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## Book Review: Wechsler, H. S., & Diner, S. J. (2022). *Unwelcome Guests: A History of Access to American Higher Education*. United States: Johns Hopkins University Press.

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Intricately woven into the tapestry of “diversity” in higher education institutions comes this profoundly important book written by Harold S. Wechsler and Steven J. Diner. Organized in five chapters, with a Preface, a section of Acknowledgements, Introduction, Conclusion, and extensive Notes, *Unwelcome Guests* is a plea for a re-evaluation of college admissions policies and goals from the Civil Rights era of the late 1960’s and early 1970s to the twenty-first century.

In the first pages we learn about the huge effort of compiling archival material that would finally lead to the writing of a synthetic history of minority access to higher education in the United States. The whole project followed a model provided by John L. Rury’s research on the student demographics of DePaul University in Chicago. As stated in the book, most institutional histories written before the 1980s did not focus on issues related to student life, and said little about social class, race, ethnicity, and gender. A fresh approach to the aforementioned subjects revealed not only a wide array of college admissions policies and prejudices, but also how extensive historical data pointed to changes that shaped the students’ access to higher education over time.

As the first paragraphs of the Introduction unfold, the reader is invited to consider the definition of “diversity,” which obviously presents a topic worth debating: “Are the categories Black, white, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American too broad to provide a meaningful description of the US population? Should religion be included in discussions of diversity? Should diversity include people who are LGBTQ or those who have disabilities?” The answers are to be found in the content of the book aimed to “help us recognize and understand the central role of race in the history of US higher education and how that history has brought about efforts today to use race as a means of overcoming the legacy of discrimination.” (p. 2)

Chapter One, *African Americans*, starts with two relevant quotations from *A Harvard Example* (1889) and from Arthur P. Davis, Columbia College (1927), and with the obvious assessment that until the end of World War II there was a profoundly different view of the African American applicants and students in most institutions of higher education in the United States. As stated in the book, the situation in the southern schools (with few colleges soliciting African American attendance before the Civil War) was somewhat different from the ones in the north, where abolitionists and other people thought that Black people, enslaved or free, “should have some education.” (p. 3)

With a plethora of examples to support their views, the authors resort to names like historian Carter Woodson, who noted that colonization societies “supported educating a Black leadership cadre at white colleges.” (p. 4) We further discover that “abolitionists and colonizers taught and studied together at Dartmouth,” that there was sporadic promotion of racial co-education in some places, and that there were eight of the best colleges, seven medical schools, and three seminaries where Black people were enrolled by 1852. (Woodson, 1919) Several other names are brought into the discussion, but one stands out:

Amos A. Phelps (1834), a Yale graduate, Congregationalist minister, and editor of *Emancipation*, who provided documents of actual enrollments in some colleges, but also noted “increased antislavery sentiment at others.” (p. 5) He also asserted that he had found five non-discriminating Massachusetts institutions: Amherst College, Williams Colleges, Bridgewater Academy, Andover Seminary, and the Normal School at Lexington.

Another school comes into the foreground when Oneida Institute is praised for a higher number of students of color and with an enrollment in 1840 of about 20 African Americans and Native people, some of whom had been rejected by other schools. (p. 9) Along the same line, we find an extremely poignant comment on the graduation orations of Oneida’s African American students:

The performances, as a whole, were highly creditable to the Institution. Some of them possessed unusual merit. But we forbear the invidious task of particularizing. It was gratifying to find marked evidence that a dark colored skin, and crisped hair, do not stand as indices of mental inferiority and barrenness. (“Oneida Institute,” *Friend of Man*, 1838)

More names have become noteworthy in the authors’ view of colleges open to Black women. One such example would be Grace A. Mapps, “often called the first Black woman to graduate from a predominantly white four-year college, who received her degree from NYCC in 1852.” (Quoted in *Notable Black American Women*, 1996, New York Central College, originally Free Mission College) was the second of New York’s integrated colleges, founded by Cyrus Pitt Grosvenor in 1849, whose aim was “to open a ‘free institution’ offering ‘literary, scientific, moral, and physical education of both sexes and of all classes of youth.’” (*Morning Star*, 1995)

