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In This Issue

Editor's Corner... 11

Around the ASC... 14

2021 Election Results... 15

Doctoral Student
Forum... 24

Obituaries... 27

Criminology Around
The World... 29

Where is the Black Criminologist?

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The Problem

Recent killings of unarmed Black persons have led to unprecedented support for structural reforms in the criminal legal system and academia. These changes would involve a massive realignment of the criminal justice system. For their part, academic institutions have responded by issuing public statements and countless online discussions to talk through many of these issues. Despite their efforts, universities have failed to address the lack of diversity among their faculty. More directly, the lack of Black faculty within Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCJ) graduate programs is extremely problematic considering the current state of affairs between Black Americans and the criminal legal system. In a field of study where racial/ethnic, class, and gender discrimination is rampant – and the racial disproportionality in the use of excessive force by law enforcement, sentencing, and incarceration rates is beyond problematic – we no longer have the liberty of *'waiting for change.'* Our call to action and immediate steps towards change must be swift.

For well over 30 years, criminologists have highlighted the limited presence of Black professors in the discipline (Brustman, 1991; Cooper, Updegrave, & Bouffard, 2019; Felder & Barker, 2013; Gabbidon, Greene, & Wilder, 2004; Greene et al., 2018; Heard & Bing, 1993; Heard & Penn, 2000). To get an idea of the degree and extent to which Black criminologists exist, we examined forty-one Criminology and Criminal Justice graduate programs in the U.S. We found that despite increased calls for diversity, not much has changed. This article will highlight the results of that study and provide some actionable recommendations for change.

In their 2019 Annual Survey Report, the Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice (ADPCCJ) surveyed 37 colleges and universities with Criminology and/or Criminal Justice graduate programs in the United States. The survey demonstrated that within these programs: 81% of the faculty were non-Latinx white, 6% were non-Latinx Black faculty, and 13% were reported as belonging to another racial or ethnic group (ADPCCJ, 2019). The current study disaggregated data provided in the ADPCCJ (2019) annual report to consider the number of tenured/tenure-track Black faculty identified on each of the 37 included college or university websites and four additional CCJ graduate programs who did not participate in the ADPCCJ survey but were ranked in the top 41 CCJ programs according to the 2020 U.S. News & World Report's Best Criminology Schools list.¹ To gain a more in-depth picture of Black faculty representation, the data were also broken down by the total number of faculty in the department, the total number of Black faculty related to all other departmental faculty, and the rank of the Black faculty members, as of January 2021.

According to the ADPCCJ (2019) Annual Report (n = 37 programs), there was a combined total of 738 full-time faculty, and non-Latinx Black faculty accounted for approximately 6% of the sample. Our study found that when the other Ph.D. programs were included in the sample (n = 41 programs), there was a combined total of 807 full-time faculty and non-Latinx Black faculty made up 7.3% of the sample (n = 59). However, when the two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are excluded from the sample, the total faculty dropped to 786, and Black faculty accounted for 6.2% (n = 49). Even when increasing the number of programs being

observed, after excluding Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) and Texas Southern University (TSU), there was a 1% decrease in Black tenure-track faculty representation in CCJ graduate programs. At face value, this may not seem like much, but when you consider that Black faculty already constitute a small representation compared to their White counterparts, even a 1% difference is substantial and potentially problematic.

We also find that 68% of the colleges and universities observed have one or no Black full-time, tenured/tenure-track faculty members in their department. In total, 34% of the programs ($n = 14$) have zero Black faculty members; 34% ($n = 14$) have only one; 12% ($n = 5$) have two; 17% (this includes PVAMU) have three ($n = 7$); 2.4% of the programs ($n = 1$) have four; and one (TSU) has seven Black faculty members. Additionally, any change in the composition of Black faculty in these programs appears to come at the cost of diversity from other marginalized groups. More succinctly, when there is an increase in Black faculty representation, there is a decrease in representation of Latinx and other faculty of color and vice versa.

The lack of Black faculty representation within CCJ graduate programs successively impacts the likelihood of promotion and administrative placements. The final observations made with these data were the rank of the Black faculty and the identification (confirmed via CVs and websites) of Black CCJ faculty that were serving in administrative positions within the department or institution in 2020. Contrary to the ADPCCJ (2019) Annual Report findings which stated that the majority of tenure/tenure-track faculty were Full Professors, followed by Associate, then Assistant (p. 8), our study found that the majority of tenure/tenure-track Black faculty are at the Assistant Professor rank. Of the 59 Black tenure-track faculty members, 23 are Assistant Professors, 21 are Associate Professors, and 15 are Full Professors. Regarding the number of Black faculty serving in an administrative position, out of the 59 Black faculty identified in the current study, a total of 10 (17%) are serving in an Administrative position: two Department heads, one Associate Dean, one Dean, and one Associate Provost. Four out of the 10 are serving as Directors/Officers of Diversity, and one faculty member was serving as the Director of Faculty Mentoring and Online Learning. From the perspective of the minority empowerment thesis (Banducci, Donovan, & Karp, 2004), these numbers demonstrate that the concerns and issues of Black faculty and subsequently, Black students, may not be adequately represented or presented at the administrative level. This then translates into these issues not being addressed at higher levels within the college or universities via the silencing of Black voices. How can true change occur if the voices of the oppressed are not included in the conversations?

