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# *Teachers, Students, and Discrimination: The Policy Impact of Black Representation*

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Although minority representation is frequently studied, few of the efforts analyze whether or not representation makes a difference. Does recruitment of blacks to bureaucratic positions result in policy formulations more responsive to blacks? Using black teachers as the research focus, this study finds that the larger the proportion of black teachers in a school district, the lower the second generation discrimination against black students. This relationship holds even under controls for black resources, black education, black income, and region.

**T**he demographic composition of bureaucracies is a well-tilled field of social science research. Although the degree of demographic representation in various bureaucracies has been established, whether or not representation makes any difference is still a subject of debate. Does the recruitment of blacks to bureaucratic positions, for example, result in public policies more favorable to the black community? The relationship between demographic representation and policy responsiveness is the subject of this research. Specifically, it will examine the relationship between the proportion of black teachers in a school system and several policies that affect black students.

Research in representative bureaucracy (Kingsley, 1944; Levitan, 1946; Long, 1952; Mosher, 1968; Meier and Nigro, 1976; Saltzstein, 1979) has generally focused on bureaucratic elites because elites are perceived as the key policymakers. Recently, the bureaucratic literature has argued that discretion is vested throughout the organizational hierar-

\* I would like to thank Robert England for his assistance in gathering the data for this paper. I would also like to thank Grace Hall Saltzstein, Michael Preston, Frank Thompson, and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

chy (Lipsky, 1980; see also Downs, 1967). Civil liberties policies, for example, are set as much by local police officers as they are by the Supreme Court and the top bureaucrats in the Department of Justice. Because public policy toward citizens is mediated through street-level bureaucrats, the responsiveness of these bureaucrats is as important as that of top-level policymakers. If responsiveness is important at this level, then so is representation.

Studies of representation in educational institutions have also focused at the upper levels. Welch and Karnig (1978), and Robinson and England (1981), for example, compared school boards to the local population. Scott (1980) analyzed the role of the black superintendent of instruction (see also Mann, 1974). Recently this literature has also examined the responsiveness question to determine if minority access to school board positions makes any difference in terms of educational policy (Meier and England, 1982; see also Silver, 1973).<sup>1</sup>

Generally ignored in this representational literature has been the teacher. Although individual teachers probably have little impact on macro school district policies such as the level of school desegregation, the location of schools, or integration strategies (see Bullock and Rodgers, 1976), they provide the day-to-day feedback that encourages or discourages students. Teachers also implement the educational and disciplinary policies of the school district and have substantial discretion in doing so. Teachers, hence, are in a key position to affect something called "second generation discrimination."

Bullock and Stewart (1978, 1979; and Stewart and Bullock, 1981) argue that as school districts are desegregated or partially desegregated, overt methods of racial discrimination are no longer tolerated. The emphasis shifts to what they term "second generation discrimination," a more subtle form of discrimination. Essentially second generation discrimination consists of inequities in educational tracking and discipline. To discriminate via educational tracking, the school system limits minority access to quality programs and channels minorities into deadend areas. For example, a black student may be counseled to avoid advanced placement classes or not be given the opportunity to take classes for the gifted. Lack of access to such classes places the minority student at a disadvantage in terms of college admissions.

A more severe method of dealing with minority students involves funneling them into special education or educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes. If a student poses a disciplinary problem or is difficult to teach, a teacher can have that student placed in a special education or an EMR

<sup>1</sup> There have also been numerous studies of the impact of black mayors and black city council members. For a comprehensive review of these studies see Welch and Karnig (1980).

class, even if this class is inappropriate for the student. Similarly a teacher can discriminate in disciplinary actions. White teachers may suspend a black student quicker or more often than they would a white student. The end result of these second generation discrimination actions will be a higher dropout rate for black students.

Both disciplinary actions and educational tracking are policies that permit teachers a great deal of discretion. In both cases, the initial actions come from the classroom. Black teachers, in theory, should be more receptive to the problems of black students and, thus, less likely to discriminate against them. The more blacks on a teaching faculty, therefore, the less second generation discrimination that should occur. In other words, black teachers are less likely to engage in second generation discrimination.