As the authors note, Oneida Institute gradually turned into Oberlin College, “the third predominantly while antebellum college with significant Black enrollments.” (p. 11) It is important to stress that African American students represented 5% of the Oberlin student body in the 1850s, and that the numbers increased to 8% after the Civil War. During the same period of time, according to Cummings (1886), we find John Baldwin, who, in 1845, founded the Baldwin Institute, where students were accepted “regardless of race, gender, creed,” or ability to pay. (p. 12)

When most colleges did not accept Black students, the reader is informed that Thomas Paul Sr., the founder of the First African Baptist Church in Boston was not accepted at Brown University, and that James McCune was rejected by Columbia and by Geneva Medical College, although he finally earned his bachelor’s and medical degrees at the University of Glasgow. (p. 17) Extra information is added when we find only 28 African Americans are thought to have received bachelor’s degrees before the Civil War. The whole situation required drastic changes, and they came in 1847, when the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends (open to white delegates) defended the idea of a separate Black College in the following words:

The colored youth, under care of colored teachers, associating with those of his own complexion and condition, would not feel depressed as likely to be in other institutions, surrounded by those whom he had always regarded as opposed to his equality, and, therefore, colored colleges were the most favorable to his mental growth. (Quoted in *College for Colored Youth*, p. 5)

The authors’ unflinching perspective switches to life lessons learned from witnessing horrible conditions of the enslaved people on his trips to the South led the Reverend Charles Avery, a wealthy merchant and abolitionist, to found the Allegheny Institute and Mission Church in Allegheny City in Pennsylvania in 1849. When the school became a liberal arts college in 1858 and then closed permanently in 1873, Avery provided in his will for a dozen scholarships enabling Black people to attend what is now the University of Pittsburgh, and left a considerable sum of money for scholarships at Oberlin College, which were used by at least 77 “indigent and worthy” colored students. (“Educational Funds,” in *Negro Yearbook*, 1918-1919, p. 287)

A smooth transition takes us to what happened after the Civil War. As mentioned in the book, African Americans and leaders of white missionary societies used religious conversion as a means to increase their efforts at race education in the South. Before World War II, we find Black people attending “colored colleges,” and sometimes “predominantly white private institutions.” In such a context, two sides of the same coin were presented by Kelly Miller, a Black mathematician, who asserted that, on one hand, “separating the races would not perpetuate prejudice,” but, on the other hand, “Black students could not relate to the white faculty and administrators at white institutions,” (p. 21)

Race and racial coeducation, in the authors’ view, remained for a while a seemingly debatable issue. Howard University, for example, was known by the mid-twentieth century as a “Negro university,” while Atlanta University, a private institution, considered that “There are things more dangerous than coeducation.” (p. 23) Morphed into the same discourse, and equally revealing, comes Samuel J. Lee, board president at the University of South Carolina, declaring that “In the chapel, recitation room, on the ball ground and in the study,” he found that “the lessons of equality and mutual self-respect have been inculcated.” A student (as quoted on p. 24) went even further when he specified that Black and white people studied together “without the black feeling honored or the whites disgraced.” (Cohen, 2012, p. 118-227)

Many insights may be gleaned from the presentation of private colleges, but one stands out: In 1904 the Kentucky legislature enacted the Day Law, which interdicted coeducation at private colleges, and “outlawed Black colleges within 25 miles of a white school.” Northern journals presented their angle and criticized “race hatred, attacks on academic freedom, and the lack of equity.” (p. 30) Nevertheless, the Day Law stayed unchanged until 1950, when, according to an amendment, African Americans were allowed to attend white colleges, graduate schools, and professional schools “if Kentucky State College did not offer equivalent programs.” (ibid.)

