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*If a country's military is to be viewed with pride by all citizens and recognized as reflecting the interests and makeup of the Nation as a whole, it is essential that all racial groups occupy a fair share of the officer as well as enlisted communities. Serious minority recruiting efforts have been made by the service academies in recent years, but despite increases in Black enrollment, goals set in the 1960's have not yet been met. The obstacles to recruiting Black cadets and midshipmen, including the high degree of competition for a limited number of academy openings and low interest in the military among young Blacks, will not be easy to overcome. Nevertheless, more positive steps such as an expanded preparatory school program and broadened personalized selection process can be taken to increase admissions without sacrificing quality.*

## **PROBLEMS IN RECRUITING BLACKS FOR THE SERVICE ACADEMIES: A PERSPECTIVE**

A research paper prepared by

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College of Naval Command and Staff

During his inaugural parade in January 1961 as the Corps of Cadets of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy passed in review, President John F. Kennedy is alleged to have inquired as to why there were no Black cadets in the corps. This inquiry ignited an investigation and recruitment program which has produced very few tangible results.

Statistics reveal that until 1961 only one Black, Jarvis L. Wright from Philadelphia, Pa., had entered the Academy as a member of the Class of 1959, but Cadet Wright was subsequently dismissed because of the serious medical complications. While several Oriental Americans had graduated from the Academy, the first Black to graduate was Merle J. Smith in 1966 followed by two graduates in 1968 and one in 1970.

In 1967 considerable political pressure revived once again over the small number of Blacks attending the Academy. A concentrated recruitment campaign designed to remedy the situation quickly ensued. By using the Ford Foundation's list of Commended Candidates in conjunction with the National Merit Scholarship Program of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) and stressing personal interviews with prospective candidates, nine Blacks were admitted to the Class of 1972. Seven Blacks were recruited for the Class of 1973, five with the Class of 1974, five with the Class of 1975, and three with the Class of 1976.<sup>1</sup> At present Blacks comprise only 1.3 percent of the Cadet Corps. These results are rather discouraging when one

considers the major effort that was made in Black recruitment.

During the same period of time, the three Department of Defense service academies were also actively attempting to enlarge their Black enrollment, and although somewhat more successful than the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, they have not achieved representation proportional to the Nation's Black population. For the Class of 1976, the U.S. Air Force Academy admitted 44 Blacks in a class of 1,505, the U.S. Military Academy admitted 50 Blacks out of a total of the 1,378 plebes, and the U.S. Naval Academy, after a very intensive recruitment program known as Project 100, admitted 72 Blacks among the 1,329 new plebes.<sup>2</sup> These percentages of 2.9, 3.6, and 5.4, respectively, fall considerably below the 12 percent potential Black representation among the Nation's college age population.<sup>3</sup>

Why do the U.S. service academies have difficulty recruiting Blacks? Before answering this question it is first necessary to review the admissions criteria of the service academies and then construct national educational and attitudinal profiles for Blacks in America today.

**Admissions Criteria of the Academies.** The three Department of Defense service academies provide several avenues for admission. The most publicized method is through the congressional appointment system in which Members of Congress are authorized specific quotas. The methods used to fill existing congressional vacancies are twofold. They may appoint one principal and nine alternate candidates from their list of applicants, or they may nominate 10 candidates and allow the academy to select the best qualified. Should they nominate a principal candidate, the service academy is required to accept the applicant if he fulfills the minimum requirements for admission. Occasionally, the Congressman will forward a list

of applications to the academy, and the academy will evaluate the credentials of all candidates and provide the Congressman with a listing of candidates ranked in order of priority. Such a method provides more flexibility in the appointment system and approximates a more competitive admission process. In any event, the congressional appointment system removes much of the recruiting from the academy and places it in the political arena.

Another method of appointment is the qualified alternate system whereby young men who meet the admissions criteria but do not receive a principal nomination from their Congressman may be admitted on a competitive basis as vacancies occur. Presidential and Vice Presidential appointments are reserved for sons of deceased, active, or retired veterans and other special categories. The point to be made here is that relatively few minority students are familiar enough with the varied admissions procedures to be encouraged about applying for an appointment.

