UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION VOLUME 21

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: THE PATHWAY TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

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FOREWORD

This volume of work will be beneficial to the students and faculty in educational leadership and social foundations. It brings into focus critical issues for management, student success, and institutional viability.

It is an important collection of research and narratives that provide insight into the soul and conscience of the HBCU community. While revealing the interrelatedness of all human experiences across the administration, faculty, and student body, it provides critical insight into leadership in a complex culture based upon a foundation of oppression. Collectively, the chapters provide a view of what seems to be an immortal journey toward self-destruction, orchestrated by an invisible hand, if left unaddressed collectively as a community of humans and scholars.

The volume contains research on many of the variables and strategies that are inevitably designed to be the destructive forces to limit educational opportunities for a significant segment of society, the future leaders, not the factory assimilated models that conform to the basic structures of politics and the economy. Leaders are not conformers, they tend to be different and the majority of society often punishes differences rather than embrace them and allow them to develop.

This volume points out the challenges associated with negotiating acceptance of the interconnectedness of all cultures, and the importance of education and identify maintenance over acceptance or blanket assimilation in a cultureless society. It clearly brings to the forefront the shallowness of socially constructed bias in the towers of education and the overall weakness of exclusion based on gender.

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BRINGING THE "OTHERED" BACK IN: BUILDING THE CASE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION AT HBCUs

Cheron H. Davis, Adriel A. Hilton and Donavan L. Outten

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the editors provide a reflective anecdote describing the professional and personal journey which led to the production of the current volume. The chapter presents the aim and scope of the text, chapter descriptions, and the overall goal of the text which includes facilitating conversations around how historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) might best support underserved populations of students and faculty.

Keywords: HBCUs; diversity; equity; inclusion; minority; higher education; gender

> Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.
>
> — Verna Myers (2012)

I never thought of myself as an activist. In fact, I find my corner of the world quite comfortable. Wife, Mommy, Current professor, Former elementary teacher, dog owner. The fence is not white, but it is there. Southern and proud of it. Country slang for days. A keen ear for hip hop, Jesus lover, church attender, no sugar on my grits, melanin popping. Quite frankly, my voice surprised me as much as it did others.

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I'm reminded of a particular incident in high school that remained with me for many years. I attended a predominately White high school – in fact, most of my schooling had been in White spaces. In second grade, my family moved to Oregon where I was the only Black student in my entire school. Well, there was a young sister, Kira, who was Black, but she had been adopted by a "rainbow family" along with other Asian, Indian, and Hispanic children and was not quite sure what she was. My mother braided her hair as a courtesy to her White adoptive mother. Kira spent her days staring at me, my brown skin, my pony-tailed hair. I remember, even then, feeling just a bit sorry for her as I wondered who and what she saw when she looked in the mirror. I had always been taught that my "Black was beautiful" and that my dark, coiled hair, as tangly as it may be, was my crown and a source of pride and strength. For some reason, I did not sense that Kira shared that same love for her natural coif. Back to high school – my best friend and I were the "smart" Black girls. We were members of the honor societies, yearbook staff, and were elected to the Student Government Association (SGA) during our senior year. And although I had grown up in White spaces, I was always very proud and keenly aware of my Blackness. With the 1993 John Singleton production of *Poetic Justice* as the inspiration, I decided to begin my senior year with a sleek new set of box braids to mirror star Janet Jackson's iconic movie hairstyle. My best friend's mother spent the entire Saturday before school started braiding my hair, while we giggled in sheer anticipation of what our senior year would hold. During our senior year, the SGA was comprised of my best friend, five White males, and me. We were quite the dream team, and I adored these gentlemen and their work ethic. I walked into the SGA office on the first day of school and was met by one of these young men who exclaimed, "Cheron! Wow! I can't believe you did that."

"Did what?"

"Your hair!"

"What's wrong with my hair?"

"I mean, it looks good. I just never thought you'd wear braids."