#### DATA AND METHODS

To assess the impact of black teachers on educational policy, this study examines eighty-two large urban school districts.<sup>2</sup> These districts were chosen because the data for this analysis had to be gathered from several sources and merged. In many cases the data did not exist for smaller districts. The generalizations presented here, therefore, are restricted to these particular school districts.

The most frequently used measure of minority representation is the representation ratio (Sigelman, 1974). The representation ratio in this case is the percentage of the faculty that is black divided by the percentage of the school district's population that is black.<sup>3</sup> This measure is equal to 1.0 when the proportion of black teachers is equal to the proportion of black population. It is less than 1.0 when blacks are underrepresented, and it is larger than 1.0 when they are overrepresented. For our eighty-two city school districts, the mean representation ratio is 1.02

<sup>2</sup> These eighty-two districts are all among the one hundred largest school districts in the United States. They come from every region of the country and appear to be representative of large urban school districts. A list of districts is available from the author.

<sup>3</sup> The percentage of black teachers is taken from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights ("Student Trend Data") and is for 1976. These data were provided by Professor Franklyn Wilson of the University of Wisconsin. All demographic data are based on the school district, not on the district's city. School district boundaries may differ significantly from those of the city. All school district demographics are taken from the National Center for Education Statistics (1975), *Social and Economic Characteristics of U.S. School Districts, 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare). The correlations between the school district and city demographics are all above .86. This study deals only with representation of and public policy toward blacks. In several of these cities Hispanics and Asians are a substantial minority. These minorities were not analyzed because only a small portion of the cities had sufficient minorities for analysis.

with a low of 0.42 and a high of 1.59. In other words, the average large urban school district has approximately two percent more black teachers than one would expect.<sup>4</sup>

A second, more meaningful, measure of black representation is simply the percentage of teachers who are black. When questions of policy impact are raised, the actual proportion of black teachers is more important than the representation ratio. Second generation discrimination has its origins in student-teacher contacts. For a black student faced with second generation discrimination, therefore, the key is exposure to black teachers, a phenomenon more likely to occur when the percentage of black teachers is large than when the representation ratio exceeds 1.0 (for similar justifications see Bullock and MacManus, 1981; Bullock and Dennis, 1982; Welch and Karnig, 1979, p. 106; Meier and England, 1982). For the eighty-two school districts in this study, the percentage of black teachers ranged from 1 percent to 63 percent with a mean of 21 percent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Although the representation ratio suggests that blacks are fairly well represented among the urban teaching faculty, averages are often deceiving because they are distorted by extreme values or by nonnormal distributions. According to Engstrom and MacDonald (1981) the best way to assess representation is to regress the percentage of blacks who hold office on the percentage of blacks who make up the population. If the intercept in this regression is fairly close to 0, the slope reveals the relationship between representation and population. The intercept of such a regression is  $-1.69$  percent so that the slope will be a good illustration of the relationship between black population and black teachers. The slope (1.16) indicates that for every increase in one percent black population, the percentage of black teachers increases 1.16 percent ( $r^2 = .9$ ). In other words, blacks are overrepresented among the faculty in these school districts by 16 percent ( $1.16 - 1.0 = .16$ ). Contrasting the slope and the intercept reveals that blacks will be underrepresented in school districts with less than 10.5 percent black population and overrepresented in those with more than 10.5 percent.

<sup>5</sup> The representation literature devotes a great deal of attention to the determinants of representation. Representation is a function of three variables—the percentage of black population in the school district, black political resources (see footnote 11 for a definition), and southern region. The results are as follows:

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR	
	% BLACK TEACHERS	REPRESENTATION RATIO
% Black Population	.82*	-.05
Region (South)	.16*	.48*
Black Resources	.12*	.32*
Coefficient of Determination	.94	.37

\* Significant at .05.