The U.S. Coast Guard Academy, unlike her sister academies, tenders appointments solely on the basis of an annual nationwide competition with no congressional appointments or geographical quotas involved. The competition, based upon college board scores, high school performance, and leadership potential, is open to any young man who meets the basic eligibility requirements. This application system is more conducive to minority applications because it parallels the application procedures of civilian colleges; however, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy severely lacks the nationwide prestige of her sister academies. Thus, many well-qualified minority students are unaware of the scholarship opportunities offered by the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

Although there are considerable differences in the application procedures of the Armed Forces service academies, the academic qualification standards

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differ only slightly. All service academies require the College Entrance Examination Board Scholastic Aptitude Test, English Composition Achievement Test, and Level I or II Mathematics Achievement Test or their equivalents. The weights assigned to each test by the respective academies are nearly equal, with approximately 20 percent being assigned to both the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Mathematics Achievement Test and about 10 percent being assigned to the English Composition Achievement Test. Furthermore, an approximate weight of 25 percent is assigned to the high school class standing of the candidate, with the remainder of the admission criteria consisting of leadership potential and physical qualification.

Although the relative weights of each category are quite similar, some differences occur, with one academy establishing minimum qualifying test scores for each test while another may disregard this criteria and use only composite results. It is worth noting that while approximately 75 percent of the admission criteria is composed of fixed factors, the remaining 25 percent provides for judgment on the part of admissions officers in the final selection of candidates.

The physical qualifications of the four Armed Forces academies are similar in many respects but do differ considerably in visual acuity and physical aptitude. The U.S. Coast Guard Academy has the most stringent visual requirements, requiring 82 percent binocular vision correctable to 20-20 and will not accept any waivers. The U.S. Military Academy simply requires vision to be correctable to 20-20, and the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Air Force Academy will grant waivers, under certain circumstances, for up to 20-400 uncorrected visual acuity correctable to less than 20-20. While it is agreed that the missions of the respective services should establish the physical require-

ments, one would expect the Navy and Coast Guard to be similar, but they are not. As one might expect, the Coast Guard Academy's strict visual requirements have definitely hindered her minority recruitment efforts during the last 5 years.

However, while the U.S. Coast Guard Academy maintains the most severe visual standards, its physical aptitude standards are the least rigid. Physical aptitude examinations are administered after arrival at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and have very little bearing on the admission decision. The other service academies require physical aptitude examinations prior to considering the candidate's other credentials. It would appear that the extremely low percentage of physical misfits who enter the U.S. Coast Guard Academy could certainly serve as an example for postponing the physical aptitude examination until reporting to the Academy, thus reducing the already complicated process of applying for appointment. In many instances the elements of time, distance, and expense involved in completing all admission requirements establish a considerable recruiting barrier for potential appointees. The appointment procedures of the various Armed Forces service academies have endured for years. However, if more Blacks are to be admitted, it may be time to realistically review and streamline the administrative procedures for admission to the service academies.

**The Black Profile.** In constructing a profile to compare the Black youth of today with the youth attending the Armed Forces service academies, heavy reliance will be made upon statistical research provided by the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS). NSSFNS has published the results from a nationwide sampling of over 54,000 Black high school juniors and seniors which was administered to provide counseling and

guidance services to Black youth and to establish a national data resource for research and analysis. It is interesting to note that of the 54,415 respondents, 40.8 percent were male compared to 59.2 percent female, indicating that nearly 20 percent more Black females are interested in attending college than males.

The NSSFNS survey indicates that 13.9 percent of the Black males polled were in the top 10 percent of their high school class; 36.6 percent in the top quarter; 56.6 percent in the top third; and 82.0 percent in the top half.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Coast Guard Academy Cadet Profile, Class of 1976, which is comparable to the profiles of the other service academies, reveals that 55 percent of the entering cadets were in the top 10 percent, 99 percent in the top half.<sup>5</sup> By simple analysis it would appear that 18 percent of the Blacks surveyed would stand little chance of being selected for a service academy. Furthermore, since 90 percent of all entering cadets were in the top 25 percent of their high school classes, Black students falling below this category (63.4 percent of all students surveyed by NSSFNS) would be in a poor position to compete for the limited number of openings.