The way he said the word *braids* stirred something deep inside of me. He meant no harm and, in fact, he considered his statement a compliment. I only gave this incident deep thought as I was approached with the opportunity to edit this volume. Why would not I have been one to wear box braids? What made me, and my best friend, different from all the other Black students who rocked the hairstyle freely? What was the source of my classmate's surprise in my decision to do so?

I began to consider what I like to call *safe* Black people. You know them. They are educated, perhaps married with kids, have careers, and may even have the picket fence (although we do not seem to be attached to white ones). In high school, I imagine, I was one of those safe ethnic representations. There was nothing particularly ethnic about me – I dressed, spoke, danced, and studied like any other normal student. The difference was that clearly my peers saw me

in a different light. The symbolism of this exchange over 20 years ago, brings me to the work I do now, as a teacher educator at a historically Black college or university (HBCU).

As I began to think about this idea of *safe* Black people, I realize that in our conscious generalization, we typically envision and project certain qualities to groups of people. Let us be honest: Are all Asians poor drivers? Do all Blacks have an affinity to rap music? Is it safe to conclude that all members of the LBGTQ community are hell-bound sinners? Do all White people include unnecessary ingredients in their potato salad like raisins? I am being facetious, but in honesty, many of our interactions with people who are different from ourselves are based on unfounded generalizations. The purpose of this book is to dispel and disrupt the narratives that are founded upon untruths.

When I was approached with the opportunity to edit this volume, I spent a lot of time reflecting and praying. You see, I am a Christian woman, and Christian values govern much of the way that I see the world. In contrast, I have unintentionally become an advocate. I did not ask for a family member who lives with autism. I did not ask for very close friends and family who happen to be gay. I would have selected friends who share my faith and actually believe in a higher power, but the truth is, I do have friends who are not believers, or have belief systems very different from my own. The assumption is that all of my associates are degree-toting members of the PhD society, but the truth is, some of my friends are from the hood, do hood things, and attend the University of the Streets. J.K. Rowling once said, "If you want to know the true measure of a man, watch how he treats his inferiors, not equals." And so as I began the journey of editing my first volume with my colleagues Drs Adriel A. Hilton and Donovan L. Outten, the leap of faith was not without fear, but in fact, full of sheer terror, not for me, but rather for the voices that the volume contributors represent. I am not immune to the backlash I witness in media toward preeminent scholars and educational researchers like Dr Marybeth Gasman, who is not afraid to use her position and voice to advocate for minority students and institutions. But what about the rest of us? What about the females who lead HBCUs during a very critical time and with very little support? What about the White faces in Black spaces? The White students and faculty who populate HBCUs and perhaps may not represent the best parts of their history, but are integral to their futures? What about those students and faculty whose sexuality is featured in the most negative light and considered a handicap rather than, an advantage?

My goal was to seek out and secure the voices of the most dynamic cadre of scholars whose mission was similar to that of mine and my co-editors: the uplifting and advancement of HBCUs and their students. Only after having earned all of my degrees at predominately White institutions (PWIs), I entered an HBCU as an assistant professor with no particular agenda. My students established that agenda for me. As I listened to their stories, I became invested in their passion to return as teachers to the urban schools in which they received their early schooling, I realized that I was an unlikely, but very willing, advocate for these young preservice teachers. They chose an HBCU for many

reasons – the rich history, the Greek life, the homecoming festivities, the freedom to be unapologetically Black. For many of them, as first time college attenders in their respective families, this opportunity came with a heavy responsibility to establish a legacy that would change the trajectory of their entire families. And I was not afforded the opportunity to choose this passion; it chose me. And I am the lucky one.

