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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Today's News

Thursday, February 17, 2000

Black-College Presidents Call for De-Emphasizing Desegregation as a Solution

By [JOEL HARDI](#)

Washington

With affirmative action under attack, advocates for black students need to focus more attention on helping historically black and predominantly black colleges, and less on desegregation, said panelists Wednesday at a meeting of black-college presidents.

"Desegregation is not an educational policy," said Elias Blake Jr., a long-time legal adviser to black plaintiffs in Mississippi's desegregation case, at the annual meeting of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education. He mocked the way state desegregation plans emphasize attracting white students to historically black colleges.

In the era of segregation, he said, states "didn't exclude black children from the universities in order to deprive them of their association with white people, and neither did the state strip down the mission of the historically black colleges, nor give them ragged facilities, to make them unattractive to white students."

Mr. Blake also said forcing black colleges to raise their entrance requirements was at best misguided, because the test scores of admitted students say nothing about a college's quality. Even worse, the policy assumes that black colleges are inferior to majority-white colleges because their students have lower ACT scores.

"American higher education is beating its breast about raising standards and improving graduation

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rates, and that is a sham," Mr. Blake said. Higher admissions standards -- especially those based on standardized-test scores -- do not make "an educational process," he said, but are simply "a selection process."

Institutions that serve large numbers of black and other minority students do have an educational process, Mr. Blake and others said, and in contrast, emphasize helping those who graduated from inferior public schools and come from impoverished backgrounds.

Even in states without a history of segregation, the push to raise admissions standards is hurting minority students, the panelists said. Edison O. Jackson, president of Medgar Evars College of the City University of New York, said the movement to eliminate remedial instruction in higher education defines "merit" in a way that excludes large portions of the population.

"We talk about merit, with all these labels," Mr. Jackson said, and what is really happening is that "so many young Americans who are black or Hispanic are falling off the table and out of sight."

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