In terms of the proportion of black teachers, the proportion of black population dwarfs all other measures, but both region and black resources are significant factors. In this case, the explained variation is high (94 percent) mostly as a result of population alone. The explanation for the representation ratio is a more modest 37 percent. Both region and black resources are statistically significant factors, but black population is not (because it is included in the

## THE IMPACT OF BLACK REPRESENTATION

For policy measures, this paper uses several indicators of second generation discrimination against blacks. A representation ratio was created for each measure. For example, a suspension ratio was constructed based on the proportion of blacks suspended from school divided by the proportion of white students suspended. This ratio and all others have the same properties as the representation ratio: they are equal to 1.0 when treatment is balanced; numbers greater than 1.0 indicate that blacks are overrepresented, while numbers less than 1.0 indicate blacks are underrepresented. Eight ratios were created for measures of second generation discrimination — graduates enrolled in college,<sup>6</sup> assignment to vocational programs,<sup>7</sup> students dropping out of school, students assigned to special education classes, students assigned to educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes, students suspended from school for one day or more, students assigned to gifted programs, and students assigned to enriched, honors, or advanced classes. The means as well as the range of values for these indexes are shown in table 1.

If black representation among teachers results in different educational policies toward black students, then we would hypothesize that the proportion of black teachers is positively related to college enrollments, negatively correlated with vocational enrollments, negatively associated with dropout rates, negatively linked to special education assignments, EMR classes, and suspensions, and positively related to assignment to gifted programs and advanced placement classes. The simple correlations between the proportion of black teachers and the eight indicators of second generation discrimination are presented in column 5 of table 1. In seven of the eight cases (vocational education is the exception<sup>8</sup>), the pro-

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base of the penetration index). No other theoretically linked variables were statistically significant. The other variables tested were black median education, the proportion of blacks on the school board, the proportion of blacks on the city council, the black representation ratio for the school board, the black representation ratio for the city council, the black poverty level, the proportion of students going on to higher education, the median income of all residents, whether or not the school district was under a court order to desegregate, and the degree of residential segregation.

<sup>6</sup> The college enrollment data are taken from the National Center for Education Statistics (1975; see footnote 2). The data are for 1970, the most recent year available. School dropout rates are taken from the same source and are for the same year.

<sup>7</sup> The vocational education data are from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights ("Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey: School Year 1976-77") and were provided by Professor Joseph Stewart of Rice University. The data on suspensions, special education, EMR programs, gifted programs, and enriched classes are from the same source for the same year. All analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, release 9.

<sup>8</sup> An explanation for the vocational school enrollments correlation is possible. As job

TABLE 1  
SECOND GENERATION DISCRIMINATION — REPRESENTATION RATIOS

VARIABLE	MEAN	LOW	HIGH	N	r**	PREDICTION	FACTOR LOADING
Attend College	.38	.06	2.24	79	.07	+	-.13
Vocational Training	.97	.32	1.76	82	.11	-	.15
Drop Out of School	1.49	.84	3.12	81	-.41*	-	.59
EMR Classes	1.90	0	4.20	82	-.50*	-	.80
Special Education	1.24	.66	2.34	80	-.54*	-	.72
Suspensions	1.80	.51	6.87	82	-.55*	-	.82
Enriched Classes	.57	.12	2.72	82	.39*	+	-.37
Gifted Classes	.51	.08	1.72	82	.06	+	-.21
Eigenvalue 2.71							
Percent of variance 34%							
alpha .47							

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\* Correlation with percent black teachers.

portion of black teachers is related in the hypothesized direction to the indicator. In five of those seven cases, the correlations are statistically significant. The greater the proportion of black teachers in a school district, therefore, the fewer the instances of discrimination that occur.

The indicators of second generation discrimination are not perfect measures of discrimination. Clearly the suspension ratio might reflect both second generation discrimination and some differential in disciplinary problems. Similar arguments could be made for each of the other indicators. As a result, the correlations between the indicators and black teachers are probably attenuated by this measurement error. To assess the impact of black teachers on second generation discrimination more accurately, the eight indicators of second generation discrimination were factor analyzed to tap the common variation. A single factor results (see table 1, column 7). The factor measure of second generation discrimination is not only significantly correlated with the proportion of black teachers, but the correlation is higher than it is for any single indicator ( $r = -.65$ ). This increase in correlation is exactly what would be expected if, in fact, the factor eliminated the non-second generation discrimination aspects of the indicators.