So after almost two years in the making, the chapters included in this volume are presented to you in honor of the outsiders. No HBCU holds a monopoly on diversity. In fact, these spaces can be more disenfranchising than inclusive. There are so many minorities within the minority, and we are at a pivotal time in the history of HBCUs during which their voices deserve and need to be heard. There is a quote floating around Twitter with my name attached that says, "It's more important to be equitable than equal. Some students come to school needing more than others." As you ponder the tenet of this text that deals with equity, may you keep in mind the have-nots, those who do not have voices, advocates, team members, and courage. They need those of us who do. May the text inspire conversations in classrooms, among colleagues, with families and friends. The contributors to this volume write from what in higher education is considered unprecedented, their hearts and their experiences, with the goal of enveloping their personal stories with scholarship and data that support the narratives. Uniquely, each chapter in this volume has been reviewed by at least two outside preeminent, highly-accomplished scholar/researchers in the field of education. To be transparent, they were not asked to agree with the contributors, but rather offer critical feedback. We reached for the highest hanging fruit in higher education to assist us with bringing this volume to fruition. And we got them.

OVERVIEW

The Verna Myers quote which opens this chapter perfectly sums up the challenge we face today when trying to deliver real diversity: it is not just about paying lip service to the ethics and principles that surround inclusion, but ensuring these standards are lived in practice. The aim of this book is to facilitate the invitation to the "outsiders" to dance. The book focuses on the lived experiences of underserved student and faculty populations at HBCUs and the implications on future higher education policy. In this chapter, authors discuss the contexts and experiences of students, faculty, and administrators who navigate the political and social spaces of HBCUs while supporting healthy personal and robust professional goals. The stigmas and social nuances that plague students and faculty of color do not dissolve with their arrival at an HBCU, but rather they transform into a new set of challenges that demand our attention as researchers. Taking into account institutional supports, identity development, and socialization patterns, this book sheds light on what the experiences of higher education's "outsiders" mean for future research and practice, while emphasizing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

RELATED TO THE HBCU MISSION

The chapter "A Balancing Act: Being First Still, and Faculty at an HBCU," written by Norfolk State University's Dr Erica R. Russell, is an account of her experiences as a first-time HBCU graduate and Professor and the challenges she faced navigating academia. Considering the rising number of first-generation college students, an increased number of first generation college graduates is to be expected. HBCUs have long served as a landing place for these students. While research has focused on the barriers to access and persistence for this population, there has been little discussion about the first-generation college students that attend college, obtain degrees and go on to serve in their disciplines, and contribute to their communities. Having been a first-generation college student, now serving as a tenure-track faculty member at a Historically Black institution, Russell's chapter explores and initiates a dialogue regarding the experience of being first, still. According to Russell, "It doesn't end with degree completion."

Elizabeth City State University's Dr Will Broussard, author of chapter entitled "Serving Students, Faculty, and Notice: Student Co-operation, Faculty Collaboration, and Institutional Counter-narration at a Southern Flagship HBCU" details a federally-funded, innovative student services/success program, Project CLAIM (Collaborative Learning and Individualized Mentoring) at Southern University. Broussard uses this narrative as an example of programs that serve students and exemplify the mission of HBCUs, while demonstrating innovation, collaboration, and leadership, and an opportunity to counter-narrate pernicious stereotypes about HBCUs. Featuring the collaborative efforts of diverse faculty from multiple disciplines, producing research and providing service to racially, culturally, and geographically dissimilar students, the Project CLAIM aims to provide differential academic and employment-support services to transition students with learning disabilities leading to improved college completion and employment outcomes. It is important not only to highlight Southern University's attempts to promote student success, but is also another clarion call for HBCUs to do all within their power to promote their own successes with underserved student populations.

In the next chapter, entitled "The Contemporary Role of the HBCU in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Absence of On-going Historical Relevance," the authors Alvin Killough, Eryn Killough, James Burnett, and Grover Bailey contend that African-American history remains excluded from core curricula at the expense of other curricula development. The authors explore this inattention to the African-American experience as unique obligations for HBCUs, by empirically examining their current lack of Black Studies programs. This is particularly important, as obstacles, in developing coherent strategies necessary for political and community survival and gain, and intersectionalism inclusivity unique to African-Americans. The authors also debunk the myth intimating that just being "a Black school" is enough, and thus bear no obligation to furthering the study of the historical, experiential lives of Blacks in America and the Diaspora. They suggest that for HBCUs to retain their uniqueness and viability, they must integrate Black studies into the

twenty-first century, and deliver an institutional configuration and commitment unapologetic to the complexity and nuance of the African-American experience.

