social Security system, households can and do accumulate wealth out of disposable income. In order to predict people's behavior with private accounts and how their behavior would fit with their overall asset building plans, it is useful to review current asset holdings of U.S. households.

There are a variety of assets that individuals and households can choose to hold. Some, such as financial assets and rental property, generate income while they are held, whereas others, such as owner-occupied housing, do not generate income although they may appreciate in value, providing capital gains upon sale. The U.S. Bureau of the Census periodically collects information on asset ownership that permits the examination of asset ownership by race. In 1993, the last year for which data are available,

Asset Ownership of Households, by Race

Selected Assets

Type of Asset	Percent White Households Holding Assets	Median Value of Holdings by White Households	Percent of Black Households Holding Assets	Median Value of Holdings by Black Households
Interest earning assets at financial institutions	74.6%	\$3,199	45.5%	\$799
Regular checking accounts	48.2	499	29.6	390
Stocks & mutual fund shares	23.0	7,100	6.2	3,900
Equity in business or profession	11.8	7,000	3.3	2,500
Equity in motor vehicles	88.7	5,472	64.5	3,242
Equity in own home	67.3	49,500	45.0	28,796
Rental property equity	8.9	29,300	4.3	19,000
Other real estate equity	10.2	19,415	3.7	8,000
U.S. Savings Bonds	19.8	775	10.3	450
IRA or Keogh accounts	25.5	13,999	6.3	4,700

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census., 1993.

the median net worth of white households was only \$45,740 while that of black households was \$4,418, one-tenth that amount.

As Table 1 shows, white households are more likely to hold all forms of assets than black households, although their patterns of ownership are quite similar. Those assets most closely associated with preparing for retirement—savings bonds, stocks and mutual fund shares, and IRA or Keogh accounts—are held by not more than 10% of all black households. This contrasts with ownership of the same assets by one-fifth to one-fourth of white households. For example, only one in fifteen (6.3 percent) black households had IRA or Keogh accounts in 1993, while one in four (25.5 percent) white households had these assets. Moreover, the median value of these accounts varied tremendously by race, with white households having median accounts nearly three times the median value of accounts held by African American households.

To some extent, the differences in asset ownership are related to differences in income and in the opportunity people have to take advantage of retirement plans available through employment. The ability to use Social Security taxes for individual investment accounts might give lower-income households more opportunities to save or invest for retirement on their own. However, income alone does not explain all of the differences in asset ownership, for significant differences exist even among those in higher-income households.

Since the proportion of African American households with incomes over \$50,000 has grown over the past 20 years, there has been a growing interest within the financial services industry in capturing this market. One financial services firm, Auriel Mutual Funds, based in Chicago, has surveyed households earning \$50,000 or more

to find out what their investment plans and behaviors are. Auriel's findings show racial differences which suggest that African Americans will continue to be less prepared for retirement even though they have made some gains in income. Surprisingly, given the figures on stock ownership in the black population as a whole, over one-half (57%) of African American households surveyed in the Auriel study had money invested in the stock market. However, this was significantly less than the proportion of white households (81%) with stock market investments. Large differences exist in every age bracket, but the racial differences are greater among younger households. African American households with higher incomes tend to have a larger proportion of their money in more conservative forms such as bank accounts and life insurance and less in brokerage and mutual funds.

African American households are less likely to see retirement as the primary goal of their savings effort than are comparable white households. Only 37 percent of the black households indicated that saving for retirement was their most important goal, in comparison to 58 percent of white households. Again, the differential was greatest among younger households, whose contributions would have the longest time to grow. Overall, the median savings or investment holding, not including real estate, was \$30,000 for African Americans and \$68,000 for white households.

Even though individuals indicated that they are not saving primarily for retirement, the largest percentage of their total savings is in retirement accounts (41% for African Americans and 42% for whites). The value of stocks and bonds (individual or mutual fund shares) is much lower (13-16% for African Americans). The most frequently used retirement program is the 401K. A little over one-third of

households indicated they had funds in an IRA and about one-quarter participated in other defined contributions plans. Overall, median savings for African American households were only one-half those of white households, and the median value of the retirement account was estimated at \$20,000 for blacks and \$30,000 for whites (average values \$42,000 and \$88,000, respectively).

When asked about their expected reliance on Social Security, only one-quarter of black households and one-fifth of white households said they expect to rely on Social Security for the majority of their retirement income. Over one-third of both groups indicated that they did not expect Social Security to exist when they retired, yet their investment decisions do not seem to address the need for higher personal savings to offset reductions in Social Security benefits.

Educating Investors

The statistics available from both the Auriel survey and the EBRI, along with recent asset holding information, suggest that investor education is much needed. These costs can be borne in part by the individual investors, but low-income households, who are often cited as the main beneficiaries of privatization by those favoring this approach to reform, cannot afford this out of their own budget. The burden will likely fall on government and/or employers if these individuals are to invest wisely. ■

New Release

The Joint Center recently released an issue brief, "Social Security Reform: What Proposed Changes Mean for African Americans." It incorporates information that appeared in the September 1998 issue of FOCUS and includes a list of other organizations that are providing information and hosting forums for the public. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Office of Communications and Marketing.