As poignantly outlined in the section regarding Military Academies, we learn that, during the Reconstruction period, the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and the US Military Academy in West Point, New York, “accorded African Americans formal opportunities.” (p. 35) Along the same lines, we find that in 1918 “about 550 campuses, including about 20 Black colleges, housed units of the Student Army Training Corps.” (p. 36) Inspired by the numbers in the early twentieth century, the authors postulate that Black colleges continued to enroll most African American college students, and they quote 1938 when the percentage went up to 97. A small decline in Black student enrollment was noticed in 1980, “but the proportion of Black people attending any historically Black college fell to 18 percent in 1976.” (p. 37) The last chapter paragraphs epitomize the problems caused by policies and practices that became fixed by the turn of the twentieth century when Black people attended mostly southern segregated colleges, a few northern Black institutions, or “predominantly white northern colleges.” (p. 39)

Underscoring the effect of an unprecedented influx of migrants coming to the United States between the 1880s and the 1920s, Chapter Two, *Ethnic Minorities*, starts with a 41-volume report published in 1907 that included 5 volumes entitled *Children of Immigrants in Schools*. In 1908, surveys were done of nationalities, races, and ethnicities of students at 77 colleges and universities. Specifically, except for Jews, “most first- and second-generation US students came from Northern and Western Europe and the British Isles.” (p. 41) Furthermore, according to the Dillingham Commission’s data collected in 1927, in 55 geographically distributed colleges, “98.24 percent of surveyed students were born in the United States.” (ibid.) A similar appraisal found that 88 percent of students second-generation Americans had fathers born in the United States. Consequently, “many nationality, racial, and ethnic groups and subgroups, in addition to Native Americans and African Americans, encountered an unreceptive white student majority when venturing into college.” (ibid.)

The information presented in the main subdivisions of the chapter, European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans, clearly delineates the patterns created by students from these parts of the world in their pursuit of higher education. Some migrant families of European origin “learned that higher education could offer economic rewards and intergenerational mobility.” (p. 42) With so much valuable information at hand, the authors resort to interesting examples to justify their selections. For example, some Eastern European nationalities seemed to share familial characteristics similar to Italian Americans, seeing little advantage to education. The prevalence of economic over cultural factors was therefore emphasized to explain “the persistence of low school and college attendance levels,” not only for Italians but also for the Poles, who “came relatively late to higher education.” (p. 45) The general discussion, as the authors claim, also took into consideration the opinions of community leaders who feared that attending denominational colleges or nineteenth-century state universities risked the religious welfare of certain students. Research showed that “Entering college could mean leaving one’s community physically; mental departure could occur even before enrollment. Biographical and fictional accounts viewed parental prohibition, based on fears of estrangement, indifference to religion, and poverty, as determining the educational fate of second-generation women.” (p. 47)

On the basis of evidence, although viewed by some people as one separate group, we find Hispanic students can be subdivided according to ethnicity, nationality, and social class. As theorized by Cohen (2000), some schools, like Rollins College (founded in 1885) in Winter Park, Florida, never hesitated to claim distinction as the nation’s only college “in which the [white] grandchildren of abolitionists and confederate soldiers, in about equal numbers, sit together in the same classroom and play together on the same athletic field, and learn thus to understand, respect, and live with one another.” (p. 49) When Cuban students were analyzed, though, Rollins College was found to have admitted white Cubans while turning away Cubans with darker skin.” (ibid.) In a nuanced perspective of the legal status of Hispanics in the southwestern states, Mexican Americans were declared “to be white in *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930), though the court also authorized the continued segregation of children with special language needs.” (p. 50) Language difficulties became the core tenet in addressing unequal academic starting points. As concluded by a 1944 Yale PhD thesis, “a language handicap impaired academic achievement at the [New Mexico] university. Classwork and reading material bewildered students; their speech and writing indicated an imperfect knowledge of English.” (p. 54) Generally speaking, racial cooperation remained unattainable and led to a political and social battleground.

The impact of Asian students is masterfully integrated into the body of the project with relevant examples and survey results focusing on what the new immigrants brought into the melting pot, their high expectations, as well as the reaction coming from high education leaders. In 1910, journalist E. E. Slosson acknowledged the intense race prejudice on the West Coast. Nonetheless, he also added that the University of California, for example, was among the first to predict that Asian students would bring “commercial, industrial, and educational opportunities for usefulness and profit.” (Quoted on p. 49) the Japanese, as well as the Chinese and the Filipino students had to navigate through decades of limitations and restrictions brought about by regulations and misconceptions, but they all gradually became embedded in the social and cultural life of their communities.