Founder and CEO of educational consulting firm ReDirect Consulting, Incorporated (RDC, Inc.), Dr Rachel B. Dunbar, in her chapter "Just Let Us Be Great! Mentoring Students at an HBCU" highlights the importance of mentoring on the resilience, persistence, and success of HBCU students. Her first-hand account of student experiences in her mentoring program at Alabama A&M University is powerful and laden with truth. Using the students' own words, Dunbar presents a powerful account, and case for, structured, holistic mentoring programs on HBCU campuses.

DIVERSITY AND HBCUS

In the chapter entitled "White Faces in Black Spaces: Examining Faculty–Student Engagement for White Doctoral Student Success at Historically Black Colleges and Universities," authors Drs Tiffany F. Boykin and Larry Walker document how although established for the purpose of educating Black Americans, recently, many HBCUs have been witness to a steady increase of White students (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). And, with projections that non-black student enrollment will continue to increase at HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2007), the authors assert that strategies for supporting the changing demographics are needed. The chapter presents findings from a quantitative investigation examining the impact of faculty–student engagement on the experiences and perceived persistence of White doctoral students at HBCUs. The results indicated that external engagement – social components for student success external to a student's academic program and research practices – was a best predictor for optimal experiences and increased belief in self for program completion. The authors also suggest directions for future research and practice.

Texas Southern University's Dr Yoruba Taheerah Mutakabbir, in her chapter entitled "Religious Minority Students at HBCUs" expands the discussion of HBCU student religion and spirituality beyond Christianity by addressing the needs and experiences of religious minority students at HBCUs. A religious minority is defined as any individual who does not self-identify as Christian. In the United States, religious minorities include, but are not limited to, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Atheists, and Agnostics. Some scholars define anyone who is not a mainline Protestant as a religious minority. Mutakabbir discusses existing literature and research on religious minority college students and the challenges and experiences of religious minorities on campus. Providing a foundational, nuanced approach to religious minorities, the chapter is intended to help practitioners at HBCUs promote religious pluralism and tolerance to support student learning outcomes and campus inclusion within a diverse student population.

In the chapter "Thursdays at Five Thirty-five," Florida State University teacher educator Dr Phyllis Swann Underwood documents her experience as a Caucasian woman with a "healthy southern accent and an obvious difference between her skin color and that of the majority of her students." Underwood

discusses her journey as an adjunct professor at one of the premiere and highly recognized HBCUs, Florida A&M University. Calling it one of the most professionally rewarding experiences of her life, she discusses the stark contrast between her 13 years of previous experience with mostly Caucasian females from middle-class backgrounds to her current experiences teaching students of color at FAMU. Her desire to create an educational experience that would be culturally significant to her HBCU students allowed her the opportunity to reflect upon and identify how her past experiences shaped her perceptions about the cultures represented in her classrooms. Her demonstration of care, concern, and respect are heartfelt and unguarded. Dr Underwood eventually comes to the realization that even though her ethnicity was different from the majority of her HBCU students, they shared many common values, characteristics, and behaviors, shaping their own identity as members of the educational community.