The Solutions

The trend in Black faculty representation as presented in the ADPCCJ annual reports from 2010 – 2019 indicates that even as universities and colleges purportedly actively pursue scholars of color, adequate faculty diversity in our graduate programs has remained elusive. This problem is not unique to the field of criminology and criminal justice. Rather it is apparent and, for some, surprisingly so, at institutions of higher education across the country (Stout et al., 2018). Even while noting that the “diversification of higher education faculty and administration had not kept pace with the diversification of student populations (p. 399), Stout and colleagues (2018) were surprised by the lack of faculty diversity in higher education. The authors noted this to be especially troubling considering their findings that having a diverse faculty positively impacted the graduation rates for underrepresented minority students.

Arguably, the state of Black faculty and other faculty of color is of no surprise to CCJ programs and administrators. There is no doubt in our minds that most programs are engaging in efforts to diversify their faculty, but there is evidence that other programs are not (Mitchell, 2020). These conclusions are hard to ignore when over 1/3 of the programs included in this study have absolutely no Black faculty. However, in respect to those programs actively engaged (particularly in the recruitment and retention of Black faculty), what remains uncertain to us is how quantifiable those efforts are and to what extent do CCJ programs actively work to include or highlight the contributions of Black faculty. Yes, these programs are inviting Black faculty to apply to their job openings but once the applications are in and search committees begin to review, are they receiving full consideration? When Black faculty are hired or are being considered for reappointment/promotion are the packages offered to them similar to their white counterparts, or for that matter, do these offers include considerations for the amount of unpaid labor that Black faculty engage in?

Furthermore, it is unclear how often, if at all, Black faculty are included in the discussions and if their ideas or suggestions are sought when developing strategies. Some researchers have suggested that diversity among faculty, staff, and leadership and its benefits are often overlooked (Espinosa et al., 2019; Hasnas, 2018; Stout et al., 2018). It is not difficult to understand how this remains the norm when we look at the breakdown of numbers within this study. The statement, ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ reigns true in regard to Black representation in CCJ academe. The betrayal of this type of sentiment is only exacerbated by the sudden, yet always temporary, heightened importance placed on this issue by academia in the wake of the national and international spotlight on the racial/ethnic divide of America and our systems.

According to the ADPCCJ Annual Reports (2009 – 2019), Black faculty representation was at 6.5% in 2010, dropped down to 5% by 2014, rose to 7% in 2017, and has since declined. When these numbers are disaggregated, we see a different picture. In 2020, a 6% representation at face value gives the impression that progress has been made. However, when the data is disaggregated we begin

to see the realities of what 6% representation really looks like in our programs and how the demographic makeup of CCJ faculty has not markedly changed over the last decade (see Gabbidon et al., 2004, Greene et al., 2018). For example, Gabbidon and colleagues (2004) noted that the contributions of Black scholars have been relatively ignored, and Greene and colleagues (2018) noted that there has since been limited improvement. Arguably, this is still the case today. In reality, it is 34% of programs having no Black faculty, 34% having only one Black faculty member, and excluding the two HBCU's in the study, approximately 27% of programs having two to four Black faculty members. In reality, the 6% also translates into only 10 Black faculty across these programs holding any type of administrative position. This then carries over to a dismal representation beyond the departmental level.

The Recommendations

In addition to investigating the status of Black faculty in CCJ graduate programs, this study aimed to provide recommendations with the hope of creating actionable change with CJ academia. Along this line, the following discussion will provide recommendations and points of consideration for our discipline as we strive for more Black representation in our faculty and scholarship, as well as our field of study.

Recommendation #1: Recognize and acknowledge how our institutions and CCJ departments maintain and reproduce systemic inequality and inequity. Pointedly, 6% representation means the overwhelming majority of our CCJ students (across degree levels) may never learn from or have interactions with Black faculty throughout their entire academic careers. This also translates to having no previous experience with Black people in leadership or authoritative positions before entering the workforce, after which they still have a very little likelihood of exposure. CCJ faculty, staff, and administrators need to seriously evaluate departmental and university climates, as well as, that of the discipline that has led to these trends. This must be a collective effort in which the experiences of Black faculty are genuinely listened to, respected, and valued.