Even though the proportion of black teachers in urban school districts is related to several indicators of second generation discrimination, this does not mean that increasing the number of black teachers will necessarily cause the amount of second generation discrimination to decline. Some other variable or variables may, in fact, be the cause of both the proportion of black teachers and second generation discrimination. The obvious candidate is, of course, black population. The larger the black population in a school district, the more likely the school district will have a greater proportion of black teachers and the more likely it will practice less discrimination. Controlling for the proportion of black population would hardly be a fair test of whether or not the relationships found in table 1 were spurious. The proportion of black teachers and the proportion of black population are so collinear that any regression including both of them as independent variables would result in unstable regression coefficients and little substantive meaning.<sup>9</sup>

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markets become more competitive, vocational school placements become prized. Rather than a place to segregate black students, therefore, vocational schools provide a wanted opportunity. Denial of black access to vocational education may well be part of an overall effort to deny opportunities to black students. I am indebted to Michael Preston for this argument.

<sup>9</sup> From a theoretical view, teachers rather than population should be the cause of the variation in second generation discrimination. Teachers directly deal with students and are the initial decision makers on such issues. The population does not directly enter into the process. Even if the size of black population somehow limits second generation discrimina-

As a result, four other variables will be used as controls to determine the strength of the relationship between teachers and second generation discrimination. All these variables combine elements of black political resources and labor pool characteristics. Together they provide an environment that is less tolerant of second generation discrimination even without black teachers in the classroom.

The first variable is the median black educational level in the school district.<sup>10</sup> The higher the educational level of the black community, the more likely members of the community will be aware of discrimination and the more qualified black teachers there will be. The second variable is the median black income in the school district. The median income serves as an indicator of black economic resources and, therefore, of less tolerance for second generation discrimination and discrimination in hiring.

Third, black political, economic, and organizational resources are the infrastructure of the black community. Without organizations to mobilize the community, without resources to build political bases, and without some current political office holders, a large black population may well not be mobilized. A factor score index is used as the black resources variable; it was created out of ten indicators of black political, economic, and organizational resources.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, the South has been the area of the country with the greatest federal attention focused on school segregation. One would expect that, as part of this focus, southern school districts would also receive more federal pressure in terms of second generation discrimination. This variable is operationalized as a dummy variable coded 1 for the thirteen southern states.

All of these variables were used as independent variables along with the

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tion, it must operate through the teachers or the administration to do so. In addition, each of the dependent variables is a ratio and, therefore, adjusts for the size of the black population. For these reasons, only the proportion of black teachers was used in these regressions.

<sup>10</sup> The source of black income and black education is listed in footnote 3.

<sup>11</sup> The black controlled resource variable is a factor score index combining several indicators of black resources: (1) number of black state senators, (2) number of black state representatives, (3) number of black judicial officials, (4) graduate chapters of Kappa Alpha Psi, (5) Links, Inc. chapters, (6) Alpha Kappa Alpha chapters, (7) number of National Urban League chapters, (8) number of top 100 black-owned businesses, (9) number of black-owned banks, and (10) number of black businesses registered with the Small Business Administration. The indicators were unidimensional with the first factor accounting for 54 percent of the variance. For a discussion of the validity of using these variables as indicators of black controlled resources see Karnig (1979) and Birmingham (1977). Finding only one factor is significant because it indicates black political, economic, and organizational resources are highly linked.

proportion of black teachers to explain second generation discrimination. The sole dependent variable was the factor measure of second generation discrimination. According to table 2, the proportion of black teachers is the strongest influence on second generation discrimination. Of the other variables, only black education is statistically significant and that just barely. Clearly the relationship between black teachers and educational policy is not spurious; black education, black income, black resources, and region do not affect the size of the relationship between teachers and second generation discrimination.

TABLE 2

REGRESSION OF SECOND GENERATION DISCRIMINATION FACTOR  
ON BLACK TEACHERS AND CONTROL VARIABLES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	<i>r</i>	SLOPE	S.E.	<i>p</i>	BETA *
% Black Teachers	-.65	-4.49	.77	.0001	-.93
Black Education	.12	-.17	.10	.05	-.22
Black Income	-.10	.00	.00	ns	.01
Black Resources	-.44	.13	.12	ns	.13
Region	-.13	.28	.24	ns	.18
$R^2 = .49$					
$N = 74$					

\* Standardized regression coefficient.

