

Black students flocking to STEM fields, yet businesses pushing for more temporary workers

Written by William Spriggs
Thursday, 06 June 2013 09:56



Over last weekend, young people watched or read about President Obama speaking at Morehouse College and first lady Michelle Obama addressing the graduates of Bowie State University. Hopefully they were inspired by seeing so many young and gifted people finishing the course they chose to follow. Well, here is a little known set of facts.

Those colleges are both historically Black colleges-known as HBCUs-and they graduate a disproportionate share of the nation's Black science, technical, engineering and math majors-the very majors everyone points to as the skills America will need to succeed. And, it turns out, HBCUs are important because those fields are the backbone of the new Black middle class.

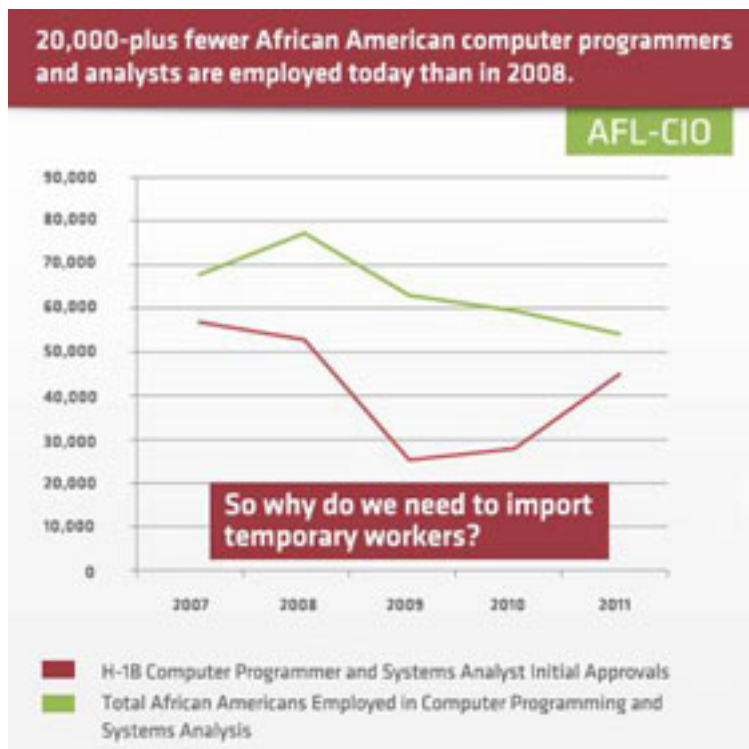
More Blacks work in computer-related occupations than are employed as elementary and middle school teachers or postal workers. And, like those students at Morehouse and Bowie State, Black college students are more likely to choose computer science as a major than White students. In part because of the high share of blacks who major in computer science and because of the large number of Black college students, there are more baccalaureate degrees awarded to African- Americans than to Asian-Americans in computer science.

Black students flocking to STEM fields, yet businesses pushing for more temporary workers

Written by William Spriggs

Thursday, 06 June 2013 09:56

Now, a great challenge lies ahead. Having found a path to the middle class through education and training, business interests are pushing hard in Congress to import temporary workers to do computer-based jobs. This while there are still 20,000-plus fewer Blacks employed as computer programmers and systems analysts since their employment peaked in 2008.



But, while those workers continue to search to get back to the high-tech jobs they trained for, we have seen businesses increase requests for H-1B visas (visas for high-tech workers). And now the Senate Judiciary Committee adopted ludicrous amendments, introduced by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) in the immigration bill, that refuse to give America's workers a first shot at these jobs. These amendments would even allow businesses to fire American workers and replace them with temporary workers.

The AFL-CIO is fighting to restore some reason here. We need to protect American workers' huge investment in college loans to get trained in computer and science skills the country needs, while providing a road map to citizenship for all aspiring Americans.

So, the AFL-CIO is challenging Sen. Hatch and the business lobby to make sure there are safeguards to keep a path to the middle class open.

William Spriggs serves as Chief Economist to the AFL-CIO and is a professor in, and former chair of the Department of Economics at Howard University. Bill is also former assistant secretary for the Office of Policy at the United States Department of Labor.