at Stanford, Deval Patrick, a civil rights attorney who is
now governor of Massachusetts, Elena Kagan, former dean
of Harvard Law School who was appointed by President
Obama to the post of solicitor general of the United States,
and Sonia Sotomayor, a judge on the Second Circuit Court
of Appeals.

Sotomayor would be the first Hispanic justice on the
Supreme Court and would serve to solidify Obama’s politi-
cal support with Hispanic voters. A graduate of Princeton
University and Yale Law School, she is considered a mod-
erate jurist and her appointment might anger Obama’s core
liberal constituency.

It is likely that President Obama’s next choice for the
Court will have clear sailing through the Democratic-con-
trolled Senate. But once the nomination is made, blacks will
have lost their leverage. It is imperative that blacks make it
known now that a nominee who is opposed to race-sensitive
admissions in higher education is an unacceptable choice.

Martha S. Putney
(1916-2008)

Martha Putney, military historian and educator, has died in Wash-
ington from chronic obstructive pul-
mmonary disease. She was 92 years
old.

A native of Norristown, Pennsyl-
vania, Putney won a scholarship to
Howard University, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in 1939
and a master’s degree in history a year later.

Unable to find a teaching position, Putney joined the
Women’s Army Corps in 1943. After World War II, she used the GI Bill to earn a Ph.D. in European history
from the University of Pennsylvania. She then
began a long teaching career, first at Bowie State
University and later at Howard University. At Bowie
State, she was chair of the history and geography
department.

Putney was a well-regarded historian. Her books
included Black Sailors: Afro-American Merchant
Seamen and Whalermen Prior to the Civil War (1987),
When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women’s
Army Corps During World War II (1992), and Blacks in the United States Army: Portraits Through History
(2003).

A story on the life of Dr. Putney appeared in Tom
Brokaw’s best seller, The Greatest Generation.

Why Family Income Differences Don’t
Explain the Racial Gap in SAT Scores

Family income differences among the races are often said to explain
the SAT scoring gap between black and white college-bound students. But it turns out that the SAT scoring gap is almost as large among high-income blacks and high-income whites as it is among low-income blacks and low-income whites. Here are some suggestions as to why this is so.

S
uppose you are permitted one
question whose answer would
give you the most simple and best
lead to an individual’s score on the
SAT college entrance examina-
tion. The best question to ask
would be: “How big is the bank
account of the family of the stu-
dent taking the test?”

For both blacks and whites,
family income is one of the best predictors of a student’s
SAT score. Students from families with high incomes tend
to score higher. Students from low-income families on
average have low SAT scores. Because the median black
family income in the United States is about 60 percent of
the median family income of whites, one would immedi-
ately seize upon this economic statistic to explain the aver-
age 200-point gap between blacks and whites on the stan-
dard SAT scoring curve, which ranges from 400 to 1600.

“Black students from families with incomes of more than
$200,000 score lower on the SAT than students from white
families with incomes between $20,000 and $40,000.”

But racial conservatives — as well as the “biological”
racists who believe that blacks are inherently less intelligent
than whites — call attention to SAT statistics that tend to
refute the belief that family income differences are largely
responsible for the racial scoring gap. Here, the first point
made is that for black and white students from families each
with incomes of more than $200,000 in 2008, there still
remains a huge 149-point gap in SAT scores.

Second and most difficult to explain is the fact that in
2008 black students from families with incomes of more
than $200,000 did in fact score lower on the SAT test than
did students from white families with incomes between
$20,000 and $40,000.
WHY FAMILY INCOME DIFFERENCES DON'T EXPLAIN THE RACIAL GAP IN SAT SCORES

The Silver Spoon Effect on SAT Scores

*Without regard to levels of income, white families are more likely to have grandparents, uncles, and aunts who went to college and who treasure and transmit to their offspring and relatives the value of a college education. These college-educated relatives tend to help financially and to motivate their grandchildren, nieces, and nephews in tackling the tasks necessary for successful college preparation.*

"According to census statistics, white families with very high incomes have three times or more the wealth of black families with high incomes."

- Black students who come from families with high incomes are more likely than high-income whites to be the first generation in their family to seek a college education. Black students who are the first generation in their family to go to college often cannot draw on the educational experience of their parents for advice in preparing for and taking the SAT exam.
- Even when the parents in high-income black families are college graduates, the education they received is on average inferior in quality to the education received by high-income white parents. For this reason, the college-educated black parent is in many cases less qualified educationally to assist children in the host of efforts that prepare young adults for the SAT.
- Even when two members of a black family produce an

<table>
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<th>At All Family Income Levels, There is a Persisting Racial Gap in SAT Scores</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
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<td>$160,000 to $200,000</td>
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<td>More than $200,000</td>
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*Source: The College Board.*
income of $100,000, the history of racial segregation and unequal treatment in this country is such that very large numbers of African-American SAT test takers still come from low-quality, segregated, and underfunded high schools.

**Similar Incomes, Different Families Altogether**

Consider the following comparisons of two hypothetical families. A white family with an income of $100,000 will typically live in an upper-middle-class suburb with superior public schools. The mother and father are both college graduates. The father is literate, well connected, and reasonably sophisticated in moving with some skill in the white world of business, commerce, and the professions. The mother is also very likely to be college educated but still may be a traditional homemaker who volunteers at her children's school. The family has a home computer and a high-speed Internet connection.

Both the mother and the father are relatively comfortable and skilled in confronting the problems facing their children in entering the fearsome world of testing for higher education. One parent is often home to help children with homework and other educational activities.

A black family with an income of $100,000 still may live in a central city community. Despite their economic success, there is considerable probability that one or both of the parents may be high school dropouts. The father holds a $60,000 unionized job with the city sanitation department. The mother may work in a service business. She often works nights and weekends and earns a salary of $40,000 annually. The family has six children, pays high rent and big-city prices for food and other necessities. There is little money for a home computer or broadband Internet access. The parents who are black are likely to have little knowledge of the complex world of standardized tests or higher education.

Clearly these two families with equal incomes share very little in other characteristics that nurture successful test takers. The children of these families cannot be expected to perform at the same levels on standardized tests for college admission.

The sum of our position is that if one were to randomly pick out a group of 100 families whose combined income of the husband and wife was more than $100,000 a year, one quickly would see that, in terms of educational sophistication, family educational heritage, and access to educational tools and resources, the average white family in the same income group would be far better equipped than the average black family to prepare their children for success on the SAT test.

**Stereotype Vulnerability**

Even if we were to find a group of blacks and whites with identical economic and social characteristics, blacks may still score lower on standardized tests due to what Stanford social psychologist Claude M. Steele calls "racial stereotype vulnerability." According to Professor Steele's thesis, black students from middle- and upper-class families perform poorly on standardized tests because they experience an anxiety that if they do poorly on the SAT they will confirm the racial stereotype of the inferior intellectual ability of black people. This anxiety, according to Steele, causes the students to test poorly and to score at levels far below their capability. Steele says his research shows that test-scoring gaps between blacks and whites with similar backgrounds tend to disappear when test takers are informed before the exam that the results will not be used to evaluate their ability or qualifications.

Whether the parents of a child earn $100,000 a year or $10,000, very large numbers of public school teachers and guidance counselors will succumb to traditional stereotypes that black students are not college material and treat them as such. Due to lingering racism, many black students of all income levels will not be challenged academically by teachers. They will be placed into academic tracks that do not lead to college and they will be assigned to courses taught by inexperienced instructors.

For these reasons alone, African-American students will tend to have significantly lower scores on college entrance examinations than white students.