### CONCLUSION

This paper examined the impact of representation in the lower levels of an organization. Through an analysis of eighty-two large urban school districts, the impact of black representation on public policy was assessed. Eight indicators of second generation discrimination were created to tap subtle forms of discrimination against blacks in educational policy. In seven of the eight areas, the proportion of black school teachers was related to public policy in the hypothesized direction. Similarly, for a factor measure, greater numbers of black teachers were associated with less discrimination against black students. These relationships held even under controls for black political resources, education, income, and region.

To set this study within its theoretical context, a brief review of the theory of representative bureaucracy is necessary.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of

<sup>12</sup> The outline of representative bureaucracy theory is actually a composite of the work of numerous authors. See Meier and Nigro (1976) for a discussion.

representative bureaucracy assume that external controls on bureaucrats can only be partial, thus leaving the official some discretion in decision making. Without restraint, rational bureaucrats would attempt to maximize their own personal policy values. Self-interest is not fatal to responsive government, however, if the bureaucrats hold the same values as the general public. Representative bureaucracy offers one vehicle for shared values. Since values are determined by socialization experiences and since socialization experiences vary by race, sex, income, and other demographic factors, a bureaucracy drawn from the same social origins as the people should hold similar values and should, therefore, make policies responsive to the public.

Although representative bureaucracy links demographic representation to policy responsiveness, representation theory treats these as two distinct dimensions. Pitkin (1967) characterizes demographic representation as passive, focused on being something (e.g., black) rather than on doing something. The key aspect of representation according to Pitkin (1967, p. 209) is "acting in the interests of the represented." Representation becomes an activity. The extent to which passive and active representation coincide is an empirical question.

The first implication of this research, therefore, is that passive representation can lead to active representation. Recruiting black teachers can result in less second generation discrimination against black students. Although the linkage between descriptive representation and policy responsiveness has been harshly criticized (see Uslander and Weber, 1983), in this case it holds. It holds for three reasons. First, the background variable, race, is directly linked to the policy in question. Unlike the linkage between years of education and crime control policy, for example, the relationship between race and discrimination is obvious to the persons involved. Teachers will be able to discern actions favorable to people similar to themselves.

Second, race is one demographic factor that persists. In an examination of demographic correlates of bureaucratic attitudes, Meier and Nigro (1976, p. 465) found that only race was a significant determinant for adult civil servants. Unlike social class, region, or nationality, race is not mitigated by adult socialization experiences (Brim and Wheeler, 1966). If anything on a policy involving discrimination, the experiences of an adult are likely to reinforce beliefs that race is important.

Third, all teachers work in similar organizations—schools. For bureaucrats, the major influence on their policy values is the organization that employs them (Meier and Nigro, 1976, p. 466). Organizations turn employees, at least those who remain with the organization long enough to attain leadership positions, into organizational advocates (Downs,

1967). This truism has become institutionalized as Miles's law: "Where one stands depends on where one sits." Because all teachers work in similar organizations, a major source of variation in attitudes and thus behavior is held constant. As a result, race becomes even more significant.

The second implication of this research is that studies of representation have focused overly much on elites. Representation studies have focused on members of Congress (see Kuklinski, 1979, for a review) or elite bureaucrats. Black representation studies have concentrated on mayors and city council members (see Welch and Karnig, 1980, for a review).<sup>13</sup> This research suggests the hypothesis that lower-level officials are also important. They interact with citizens far more often than do elites; clearly they merit more study.

Finally, this study suggests that representation makes a difference. In too many cases policy has been difficult to measure or has been crudely measured. As a result, the importance of research on representation has itself been called into question (see Lineberry, 1978). The study of representation is not important just for symbolic reasons; if the assertions in this paper are correct, it is also important for policy reasons.

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<sup>13</sup> When the regression in table 2 is run with the percent black on the school board and the percent black on the city council as additional independent variables, only the percent teachers and not school board members or city council members was statistically significant. In this case, rank and file bureaucrats appear to have greater impact on policy than do elites.

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