

From my Perspective

Featuring Reflections from the Field

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, it's crucial to create spaces where educators can exchange ideas, share experiences, and engage in meaningful discussions on current issues that shape our professional learning environment. "From My Perspective," serves as such a platform that aligns with the purpose of IFOTS.

It invites educators from across the globe to contribute brief essays that reflect on the hot topics, challenges, trends, and innovations defining the field of teaching today. This section not only enriches our journal with a diversity of viewpoints but also fosters a sense of community among educators who are passionate about shaping the future of teaching and theory in learning. Through these personal essays, we aim to encourage a reflective and forward-thinking dialogue that contributes to the advancement of teaching and learning worldwide.

Higher Education and its Ongoing Relationship with Anti-Blackness

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[Abstract] The greatest lie ever told was the one that allowed us all to believe that higher education institutions (HEIs) were actually progressive. Institutions of higher learning have been successful in creating a mirage of progressivism. If anything, HEIs are late to the party and are slowly playing catch up. The targeting of spaces aimed at making marginalized campus-stakeholders feel seen and supported is further proof of the actual conservative right-winged nature of higher learning. An institution truly steeped in forward thinking and progressive practices would stand up in the face of racism and sexism, yet they bow down. This op-ed aims to create intentional dialogue regarding the ongoing relationship with HEIs and anti-Blackness.

[Keywords] Anti-Blackness, HEIs, progressivism, higher education, performative diversity

Higher Education and *Faux* Progressivism

A belief of the far-right is that education, higher education more specifically, is rooted in far-left ideologies. However, any non-white person in higher education could point you toward countless examples of such a false assertion. Higher education operates as the perfect proxy for the performance of all things: *diversity, liberalism, equity, and justice*. In short, higher education is far more conservative, racist, and sexist than most right-wingers would ever care to admit. Higher education does exactly what it was intended to do at its inception all of those centuries ago. The fundamental function of higher education since its inception is to center wealthy, cishet, abled-bodied, white men.

The historical story-telling of higher education as being for anyone else who does not meet such a specific criterion is inaccurate. As a higher education faculty member who teaches about the history of higher education, I can assure you of this fact, higher education was never intended for me or most of you. With this understanding of higher education's history of exclusion, I cannot help but chuckle when institutional stakeholders pretend to be shocked that anti-Blackness is embedded within the institution. Many of the institutions that many of you lust over also operated as beacons of oppression via the enslavement of Africans on land stolen from Native nations. How higher education became a living example of progressive liberalism is beyond me and as such is falsely depicted and wholly deceptive.

Black people, people of color, and practitioners of religions that do not center whiteness are not fully welcomed in higher education, they are tolerated. As institutions begin to change codes of conduct to favor one particular religious faction over all other marginalized groups, the truth of its deception is visible. Higher education does not offer a true end to its anti-Blackness or white centering. Much like the social experiment that is America, higher education will always be sold to the highest bidder by those who are committed to the uplifting of whiteness and the marginalization of everyone else and those willing to reiterate the talking points of warmongers, oligarchs, and white supremacists.

Last academic year, we witnessed the deaths of Black women in positions of authority. One dying in the middle of an event, her body was moved, and the event continued. Another dying

as a result of the misogynoir she experienced at an institution she worked at, graduated from, and poured her spirit into. Higher education is seen as the great equalizer, the gateway to the “middle-class,” and the opportunity to change generations. However, higher education and the stakeholders therein are not always honest about the harm that the relationship between itself and anti-Blackness causes. I am reminded of my own bouts with anti-Blackness at every institution that I have ever worked for as a professional.

Anti-Blackness seems like a singular focus for many because most folks do not realize the elements of oppression that exists within anti-Blackness. Anti-Blackness within higher education can take on several forms because it can be each of the following:

- *Classism*
- *Ableism*
- *Islamophobic*
- *Homophobic*
- *Transphobic*
- *Fatphobic*
- *Texturism*
- *Colorism*
- *Xenophobic*
- *Anti-Poor*
- *Racism*
- *Sexism*

These are just a few examples of how anti-Blackness shows up within institutions of higher learning and are often ignored because they are seen as issues of the individual. As discussed in my book *Black Liberation through Action and Resistance: MOVE*, we each have a relationship with whiteness, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy that must be addressed. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are not excluded from this need to address, not self-assess, their own relationship with whiteness, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy. Believing that because your institution employs, admits, graduates, and tenures Black folks means that you cannot simultaneously have a disdain for them is disingenuous. The lived experiences of Black folks in higher education spaces, particularly white ones, have been documented and proven problematic.

Campus activism, disruption, and progressive political pressures are necessary to push the institution and America toward being more people-centered. Our society is in a constant state of upset and mass suffering because the people most disproportionately affected by it all are ignored, targeted, and suppressed. To believe that the issues that impact humanity outside of academia and academic spaces does not also meet us in those same spaces is foolishly obtuse. It is a privilege of whiteness to believe that your counterparts are having the exact positive experience that you are having, simply because they are in the same space at the same time. We are situated to begin to ask ourselves some very difficult questions.

Those questions are as follows:

What is the role of HEI's in discourse regarding ongoing genocides and properly supporting ALL impacted students?

Can HEIs ever truly be liberatory in praxis and ethos?

How might HEIs permanently de-center whiteness amid a rise of white Christian nationalism on campus?

Were HEIs every truly committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work?

How are HEIs planning to protect and support scholars of anti-racism amid attacks from oligarchs?

Asking and working through these questions will only scratch the surface of the necessary work that must be done. However, it creates an opportunity for all HEI stakeholders to begin having real conversations aimed at promoting and implementing true systemic change. I hope that many of you and your HEIs will consider the time that we are living in and begin asking yourself which side of history you intend to be part.

References

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