When referring to Asian students in general, the authors’ argument was that college admission did not necessarily imply acceptance by the white majority culture. In a report entitled *Sending Students to America*, the Philippine commission asserted that “The quickest way for Filipino youth to acquire the English language and to arrive at an understanding of Western civilization is to live among Americans in the United States and be taught in American schools.” (p. 63) The overall picture shows that the Philippines established scholarships and, of the initial 100 students, most came from prominent families. However, even though a lot of money was spent on their education, “tolerance was not the norm,” and some students were even accused of cheating. The chapter concludes that “Asian students fell victim to stereotypes, customs, and the law.” (p. 64)

The general contours of Chapter Three, *Streetcar College*, build and then expand the idea that, although some college founders expressed their concerns that cities may have negative effects on young men and women, “some US intellectuals and

academics celebrated urban colleges and their growing enrollments” in places like New York, Pittsburgh, Akron, Detroit, Chicago, and Louisville. (p. 67) One obvious reason was that “cities were increasingly populated by immigrants, Black people, and other ethnic and religious minorities.” (ibid.) When asked if a student should go to a city or country college, Western Reserve president made the following remark:

Nearly all the colleges in the United States are, like the Jerusalem of David, beautiful for situation. Country colleges, say the advocates, are relatively inexpensive, freer from moral temptation; offer students greater extra-curricular opportunities, and more intimate association with nature. Cities, by contrast, offer contact with the best of humanity and its creations; the mightiest life of the nation pours into the city. (Thwing, 1899)

In 1903, Princeton president Woodrow Wilson stated that “A university which one goes to in a street car cannot, in seems to me, fulfill the true ideal of what a university should be.” By comparison, there were other institutions of higher education that praised city colleges because of their highly cultivated and stirring communities. To support this idea, the authors postulate that, according to the 1920 US Census, more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas. More specifically, several private nondenominational colleges, municipal colleges, proprietary institutions, and colleges with religious backing were opened in eastern and mid-western cities. “In short, the growth of cities and of colleges within them greatly increased the number of students from racial, ethnic, and religious minorities who could attend.” (p. 69).

As research shows, since few students were able to buy a car before World War II, subways, streetcars and buses provided the means of transportation to most city colleges. To begin with, The University of Pittsburgh and the University of Newark are used as perfect examples. With a nickel for one-way fare, this affordable mode of transportation paved the way for other urban colleges to grow and diversify. As the chancellor of Washington University argued, great universities are located in great cities, where great institutions, courts, industries, monuments, engineering feats and “great men” are to be found. Unfortunately, racial, ethnic, and religious minority students’ enrollment was generally limited, although the cultural mix was considered an experiment in intergroup relations. (p. 72)

Ingrained in the urban atmosphere are several colleges that attracted young people to study in New York: First, the University of the City of New York (now New York University) opened in 1831 “without significant denominational support or a benefactor’s endowment.” It was followed by the Cooper Institute for the Advancement of Science and Art (later renamed Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art) was established by philanthropist Peter Cooper in 1859. Next, Townsend Harris founded the Free Academy of New York in 1847. For women who wanted to become teachers, the Normal College opened in 1870, and later on changed its name to Hunter College. In the same context we find the city’s immigrant population predominating at City College and Hunter, both staying single-sex institutions until after World War II. In 1923 a *New York Times* editorial strongly supported public funding for the two colleges and that paved the way for Brooklyn College opened in 1930 and Queens College in Flushing also opened in 1937. (p. 79)

Recounting “triumph over diversity”, many colleges in Midwestern cities remained “a loosely integrated group of preparatory and professional schools,” where “large populations created institutional competition.” Where rapid enrollment growth created problems, if sufficient funds were not received from large gifts, citizens were solicited to make much needed donations. Additionally, cultural, economic, and political channels did their best to promote “cordial town-gown relations.” (p. 83) Places of higher learning like Temple University in Philadelphia had no entrance examination and the goal was to:

give all classes, the unemployed and the employed, the opportunity to rise from the middle or the lowest to the highest intellectual plane, that thereby they may advance themselves financially, socially, morally, and spiritually, and may thus increase their ability to become benefactors to the world... (*The Temple College Catalogue*, 1895, p. 10)

