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Race, Ethnicity and Higher Education in the African Diaspora: Guest Editors' Introductory Note

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Guest Editors' Introductory Note

Perspectives Editors

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Authors in this issue of *Alliance for African Partnership Perspectives*, "Race, Ethnicity, and Higher Education in the African Diaspora," responded to a Call for Thought Pieces from anywhere in the world—urgent, critical reflections of issues around race and ethnicity in higher education institutions and key stakeholder and collaborator organizations in Africa and the African Diaspora.

We situate this themed issue at a time when racism and long-standing inequities came to the forefront in the United States in summer 2020, prompting a global outcry against racial injustice. People from across racial, ethnic, gendered, linguistic, geographic, and other identities rose up in protest in every U.S. state and in countries in Africa and the global African Diaspora in solidarity with Black communities in the United States, but also against injustices in individuals' own countries.

While progress and symbols of racial reconciliation were rendered visible in some countries, until there is recognition that systemic racism exists and is still deeply embedded in the very structures and fabric of many social, political, economic, educational, judicial, and religious institutions, reconciliation will still remain an idea.

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The call for racial justice has thus taken on a new urgency and impact across institutions and sectors of all types—including higher education, as higher education institutions are tasked with empowering critical thinking in students, many of whom took part in the 2020 protests in the United States and globally. The thought pieces in this themed issue underscore an important opportunity for higher education to demonstrate leadership and come together for sustained discussion of how it is, or ought to be, responding to this contemporary moment of racial reckoning.

This collection of thought pieces addresses the ways in which higher education institutions may unknowingly perpetuate structural racism; global race relations currently and higher education's role in examining what should be done to create meaningful change; and specific issues that affect African Diaspora populations in the context of university policy priorities. Authors look at how faculty and students at universities are being prepared to address race and ethnicity issues in and outside the classroom and the ways in which we must meaningfully ensure student voices and advocacy are part of the solution to institutional change.

The objective and aim of this themed issue is to share perspectives, challenges, and opportunities for transforming the race and ethnicity experiences at higher education institutions and key stakeholder organizations in the public and private sectors in Africa and the African Diaspora at this time of racial reckoning.

Jabbar R. Bennett, in the prologue for the themed issue, situates the urgency of this moment for colleges and universities. Justin A. Coles, Gorana T. Gonzalez, Imani J. Wallace, and Chanel J. Prince, in “Black Artistic Imaginaries and the Endemicity of Anti-Blackness in the U.S.

University,” describe how using Black artistic imaginations to cultivate Black joy emboldened an urgent Black Education Space (Warren & Coles, 2020) to counter antiblackness. The authors contextualize how, following the distribution of an anti-Black letter, their collective curated the Black Joy event space. Coles and colleagues contextualize their reflection and inquiry within and across theoretical perspectives situated in and extending Black studies. The authors share visual works composed and created by Black students in the Black Joy event space, encouraging readers to reflect on images. The essay concludes with discussion and possibilities of how Black artistic imaginaries may be leveraged to combat antiblackness.

Fraser G. McNeill, in “‘Building Bridges’: Teaching Ethnicity to Engineering Students in a South African University,” details the experience of introducing and teaching ethnicity to first-year engineering students at a university in South Africa. McNeill, authoring from a lecturer's perspective, engages an ethnographic analysis of teaching about ethnicity from a “constructivist” approach to students who largely had not considered such broadened perspectives and definitions of ethnicity. McNeill concludes that work in the course may have bridged essentialist and constructivist approaches of ethnicity, yet persistent ethnic essentialisms in contemporary South African contexts render processes of teaching and learning complex and incomplete, as instructors encounter and navigate resistance from students.

Patriann Smith, in “Centralizing Place as Past(s), Present(s), Future(s): Hybridities of Literate Identities and Place in the Life of a Black Immigrant Scholar,” braids a theory of place and a Sankofan approach to emphasize how place moved as both experiential and material, influencing the author's situated identities as a literacy and

language scholar, mother, and individual. Smith thus demonstrates how “hybridities of identities and places” influenced how the author journeys between and across the range of positivistic, interpretivist, critical, and pluralist epistemologies, within and across quantitative and qualitative inquiries. Smith extends meanings of engaging literacy research intertwined with the past and present to shape the future, reflecting on the interplay of hybridities of place and literate identities. The author concludes with critical implications for work with Black immigrant communities.

Mellissa Gyimah and Olabisi Adenekan, in “Blackness Is Not Monolithic: Black Immigrant Women Scholars Enacting Change Through Storytelling,” render visible Black immigrant women scholars’ lived experiences as literacy teachers and college professors. The authors discuss their experiences and intersectional identities as Black immigrant women scholars and teachers working with students in the United States. Their narratives make space for expanded stories of Blackness and Black womanhood (Adichie, 2009), and for possibilities of such work in United States-based classroom contexts. Gyimah-Concepcion and Adenekan purposefully discuss through storytelling their work and ways of being with the range of educators, colleagues, researchers, administrators, and other related communities and organizations within and outside the African Diaspora, as the urgent work of broadening educational opportunities and composing space for such stories in academia (Louis et al., 2017).