As regards high school achievement

in the field of English, the NSSFNS survey reveals that 7.1 percent of the Black males received a grade of A, 38.7 percent B's, 46.8 percent C's, and 7.3 percent were graded below C.<sup>6</sup> As stated previously, the two required verbal facility tests comprise approximately 20 percent of the candidate's admission qualifications. With only 45.8 percent of the Black males receiving a B or better, it would appear that a considerable number would fail in this category, especially if a minimum qualifying score were assigned to each test.

Experience has shown that some tests do misrepresent the intellectual competence of students from different cultural backgrounds and that the average Black student compares unfavorably with the average white on the standardized Scholastic Aptitude Test. Mr. S.A. Kendrich, executive director of the College Entrance Examination Board, has estimated that not more than 15 percent and possibly as low as 10 percent of the Black high school seniors would score 400 or more in the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and only 1 or 2 percent would score 500 or more.<sup>7</sup> This estimated performance falls considerably below the performance of the cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, as illustrated in table I.

**TABLE I—STANDARD SCORES EARNED ON THE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST (SAT) BY ENTERING CADETS OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD ACADEMY, CLASS OF 1976**

CEEB SAT Verbal Score	Percentage in Interval
749-700	3
699-650	9
649-600	16
599-550	27
549-500	27
499-450	13
449-400	4
Below 400	1
<b>Mean Score: 552</b>	

Source: U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Director of Admissions Office, *U.S. Coast Guard Academy Cadet Profile, Class of 1976*, Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1972).

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It is obvious that any college or university which adheres strictly to minimum testing scores will, in effect, build an anti-Black bias into its selection criteria. Therefore it is incumbent upon the Armed Forces academies to place less emphasis on minimum single scores in favor of composite evaluation of all facets of the applicant's background. However, a degree of caution must be observed in abandoning prior criteria. Rather than simply advocating that the selection criteria be drastically modified, applicants who score low on the SAT verbal tests should be further screened to determine whether cultural deprivation is the primary cause.

All of the Armed Forces service academies require a minimum of 3 years of high school mathematics to be eligible for appointments. The NSSFNS survey reveals that only 64 percent of the Black males will have completed 3 years of mathematics prior to their high school graduation and that only 39.6 percent maintain a B average or better in mathematics.<sup>8</sup> While all academies require a rather extensive math background, in many instances the math requirements established for graduation from high school by the various states do not fulfill the minimum requirements for admission to the service

academies. As a case in point, of the 42 Black candidates for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Class of 1975, 19 percent were rejected because of insufficient mathematics credits.<sup>9</sup> One method of dealing with this problem would be to inform prospective candidates for the Armed Forces academies of the entrance requirements much earlier in their high school careers.

Academic credentials are not the only criteria affecting the recruitment of Blacks by the academies. The attitudes of Black youth themselves are vitally important. When queried as to their probable major field in college, 17.4 percent of the Black males replied business; 14.6 percent replied engineering; 11.7 percent, fine arts; 3.2 percent, mathematics; 2.3 percent, physical sciences; and 0.9 percent replied other nontechnical fields which included the military profession.<sup>10</sup> Less than 1 percent demonstrated an interest in the military—a discouraging statistic for those desirous of increasing minority enrollment at the service academies. When asked what persons contributed the most to society, the following responses were received: educators, 23.5 percent; civil rights leaders, 21.9 percent; political leaders, 15.6 percent; scientists, 11.3 percent; and at the

TABLE II—PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY AS DETERMINED BY BLACK MALES

Occupation	% Contributes Most	% Contributes Least
Political Leaders	15.6	8.6
Businessmen	8.7	10.4
Military Figures	1.0	28.5
Scientists	11.3	1.9
Artists, Musicians, Writers	5.5	5.4
Athletes	4.3	16.7
Actors or Entertainers	1.9	18.1
Civil Rights Leaders	21.9	1.8
Religious Leaders	6.5	5.6
Educators	23.5	3.0

Source: National Scholarship Service and Fund For Negro Students, *A National Profile of Black Youth, The Class of 1971*, Research Report (Minneapolis: National Computer Systems, 1972), v. 1, no. 1, p. 7.

bottom of the list came military figures with 1 percent. The field which Blacks consider contributes least to society was the military.