After a quick view of the University of Buffalo and that of the University of Newark (merged with Rutgers in 1946), the authors provide a smooth transition to debates about college life, with dormitories at their center. “Supporters of dormitories emphasized their commitment to diversity, and they viewed student unions as venues where staff could promote community and nudge students toward salutary academic, vocational, and social growth.” (p. 98) As time went on, students became aware of the benefits of being integrated into existing campus life and “the advantages of a rigorous education by professors offering tough love were worth sacrificing college town life.” (p. 100) Although the real issue facing urban colleges remained their concern over the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body, several schools morphed from street colleges into commuter colleges, where dorms and parking garages were built to accommodate recruitment of suburban and out-of-town students.

The long and troubling history of discrimination, viewed from the student perspective, takes center stage in Chapter Four, *Minority Student Experiences*. Carefully addressed in this section, minority students’ race, ethnicity, and religion are unraveled through the eyes of those who had to endure greater hostility and segregation in student activities and organizations than in classrooms and in their interactions with faculty. More hostile than others were encounters on the academic side, whereby “Some instructors created a chilly or even frigid racial climate – subjecting minorities to differential standards, ignoring their presence, banishing them to the last row of seats, and even failing them – unless and until deans or colleagues intervened.” (p. 106) The underrepresented students had to cope with some faculty members who were obviously hostile, while most faculty showed indifference to the race problem. (ibid.)

The effects of racial and ethnic dynamics are then better recognized and understood, as asserted by the authors, when we explore autobiographies written by people like Laura Zametkin a Cornell University student, who objected to her name being mispronounced by several instructors. A similar example comes from Gustavus Adolphus Steward, a Black educator and businessman, who expressed his disbelief at professors who embarrassed their audience with “darkey jokes” or “by repeating

statistics covering the prevalence of crime, bastardy, and diseases of filth in the section of the town where 'white supremacy' forces them to crowd." (Steward, p. 245; quoted on pp. 109-110) Life lessons were quickly learned when several fraternities at CCNY refused to admit Bernard Baruch, or when, in 1867, "a Columbia College literary society denied admission to Oscar Straus, a Jew who later became secretary of commerce under Theodore Roosevelt." (p. 110)

The reality of campus culture, with its restrictions, exclusions, and discrimination, led minority students "to devise strategies to coexist with the official and peer culture," through their local minority community and their race- or nationality-based clubs. (p. 111) Not confined to their origins in 1906, Black Greek organizations, when Alpha Phi Alpha began at Cornell University, similar fraternities and sororities were founded at Black Howard University. (ibid.) Fear, prejudice, and ignorance are delineated as the major reasons for limitation and restrictions. Editorials published in the *Daily Illini* argued that freedom or association had nothing to do with fear and "prejudice [...] based on ignorance." The same student newspaper went even further when a 1932 editorial posited that "There can be small honor in membership in an honorary society which creates the false impression that all achievement is confined to the white race." (Pickens, p. 4; quoted on p. 120) Nevertheless, the chapter ends on a positive note when the book mentions Harvard and Columbia among those higher education institutions that "pioneered discriminatory admissions practices among northern colleges after World War I." (p. 125)

The debate about race and prejudice continues in Chapter Five, *Lowering the Barriers*, with a plea coming from Leila B. Strayhorn, a freshman at Lincoln University, who, in 1945, strongly advised Black students "to attend integrated colleges, asserting that it would cause white colleges to incorporate Black history into the curriculum, would raise the competition level for Black people, and would enable a Black student to rid himself 'of the bitterness with which he regards the white race.'" (p. 126) The counterargument comes from people like Vivian Freeman, a junior at Fisk University, and Mildred E. Delaney, a student at Talladega College, who defended the choice of Black colleges which "supplied academic, social, and peer support."

