Black Americans’ educational interests are underserved. This has proven true generation after generation, borne from the belly of “separate but equal”. Perhaps inequity in education is borne from an even older rule-of-thumb: enslaved people being barred from learning to read.

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute At UCLA conducted a survey with thousands of college seniors in 2008. The seniors surveyed have diverse backgrounds, attended different colleges and universities, majored in different programs and had different attitudes toward their time in undergraduate study.

There are some striking trends in the data for Black students. Namely, Black students are still grossly underrepresented in higher education and Black students are underrepresented in STEM majors.

Although dated, this dataset is large enough to answer some questions for Black students:

How many Black students or students of color were satisfied with aspects of their college education?

How are Black students paying for college?

How many Black students first-generation college students?

What relationship, if any, does type of school have on education outlook?

Chart, pie chart

Description automatically generated

Looking at the above chart, the amount of first generation students that are Black is dwarfed by the white first generation students. Dr. Jesse Goldstein, a sociology professor at Virginia Commonwealth University describes this situation as a consequence of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. “First generation students as a population are sizeable on campuses, no matter their racial make-up,” he said. “Data reflects Black students’ needs not being met on college campuses in America. This community of students is more likely to be working and attending school at the same time, supporting folks back home or not have the basic essentials to live (ie. Access to food or shelter) while enrolled in a higher education program.”

Dr. Goldstein explains that while an education is important, other compounding factors that affect Black communities (like food insecurity) muddy the Black enrollment numbers.