These results clearly indicate that among Black youths of today the military profession is not highly esteemed. Certainly the bad press it has received as a result of the Vietnam war is a contributing factor, but the racial problems which have surfaced in recent months have had a significant impact on this dilemma. On several occasions while recruiting for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, I encountered Black candidates who would prefer to meet me at a location other than their high school because they did not want to be called an "Uncle Tom" by their peer group. This peer pressure contributes considerably to the actions of candidates in their everyday environment.

Two final questions shed additional light upon the attitudes of Black Youth today. When asked what person they would most like to be, only 2.7 percent replied military figures. This percentage was second lowest, religious leaders being the least desirable. When the question was reversed, 29.5 percent replied that the military was their least desirable choice, and the second least desirable profession, political leaders,

was a distant second with 21.8 percent of the vote. Clearly the military profession's image in the Black community must be substantially improved before greater numbers of qualified young Black men will seek service academy educations.

**Recruitment.** The traditional method of college advertising is through the high school guidance counselor. While this approach has been widely used by the service academies in the past, I submit that reliance on this method today would have tragic results for Black recruitment. Today's typical high school counselor is assigned far too many students and is too involved in other professional duties to give more than cursory attention to the service academy's plea. Besides, many of today's younger counselors possess a strong antimilitary bias, and on several occasions I have been told that the service academies would be the last institutions in the world they would recommend to their students. Either intentionally or unintentionally, the high school counselor is often a formidable barrier for the service academy's recruitment program.

To avoid this obstacle, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy has employed a direct

TABLE III—PERSON ONE WOULD MOST/LEAST LIKE TO BE AS DETERMINED BY BLACK MALES

Occupation	Most Like To Be	Least Like To Be
Political Leaders	4.7	21.8
Businessmen	19.5	3.5
Military Figures	2.7	29.5
Scientists	12.5	5.0
Artists, Musicians, or Writers	11.5	7.0
Athletes	25.5	4.0
Actors or Entertainers	4.4	8.0
Civil Rights Leaders	7.1	3.6
Religious Leaders	1.6	14.1
Educators	10.4	3.4

Source: National Scholarship and Fund for Negro Students, *A National Profile of Black Youth, The Class of 1971*, Research Report (Minneapolis: National Commission on Black Leadership Initiatives, 1972), p. 7.

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recruiting program. Form letters were mailed directly to the homes of one-half million high school male juniors informing them of the educational, career, and scholarship opportunities offered by the Academy. While this program did entail added costs, applications for the 400 appointments rose from approximately 5,000 to over 8,000 over a period of 3 years. Many minorities responded to this letter, but one unfortunate aspect of such a program is that it instills false hope in many students who do not possess the minimum academic qualifications for admission. Radio and television public service announcements provide the same shotgun approach with the same advantages and disadvantages.

The three Department of Defense academies all utilize recruitment programs which effectively employ the resources and good offices of their respective Reserve programs. Perhaps the best organized and most effective of these approaches is the U.S. Air Force Academy Liaison Officer program.