Since the mid-1800s, HBCUs have been educating a majority of Black Americans. These 105 institutions serve more than 300,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students from diverse backgrounds, various socioeconomic levels, and academic achievement levels. And, it is important that they continue on this challenging journey of addressing the unique needs of the HBCU student by becoming more efficient and focused on their program offerings with minimal state support and shrinking federal funding. Further, system mandates, board governance, affirmative action, and civil unrest oftentimes camouflage the historic role of the HBCU. Questions arise as to the relevance of these historic institutions when the student, faculty, and staff demographics begin to shift in an effort to compete for the quality and quantity of students enrolling at majority institutions. In the chapter entitled "The Role of HBCUs in Tackling Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," Jewell Winn, Kisha Bryan, and Andrea Tyler encourage crucial conversations surrounding the essence of this challenge. Diversity is our strength and a reality that should not be ignored. What better institution to exemplify inclusive excellence than an HBCU? In this chapter, authors address how these historic institutions can continue to celebrate their legacy while embracing the rich dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In the chapter "Challenging Cultural Norms at HBCUs: How Perceptions Impact LGBTQ Student's Experiences," Drs Larry Walker and Ramon B. Goings tackle the reality of the increase in the number of students from various marginalized communities who are encountering hostile environments at the post-secondary level. Fortunately, HBCUs offer students safe spaces to deconstruct vital issues. However, they have struggled to keep pace with other colleges and universities committed to supporting Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-, and Queer (LGBTQ) students. As a result, LGBTQ students feel isolated and abandoned because of conservative ideas rooted in heteronormativity. In this chapter, Walker and Goings explore: (1) findings from a study that examined the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate students from a public HBCU regarding the LGBTQ community, (2) how conservative religious tenets impact LGBTQ students' experiences, and (3) university support systems for LGBTQ

students. In addition, the chapter includes recommendations and implications for HBCU administrators.

In the chapter "Afrocentric Worldview, Hetero-Normative Ethos and Black LGBTQ Intellectuals Matriculating through Afrocentric Psychology Programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)" authored by Novell E. Tani and Simone A. Grier continues to examine the marginalized group of LGBTQ individuals navigating through higher education within the Afrocentric-driven fields at HBCUs. This chapter discusses (1) relating theoretical concepts that guide driving philosophies and academic curriculum, (2) possible ramifications and experiences Black LGBTQ individuals face as they navigate through such higher educational contexts, and (3) possible stances gay and straight scholars may take when operating under a paradigm/worldview with views counter to "alternative" sexual orientations.

New Mexico State University's Dr Henrietta Williams Pichon, in the chapter "Providing Support for non-Black Students and Faculty at HBCUs: A Promising Approach for Senior Academic and Student Affairs Officers (SASAOs)," discusses the growth HBCUs are experiencing across the country. Although there was a 6% decline overall in student enrollment between 2010 and 2016 at HBCUs (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018), they have experienced growth of a different kind. This growth comes in the form of an increased number of non-Black faculty and students, now an underserved population at HBCUs. As they seek to increase pathways to diversity, equity, and inclusion, it becomes even more important than ever before for Senior Academic and Student Affairs Officers (SASAO) at HBCUs to develop a systematic approach to addressing concerns related to these underserved populations. In this chapter, Pichon provides a snapshot of what this trend in diversification at HBCUs looks like (The Caramelizing of HBCUs), what are the challenges that these students and faculty encounter (Challenges non-Black Students and Faculty Encounter at HBCUs), and finally, what SASAOs at HBCUs can do to address these challenges (Othermothering).

LEADERSHIP ISSUES AND HBCUS

Despite the multiple forms of leadership and leadership positions within the higher education context, well-qualified females have disproportionately been rejected in and ejected from these positions of administrative power. In the chapter "Envisioning Equity: Women at the Helm of HBCU Leadership," University of Pennsylvania's Amanda Washington Lockett and Dr Marybeth Gasman address issues that have plagued African-American women in higher education for a long time: "marginal positions in academic settings have been occupied by African-American women for an extended period" (Horsford & Tillman, 2016, p. 101). In fact, among HBCUs, the student bodies are majority women. Between 2013 and 2017, of 105 private and public, HBCUs' total enrollment of women students was roughly 61% (Snyder et al., 2018). In the 2014–2015 academic year, a total of 48,000 bachelors and master's degrees were conferred by HBCUs and a majority of these degrees were earned by Black