

Ashton Brasher

Abstract: *Blackness, Literacy, and Higher Education*

Sitting around a waxed wooden table in February, 2011, I took a moment to observe the faces surrounding me. We sat in quiet conversation, discussing our interests and our future goals, many of us wiping sweaty palms on our dress pants and pencil skirts, nervously awaiting the sound of our names. The Presidential Scholarship interview would be, for seven of us, a life-changing addition to our academic lives. Providing comprehensive financial coverage for a full eight semesters at Georgia State, this scholarship allows its recipients to essentially earn a profit from the university just for attending. As a recipient, I seldom pay attention to the price of my education. It is all given to me each semester, allowing me to prepare for my future with a social and economic investment from the university. As they fund me, they groom me, and I benefit every step of the way.

The current scholar cohort is primarily white, with only three people of color in a group of twenty-eight--a ratio hardly reflective of Georgia State's student population. In a school championed for its diversity, I cannot help but question how such an unequal distribution within an institutional scholarship could occur. I know for a fact that there are plenty of well-deserving students of color who were considered for the scholarship and many who were not. Yet, this inequality is not addressed. Each year, the standards for the scholarship are raised to accommodate the increasingly competitive pool of applicants. These standards, though, are not based on personal character, lifetime goals, or extra-curricular activities. Instead, one of the first steps is always to raise the minimum for the SAT verbal section, to the point where now hardly any score under a 700 stands a chance. Working for the Honors College, I am often present for discussions pertaining to admissions standards. I have watched as numbers have been toyed with,

and one truth continually stands out: the higher the SAT verbal minimum is raised, the whiter the incoming class becomes.

Through my paper *Blackness, Literacy, and Higher Education*, I examine how historical and current trends regarding functional literacy, the type measured by standardized tests like the SAT, often bars marginalized students from an effective, affordable college education. The SAT, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, attempts to measure, in a standardized fashion, individual students' cognitive capability for succeeding in a university setting (The College Board). I use my research to engage in an analysis of the effects of this test through a brief discussion of historical literacy practices involving African-Americans and then proceed to explore modern themes. My purpose is to illuminate a dire circumstance facing a marginalized group of people and to ultimately make a claim that places the blame for these circumstances on structural inequalities. I aim to analyze the trends responsible for a disparity of black graduates and black achievement when compared to white students as inspired by my own experiences at Georgia State.