In 1958, in an effort to increase applications, the Air Force Academy organized an alumni college counseling service consisting of Air Force officers serving in their Reserve. The objectives of these counselors were to seek out and then encourage and assist potential candidates in their application for appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy. Since these Reserve officers were usually successful and well established citizens in their communities, they were both easily identified and accepted by potential appointees. This effort has proved so successful that both the Naval and Military Academies established similar programs. The value of these programs lies in the personalized approach to recruitment they offer. Such a personalized approach is deemed necessary if the desired percentages of Blacks in our service academies are to be met.

higher education have complicated the task of Black recruitment at the service academies. Over the past decade the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has closely monitored the Black student population of all public and private colleges and universities and has made clear that Federal funding for institutions of higher education is contingent upon equal opportunity at the admissions office. This fact, combined with the inherent desire of colleges to limit their admissions to only the most academically qualified students, has produced a highly competitive situation among colleges and universities. Even less qualified Blacks have been recruited by many colleges, including such prestigious schools as Yale. For these students modified curricula have been adapted to assist them while they adjust to the new academic demands made upon them. Tutoring services are often made available to these students to ensure that they can successfully master the basic skills and thus satisfactorily compete with their contemporaries. Besides their academic content, such assistance programs demonstrate an interest in student need and progress and foster a "grassroots" program which is self-perpetuating within the Black community.

As previously noted, the number of academically and physically qualified Blacks from which the service academies must draw their candidates is extremely small. Through a process of elimination, table IV seeks to establish roughly the number of male Black college students that possess the interest and ability to compete for an appointment to one of the four Armed Forces service academies. It must be remembered, however, that these same 1,000 students are also being actively recruited by other colleges and universities. Thus it becomes readily apparent that the chances of achieving equitable Black representation at the service academies rests on an effective recruiting program.



TABLE IV—SOURCE POOL OF BLACK CANDIDATES FOR THE SERVICE ACADEMIES

Academic Year 1970-1971	
Blacks enrolled (approximate) <sup>a</sup>	40,000
Of the 40,000, 20 percent attend all-Black colleges <sup>b</sup>	
Remainder	32,000
Of the 32,000, 16 percent are above the mean mathematic score on the SAT and achievement test <sup>c</sup>	
Remainder	5,120
Of the 5,120, 60 percent passed the Physical Aptitude Examination and Medical Examination <sup>d</sup>	
Remainder	3,072
Of the 3,072, those probably interested in service academies <sup>e</sup>	1,000

Source:

a. American Council on Education, *Recent Trends in Enrollment of Minority Freshmen*, Report (Washington: American Council on Education, March 1972).

b. *Ibid.*

c. Interview with Capt. Malcolm J. Williams, Director of Admissions, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, Conn., 14 October 1972.

d. *Ibid.*

e. *Ibid.*

One area in which the service academies have a considerable advantage in their appeal to students is money. In addition to receiving free tuition and books, the service academy cadet is paid in excess of \$2,500 annually, plus a subsistence allowance which covers food and lodging. The total scholarship value of the program exceeds \$50,000, a truly unique financial assistance package.

The importance of financial assistance to Black students is evidenced by the results of the NSSFNS survey which indicates that 65.3 percent of the Black males polled expect to incur a debt while attending college, and 87.6 percent expect to work full time while matriculating. Additionally, 14.9 percent indicated their gross family income to be less than \$2,999, 33.6 percent between \$3,000 and \$5,999, and 24.7 percent between \$6,000 and \$8,999.<sup>11</sup> Thus, 71.1 percent of the Black students polled come from families with a gross income of less than \$9,000. Financial assistance certainly is needed,

and the academies provide an unexcelled scholarship opportunity compared to their civilian counterparts.

The difficulty which recent college graduates have encountered in obtaining employment has been widely publicized; however, very little emphasis has been placed on the fact that the academy graduates are guaranteed employment with a starting total salary in excess of \$8,000 annually. Very few civilian institutions can guarantee such employment opportunity before admission. Comparing this annual salary to the NSSFNS report reveals that over 50 percent of the Black students upon graduation from an Armed Forces academy would be exceeding their family's gross annual income.<sup>12</sup>

The financial and employment opportunities notwithstanding, the academies are not without their drawbacks. The service academy environment is extremely restricted compared to that of a civilian institution. Besides the academic load, a rigid disciplinary sys-

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tem becomes an integral portion of the student's life, with military indoctrination, precise daily routine, and required physical activities making for a very busy schedule. With heavy demands being placed on the student's time, there exists little opportunity for extensive tutoring or flexibility for reduced academic loads. Furthermore, the practice of admitting high risk students and providing them with academic underloads or tutoring would both damage the cohesiveness which is built within the class and adversely affect the student's self-confidence. The service academies, unlike civilian institutions, are not the place for assimilation of ethnic groups. If high risk students are to be admitted, greater emphasis must be placed on their preparation. Preparatory schools operated by the service academies would seem ideally suited for just such a purpose.