Lauren Anderson, in “Trusting Women of Color: Lessons From American Higher Education on Organizational Change Through an Intersectional Lens,” examines how in U.S. higher education, the Office of Diversity and Equality takes on a crucial functional area. Anderson asserts the

urgency for institutions to meaningfully attend to the challenges faced by women of color in bringing about institutional reforms in their role as Chief Diversity Officers at the intersections of race and gender. Anderson presents research underscoring the crucial role of organizations in developing and sustaining equitable practice and policies that affirm and value the epistemologies of marginalized employees and critical stakeholder communities.

Araba A. Z. Osei-Tutu, in “African-Centered Hybridity: A Reconceptualization of Africanness in this Colonially Guised Globalized Era,” challenges conceptions of African identities that are not rooted in distinct, African linguistic and cultural ways. Osei-Tutu asserts an African-centered hybridity; Africanness as related to cultures, worldviews, and languages in Africa; and reconceptualization of Africanness in the Diaspora through indigeneity. This notion renders visible and tangible African identities, languages, and cultures, countering recolonization situated as globalization. Osei-Tutu concludes that higher educational institutions, Africans, and Africanists should thus engage in and apply research, curricular, and pedagogical tenets that center on inclusivity, contrasting and resisting colonialism in a contemporary era.

Natalie Tegama and Alison Fox, in “Ethics, the University, and Society: Toward a Decolonial Approach to Research Ethics,” examine the urgency of research ethics as central to knowledge production in universities and related institutions. The authors assert the centrality of knowledge production in the key role of the university, as an institution, as a site for scientific and social innovation since the 19th century. Tegama and Fox thus examine contemporary and potential possibilities of ethical review committees across Global North

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universities in supporting and sustaining urgent ethical research of relevance within and across Global South contexts. Such work necessitates interrogating global North histories of colonial thinking and how such legacies have affected universities, and reconsidering definitions of research ethics, including vitally whose voices, values, and knowledge are included in such definitions. Tegama and Fox draw on research conducted in African contexts, and on the authors' individual and collective perspectives, in asserting possibilities of decolonial approaches toward recalibrating research ethics for epistemic justice.

Eileen Boswell, in "Disaggregating Blackness or Dissolving Binaries? Tools of Thought for Recollecting African 'Transnational' Students in Higher Education," interrogates racial and linguistic taxonomies in today's U.S. higher education. Boswell considers how students who identify as "migrant" or "refugee" collegians, and students' countries of origin, are viewed from deficit perspectives, while references to "international" and "global" gain accolades. Boswell thus used the critical race theoretical framework, "tools of thought" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017), to examine (a) what biases and ethnic whitewashing come from such limited tools of thought as the labels "domestic" and "international" that U.S. higher education utilizes in referring to African-heritage students, and (b) how students may be essentialized and homogenized by the term "Black/African American." More broadly, Boswell seeks to interrogate and disrupt a "domestic"/"international" binary by rendering visible African students' experiences with anti-Black racism on predominantly White university campuses.

James Alan Oloo, in "A Critique of Public Policy Initiatives to Address Unequal Educational Outcomes for Black Students

in Ontario, Canada, 1987–2021," identifies and evaluates public policy initiatives in Ontario, Canada, to focus on disparate educational outcomes for Black students. Provincial rather than federal laws govern education in Canada. For some population groups, educational inequities persist in Ontario and across Canada (Henry, 2021). Students, in particular Black youth, thus feel "disempowered and, as a result, excluded as far as actual classroom practices are concerned" (Dei & James, 2002, p. 61). Oloo thus addresses urgent experiences of "people of African descent" who have long taken advocacy stances in Canada toward "equal access to a quality education" (James & Turner, 2017, p. 6).

Nathaniel D. Stewart and James Uanhoro, in "The Quantitative Debt Owed to Africa: A Call to Action," discuss the interplay of resources through which scholars in higher education institutions produce quantified knowledge—such as statistical software, computers, phones, vehicles, and storage—and Congolese labor and the Democratic Republic of Congo's mineral wealth, resources and land that facilitate modern technological and computing advances. The authors engage Pan-African theories to contextualize what the authors name as the quantitative debt owed to Africa for the contributions of Congolese families and communities to contemporary technological advances.

Taken together, authors across this issue prompt significant and knowing reflections of race and ethnicity in higher education institutions and key collaborator organizations in Africa and the African Diaspora. Thought pieces highlight new urgencies and impacts of the call for racial justice; moreover, authors call attention to the imperative for higher education to lead and sustain discussion of present possibilities and futures, evoking substantive change.

The guest editors would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their contributions to this issue.