Recommendation #2: Actively recruit and hire Black faculty now, and do so without limiting the value of their scholarship. This recommendation for action relates to how or in what context Black faculty and their voices appear to be deemed as valuable or needed. More specifically, this recommendation addresses how universities and colleges go about (or not) recruiting Black faculty via their job ads. As a doctoral student going on the job market in 2018, I quickly learned that the words 'race and crime' scholar or those similar was academic job ad code speech for "we are looking for Black faculty." Race and Crime scholar(s) has become synonymous with Black (or Brown) and as such relegates our scholarship to one parameter: race. Inadvertently, when intended to signal that the department *wants Black and Latinx faculty to apply*, it can read as: we only value your racial/ethnic groups contributions to this particular sub-field of study; or b) we are more so seeking a Black or Brown applicant due to being concerned with making our program *appear* diverse because it benefits or takes the heat off of us, rather than wanting them because it *improves* our students' education and promotes the scholarly contributions of faculty of color. Not all Black scholars study or teach about race and crime (or whatever label given to diversity courses). As noted by Greene, Gabbidon, and Wilson (2018, p. 108), "Black scholars have increasingly contributed to the body of knowledge, on numerous topics since 2004."

Recommendation #3: Make room for Black faculty and their voices at the table, and earnestly listen to them. Black faculty have to be given a seat at the table in the decision-making rooms. To be quite frank, our Black scholars do not need to be *given* the seat because they have more than *earned* their place at these tables. This must be accomplished not for the single-minded, administrative-serving purposes of 'showing diversity,' but to gain their perspective and center their voices in the very discussions about Black scholars presence and representation in academia. It must be accomplished expediently so that we can then begin to move the discussion of Blacks in relation to the CJ system from the point of negative association (i.e., disparities and mass incarceration) to one of more positivity (i.e., knowledge production, scholarly contributions, and policy implications/change) and to demonstrate a universal recognition of Black scholarly contribution. Similarly, greater efforts must be made to center Black voices and increase their representation in our mainstream journals, textbooks, advisory, and editorial boards. We are far past a point in our discipline where Black scholarly voices are limited to special issues of journals or race and diversity-specific journals and textbooks. The time of literary silencing must end.

Recommendation #4: Desegregate Research Groups. Despite the recent push to diversify the academy, the internal policy and cultural frameworks work to undermine these recent efforts and maintain the status quo. Rather than accepting the current state of affairs as the norm, academic departments should focus on providing collaborative publication and grant writing opportunities for Black faculty and students. More research is needed on the impact that lived experiences have on the types of questions asked, the methodological approach taken, and the dissemination plan utilized for criminological studies. We also need a better idea of how race impacts funding opportunities to study crime and justice, similar to the work conducted on the National Institute of Health's funding of Black researchers (Stevens, et al., 2021). Ultimately, this means that we develop academic research mentoring programs for Black students and faculty from undergraduate programs up to full professor status. If professional sports leagues can do it, then why can't the academy?

Conclusion

There is no debate that Black criminologists are underrepresented among the faculty ranks in doctoral-granting programs. This type of work should be expanded to determine if this disparity exists in non-doctoral granting programs, and if so, why. We hope that this article motivates departmental assessments of their commitment to dismantling barriers to hiring Black faculty. In addition, there is a need for programming designed to develop students into faculty while simultaneously building in the necessary resources for Black faculty success.

Considering the current racial climate and the unprecedented “lip service” for Black lives, academic departments can be ground zero for solutions to the most pressing criminal injustices. We must use the “good winds” that we have at our backs to encourage Black criminologists to share their voices and experiences. At the same time, those in positions of power must listen and respond with evidence-informed solutions.

Personally speaking, as Black criminologists with myriad experiences, the #BlackintheIvory experiences are real. When we look around – at our institutions and that of others –we seldom see other Black and Brown faces. This has been the case our entire academic careers. Even as students, we rarely saw people who looked like us, and never did we have a Black professor for any of our criminology or criminal justice-related courses (our only Black professors were for African American History as undergraduate students). We quickly realized that we are the representation, and therefore, we must make our presence known in every space. We bring our Black voices and perspectives to the discussion unapologetically in all spaces. We must hold the line until others can join the journey. However, the tenacity, willingness, determination, and resilience of the few can no longer be the norm. Representation matters and we can only be better as a discipline for it. Black criminologists deserve a seat at the table, for we know that lived experiences and cultural responsiveness are key to any academic discipline’s ability to address real-world challenges.

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¹ Programs that were not included in ADPCCJ (2019) Report: Pennsylvania State University- University Park; University of Pennsylvania; Temple University; and University of Delaware.