Perhaps an even greater obstacle than the environment of the military institution is the 5-year military obligation incurred upon graduation. Many students are simply hesitant to accept a program with such an extended commitment. Another factor which is detrimental to academy recruitment efforts is the limited academic curriculum offered. Among the academies, the U.S. Air Force Academy probably provides the greatest selection of major fields, but regardless of the option pursued, all cadets are required to successfully complete a basic core program which heavily emphasizes advanced mathematics and the physical sciences. The emphasis on quantitative courses, especially during the first 3 or 4 semesters, deters many young Blacks with inadequate preparation in mathematics from applying to the academies.

Therefore, while the Armed Forces service academies provide exceptional scholarship and job opportunities, competing civilian colleges and universities offer a more desirable environment,

and a greater choice of curriculum.

**Conclusion.** The two most serious problems in the recruitment of Blacks for the service academies are scholastic qualifications and attitude of the prospective candidate. Effectively selling the merits of a service academy education and a career in the military can serve to stimulate interest and alert potential applicants to the scholastic prerequisites of the service academies. At the same time it is incumbent upon the academies to increase their preparatory school program so that high risk students may receive proper academic preparation prior to entering the academy. The academies must provide for a more personal selection process to ensure that applicants are not disqualified simply on the basis of one test score without due consideration being given to their background. By utilizing a composite academic criteria and placing greater emphasis on high school performance, more candidates may be screened for final consideration. However, the admission criteria must ensure that all appointees can perform satisfactorily in the demanding environment of

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Comdr. Robert G. Bates is a graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Rhode Island. He has served under the U.S. Coast

Guard Resident Inspector in Houston, Tex., in the USCG cutter *Diligence* as First Lieutenant; as Commanding Officer of the USCG Loran Station, French Frigate Shoals in the Hawaiian Chain; and as Assistant Director of Admissions of the USCG Academy at New London, Conn. Lieutenant Commander Bates is a recent graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff.

the academies; no student should be admitted unless he shows strong potential for successfully completing the program.

The problem of recruiting Blacks for

our service academies has no easy solution. The "grassroots" approach offers the best prospect for long-term results, but the seeds for such a program must be planted now.

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### FOOTNOTES

1. Reports to the Superintendent, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, by the Director of Admissions, U.S. Coast Guard Academy (in the files of the Department).
2. Memorandum regarding Minority Group Enrollment of U.S. Armed Forces Academies, Class of 1976, prepared by Director of Admissions, U.S. Coast Guard Academy in August 1972 (in the files of the Department).
3. Wiley S. Bolden, "Improving Access to College for Black Students," *College Board Review*, Summer 1972, p. 18.
4. National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, *A National Profile of Black Youth, the Class of 1971*, Research Report (Minneapolis: National Computer Systems, 1972), v. 1, no. 1, p. 7.
5. U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Director of Admissions Office, *U.S. Coast Guard Academy Cadet Profile, Class of 1976*, Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1972).
6. National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students.
7. Junius A. Davis and George Temp, "Is the SAT Biased Against Black Students?" *College Board Review*, Fall 1971, p. 4.
8. National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students.
9. Memorandum concerning Minority Applications to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Class of 1975, prepared by Director of Admissions, U.S. Coast Guard Academy in July 1971 (in the files of the Department).
10. National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*

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Freedom is not enough. You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line, and then say, you're free to compete with all the others, and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

*Lyndon B. Johnson, Commencement Address at  
Howard University, Washington, D.C., 4 June 1965*