In seeking to deal with admissions discrimination and segregation criteria, the authors resort to assertions offered by leaders of higher education associations, like The American Council on Education, who, in 1949, advocated adherence to meritocratic principles. In their view, opportunities for higher education should never be restricted "on any bases whatsoever other than the ability and interest of the individual." (Davis, 1949; quoted on p. 128) Navigating through the wealth of factual information, we discover social scientists like Robert Redfield from the University of Chicago, who "argued "that legislation and administration expressed social mores, but they also created social more." Stimulated by campus demonstrations, social scientists researched "ways of ameliorating the negative experiences of minority students on predominantly white campuses." (p. 130) In this context, the Commission on Higher Education was appointed by President Harry S. Truman in 1946, and their 1947 report suggested "a major expansion of public higher education," which led to the creation of two-year colleges, and, in time, encouraged many states to change their teachers colleges into state colleges and then into regional state universities. (p. 131)

Going one step further, southern states offered "differential scholarships" helping resident Black people to enroll in northern non-segregated professional schools and covering "the difference between in-state resident tuition and the receiving institution's out-of-state tuition charges." In 1921 and 1929, when Missouri began the practice, other states followed: Maryland (1933), Virginia (1936), and Kentucky (1936). A somewhat different but interesting approach came from the Southern Regional Education Board (1948) which decided to concentrate Black professional and graduate students in segregated regional schools. The segregated system continued well into the 1970s "when federal intervention led to the desegregation of public medical schools in the South." (p. 133)

Race relations at some universities, as the authors claim, changed drastically after World War II, when many students campaigned, picketed, and boycotted several actions taken by those who defended segregation and racial superiority. The Liberal Union at Princeton, Penn State, and Wayne University are relevant examples of such activities. Scenes of protest erupted in Black colleges during the 1960s, and they were compounded by "on-campus pressures from students, faculty (sometimes), and administrators (sometimes directly and sometimes working through the students)" which resulted in quiet integration and outright resistance on and off campus. (p. 137) Other results, like voluntary desegregation, included a considerable number of southern colleges, not to mention the University of Kentucky (in 1950) and three Catholic colleges in the same state – Nazareth and Ursuline for women and Bellarmine for men – which started to accept Black people. Unfortunately, surveys conducted in those years "showed discrimination persisted into the 1960s." (p. 142)

According to the authors, the postwar period brought significant changes in racial and ethnic stratification, with the rise of community colleges (and simultaneously regional colleges) taking the pressure off four-year colleges. "By 1970s, about 55 percent of all Hispanic students in the United States attended community colleges. African Americans would have shown similar representation if one looked only at predominantly white colleges." (p. 150) The chapter wrap-up points to an increased number of Black students at predominantly white colleges, mostly due to the civil rights movement. The compelling effort to achieve diversity, therefore, as research shows, has led to a completely different view of the students' race, ethnicity, and religion. And here we are with some supporting consideration of race in college admissions as a remedy for ongoing racial inequality, and with others opposing this view, believing that it is a violation of the country's commitment to civil rights. (p. 155)

In conclusion, we can say that *Unwelcome Guests* has brought a considerable contribution to the debate regarding race, nationality, and ethnicity in the context of college admissions decisions, which all might lead to better criteria, improved academic disciplines, incorporated professional schools, on expanded and beautiful campuses all over the nation. On one side we have supporters of affirmative action as a means of changing college admissions practices and their racist effects; on the other side, we find college leaders, mass media, and policy analysts pointing to the violation of civil rights laws that prohibit

racial discrimination which reinforces the historical racial bias in higher education, but now directed toward whites. One way or another, “Long-standing policies and practices that make minority students feel like unwelcome guests in another’s house have proved difficult to undo, even when all sides express goodwill.” (p. 160) The debate continues and the authors, as well as the readers, might come up with more questions and with interesting alternatives. The readers are definitely going to appreciate the depth and the relevance of the authors’ methodical research that presented, developed, expanded, and then elevated the effects of racist practices on minorities at a level where the role of race becomes an integral part of the history of American higher education.

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