

Chapter 4

The Fierce Urgency of No: Moving From Aspirational to Operational

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ABSTRACT

The discussion in this chapter affirms the intentional and collaborative partnership built between the Inaugural Faculty Fellow for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (FFDEI), a Black, middle-aged, immigrant woman, who is a tenured member of the faculty, and a senior executive, a White, middle-aged man at a community college. The chapter engages reflection as analysis, situating the experience of a Black woman in a quasi-administrative DEI role and that of a White male senior executive in the context of historical and contemporary allyship and accompliceship. Coupled with historical references to emphasize the significance of transformational leadership, the partnership leads to the development of a values-centered model for DEI work at an urban community college in one of the country's largest university systems.

INTRODUCTION

The authors work at a community college located in the most diverse county in the United States. While the institution is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), its faculty and senior leadership are primarily White people. Community colleges are sites for innovation and transformation in all aspects of the academy. Pedagogy and leadership have the potential to blossom and bloom and, in the case of the institution discussed in this chapter, create outcomes that can shift and change conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) when done intentionally.

The discussion in this chapter delineates the intentional and collaborative partnership built between the Inaugural Faculty Fellow for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (FFDEI), a Black, middle-aged, immigrant woman, who is a tenured member of the faculty, and the former interim president and now

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provost and senior vice president of the college, a White, middle-aged man. Central to the discussion are the perspectives, observations, and reflections of the Black woman, sharing the challenges and benefits of approaching a quasi-administrative role from a Black feminist perspective. The conversation includes the reflections of a White male senior administrator who was challenged to shift his lens from transactional to transformational to better serve the minoritized members of the campus community. At the intersection of their multiple identities and experiences, they find a collaborative synergy that situates their work in a context to advance the college's academic diversity, equity, and inclusivity agenda from aspirational to operational. Their reflections, coupled with historical references to allyship and accompliceship, emphasize the significance of transformational leadership, through a Values-Centered model for DEI work at an urban community college.

BACKGROUND

Black women have led revolutions in the quest for liberation for Black people for centuries. History accounts for the arduous, intellectual, emotional, and physical labor undertaken by Black women. Leaders such as Nanny of the Maroons, the Ghanaian-Jamaican matriarch, who famously led the First Maroon War against the British (McLean, 2017; Tuelon, 1973) moved the dial toward liberation for Black people. Later on, journalists Ida B. Wells, who cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Claudia Jones, the radical feminist whose work centered Black people across the globe (Boyce-Davies, 2016) challenged patriarchy and racism simultaneously. In later years, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell, Black women intellectuals who were instrumental to the suffrage movement and to Black liberation (Guy-Sheftall, 2009) and Black Panthers, Elaine Brown, Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, and Kathleen Neal Cleaver, joined in the collective action against oppression in the struggle for Black liberation (Cleaver, 1999). Contemporary women such as Tarana Burke, who founded the 2006 #MeToo movement in fierce defense of women's rights, and the founding of Black Lives Matter by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, in 2013, have championed the current movement toward the liberation of Blacks in the United States of America and across the globe (BBC).

The aforementioned are members of a small corpus of myriad Black women who sacrificed comfort and convenience for the sake of radical liberation with the understanding that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984). Indubitably, these women had concerns and fears that were transmuted by their courage and determination to affect change, thus they persisted despite adversity to advance the work of justice. The same is true for Black women in higher education, particularly at institutions where White leadership predominates. At its inception, higher education in the United States was designed to cater to the needs of White men (Oluo, 2020). When Mary Jane Patterson, earned her bachelors degree in 1862, she became the first known Black American woman to achieve this goal (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education). It wasn't until 1921 that Georgianna Simpson became the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States (Witynsky, 2021). Today, the complexity of being both woman and Black in higher education spaces continues to simultaneously render Black women invisible yet hypervisible and tokenized (Smith, Alves, Weathersby and Yi, 2019). Existing research shows that Black women are least represented at the highest rank of professor (Davis and Brown, 2017) and in senior administrative ranks in academic affairs. Invariably, underrepresentation leads to cultural taxation, disproportionate emotional labor, abject isolation, and an overbearing and inequitable service demands (Ahmed, 2012; Matthew, 2016; Padilla, 1994).

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