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for Cell Biology**

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Understanding How Race and Ethnicity Matter

February is Black History Month in the U.S., and its celebration seems a fitting time to discuss race and ethnicity... and review the ASCB's commitment to diversity. It is, after all, a cornerstone of the Society's mission. Our vision encompasses recruiting and retaining diversity in our membership, leadership, and meeting programs. We also strive to promote diversity in academic, industry, and government institutions. It's a longstanding commitment of the Society, although we, like the U.S. in general, have not always been successful in meeting our goals. I look forward to dedicating myself—and the Society—to further achievements in this direction during my tenure as ASCB President.



Brigid Hogan

Why Race Matters

With the inauguration of the first African-American U.S. President, we'd like to believe that race no longer matters. But if you've ever heard a racist comment—or been accused of “not getting” what it means to be a minority today—you know that a postracial world remains an ideal, not a reality.

I began my scientific career in London but, as a woman at that time, the U.S. offered me far greater opportunities to succeed than were available to me in the UK. Moving here alone wasn't easy, and I had to overcome many internal doubts and uncertainties. However, I know that even as a woman I had a relatively easy time because I was white and most Americans are Anglophiles. If I had been black or Hispanic or, today, a Muslim, my life would have been incomparably harder. But I hope my experience nevertheless makes me sensitive to the fact that the ASCB must provide a sense of support and community—and a home—for everyone, whatever their race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, or gender.

At the ASCB Annual Meeting in San Francisco in December, Society leaders made a point of visiting committees and attending

award presentations and lectures to show their support. To us, the words of our 2008 E.E. Just Lecturer, James Earl King Hildreth, and of our 2008 Women in Cell Biology (WICB)

Senior Awardee, Fiona Watt, were particularly poignant. Both were selected, by the Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) and WICB respectively, for their extraordinary scientific achievements. But they were also honored for what they represent: success in a world that has not always nurtured or welcomed those who do not fit the stereotype, and leaders who have worked hard to be mentors and role models to others.

Role Models, Mentors, and Peers

In recognition of our continuing need for diverse role models, peers, and students, the ASCB supports a variety of programs and groups. Since 1994, the MAC has sponsored a lecture by a distinguished minority scientist to present current research at the ASCB Annual Meeting. Named for famed 20th century African-American biologist Ernest Everett Just, the E.E. Just Lecture spotlights research efforts from some of the most prominent minority researchers in the U.S.

Who was E.E. Just, and what can we learn from him? He was born in South Carolina in 1883. Tremendously gifted, he attended the Kimball Academy in New Hampshire. At this four-year college prep school, he was the only African-American. He graduated in 1903 as the valedictorian and entered Dartmouth College. Again, he graduated with high honors. However, academic opportunities for African-Americans were very limited.

Just spent his academic career at Howard University, where he was head of the Department of Physiology until his death in 1941. He also spent many summers at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL).

He was a pioneer in studying the nature of the cytoplasm—focusing on marine eggs. His life's work was summarized in a book he

authored entitled *The Biology of the Cell Surface*. This book is still interesting reading today.

Our 2008 E.E. Just Lecturer found the same fascination in science. As the Director of the Meharry Center for Health Disparities Research in HIV, Hildreth has committed himself to having an impact on a disease that African-Americans suffer in numbers far in excess of whites. In his San Francisco lecture, Hildreth noted that African-American women are 25 times more likely to develop AIDS than whites. The report of his research into a novel approach for combating AIDS made a fascinating story. His contributions to AIDS research not only offer hope, they demonstrate what characterizes our best role models: passion and commitment, curiosity and creativity.

We all need role models. But we need mentors and peers too. We need to not feel alone, and to feel supported and understood. When Watt accepted her award last December, she shared several anecdotes that sadly illustrated the sexism that she had encountered in the course of her career. Her perseverance, like Hildreth's, provides younger scientists with role models. And the ASCB can complement the efforts of individuals and provide valuable resources that can be mobilized to solve problems.

Ingredients for Success

We know that curiosity about the cell and how it works may attract students to the biology major. But to pursue basic science beyond this level, many students need to see its relevance to society and understand its role as an agent of change. While it is easy to see the relevance of clinical research and medicine, we need to make a stronger case for basic research. And budding scientists of all colors, genders, and ethnicities need to see that careers in academic science are not only viable and intellectually rewarding, but that institutions, big pharma, and biotech companies provide welcoming environments. We all have a responsibility to create a climate of welcome, to help each other succeed.

How to achieve this? The ASCB MAC targets students, postdocs, and young faculty, with the support of a National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) grant. MAC is responsible for administering a variety of programs aimed at nurturing young minority scientists. MAC members work with ASCB Senior Manager, Minorities Affairs, Deborah

McCall to advertise travel and poster awards to enable students to present posters at the ASCB Annual Meetings. They represent the ASCB at exhibit booths, sessions, and award presentations at the annual meetings of the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) and the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS).

MAC ensures summer research experiences for minority scientists at primarily teaching institutions with experienced mentors through visiting professorships, as well as summer courses at the MBL and other institutions. Moreover, MAC mounts junior faculty workshops and mentoring symposia, as well as grantwriting and publication workshops. Recognizing the importance of role models at minority-serving institutions, MAC members select Linkage Fellows to introduce their students to what cell biology—and the ASCB—offers. In addition, MAC works with the American Association for the Advancement of Science and representatives of other groups to examine assessment data on intervention programs for recruiting and retaining minorities in science at annual meetings. As always, new enthusiastic volunteers are welcome, and there are many opportunities to make an impact.

WICB members foster career development as well, and like the MAC's, WICB programs frequently attract a diversity of participants. In addition to the monthly career columns in this *Newsletter* (and the compilation of these columns), WICB provides childcare awards for Annual Meeting attendees (funded by the Elsevier Foundation and a generous, anonymous gift). WICB also offers a well-attended Career Discussion Lunch, a Workshop, Evening Program (featuring WICB Junior and Senior Award presentations), and a WICB Network reception, all at the ASCB Annual Meeting. (See p. 9 for reports.) Individuals seeking speaker recommendations for meetings can contact WICB's speaker referral service (www.ascb.org). Click on "Committees," "Women in Cell Biology," "Speaker Referral Service", and the WICB blog is available at the same webpage just mentioned, but click on "WICB Blog."

To learn more about MAC and WICB programs, visit the ASCB website at www.ascb.org. To volunteer to help, write info@ascb.org. I look forward to your thoughts. ■

Comments are welcome. Send to president@ascb.org.

