By Gaetane Jean-Marie & Brenda Lloyd-Jones (Eds)

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Women of Color in Higher Education is an edited volume that covers much ground in the debate about how women of color fare in academe, and about what might be done to make colleges and universities more equitable and welcoming places for them by addressing the challenges they continue to face. Olga Welch writes in the book’s prologue: “If the assumptions on which higher education culture is based are challenged through either external or internal situations or through an organizational change process, there is a tendency to resist the challenges.” This is certainly the case as members of the academy seek cognitive and emotional stability while avoiding the fear and anxiety of instability because they provoke pain. As faculty and administrators avoid pain, they also avoid change” (xiii). This book, however, is about change, why it is needed, and how it might be accomplished.
Perspectives addresses how to promote equity for women of color in higher education administration, as leaders in collegiate athletics, among faculty, and in STEM fields.

The first chapter, written by Brenda Lloyd-Jones and titled Diversification in higher education administration: Leadership paradigms reconsidered, examines the lack of diversity in higher education administration and focuses specifically on the underrepresentation of women of color in leadership positions at predominantly white institutions (PWI’s) in the United States. The author discusses how stereotyping as well as traditional leadership theories and paradigms (such as “Trait” and “Great Man” theories) affect various groups of women of color, and how critical paradigms (such as critical theory, social constructivism and postmodernism) provide more inclusive leadership theories. She argues for the latter to be used more extensively in future research on leadership in higher education.

Chapter two Diversity in sport: The status of African American female head coaches and administrators in collegiate athletics, authored by Vicki A. Williams, also addresses the issue of underrepresentation, in this instance underrepresentation of African-American head coaches and administrators in college athletics. She discusses the role of race and gender discrimination in perpetuating the problem and how diversity organizations, initiatives, and programs are working to counter it and provide opportunities for women and minority groups. Finally, she proposes strategies to assist athletic directors during the hiring process in order to promote diversity in their departments.

Chapter four Promoting attainment of African American women in the STEM fields, written by Marybeth Gasman and Laura W. Perna, draws on lessons learned from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to inform their discussion of promoting attainment of African American women in STEM disciplines. Specifically, they focus on Spelman College because of its consistently high performance on indicators of African American women’s STEM attainment. Successful strategies include creating an atmosphere that celebrates participation and accomplishment, being committed to student success and support, providing small classes and access to a caring and diverse faculty who serve as role models, being cognizant of financial needs, fostering a supportive peer culture, and providing undergraduate research opportunities. Much can be learned from these practices, and the authors conclude with a plethora of suggestions for other institutions, discussing in particular the value of an inclusive curriculum.

Part Two of Women of Color in Higher Education: Changing Directions and New Perspectives addresses several essential matters pertaining to women of color in the academy. These include mentoring, paths and barriers to professional advancement, agency of women of color and their impact within an institution, and retention and promotion. Common in all of the chapters is the underlying discussion of the influence of race and gender on the promotion and scholarship of women of color in the academy.

In chapter five, Gaëtane Jean-Marie and Jeffery Brooks, chapter authors and editors of this collection, open Part Two with Mentoring and supportive networks for women of color in academe. They provide an overview of mentoring definitions and types of mentoring relationships as well insight into how new women of color in the academy can build mentoring networks.

Jothany Blackwood and Sharon Brown-Welty further the discussion of mentoring and link it to leadership development and retention in chapter six,
Mentoring and interim positions: Pathways to leadership for women of color. The authors emphasize the instrumental role mentors can play in identifying professional opportunities for their mentees and encouraging the mentees to take advantage of those opportunities.

In chapter seven, Their rightful place: Diversity narratives, women of color agency, and transformation of the academy, Venice Thandi Sulé employs diversity narratives and Critical Race Feminism to frame a discussion of how Black female faculty contribute to their institutions. She presents a thought-provoking argument for the effect that women of color can have on daily institutional practices, ultimately stimulating transformation around diversity in academe.

Chapter eight, Asian American Pacific Islander women from Ph.D. to campus president: Gains and leaks in the pipeline, addresses the state of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in higher education comparative to their AAPI male, white male, and white female counterparts. Authors Edith Wen-Chu Chen and Shirley Hune deliver a well-organized presentation of qualitative and quantitative findings and a discussion of implications for the Higher Education community.

The contributions to this section of the book offer a diverse presentation of methods as well as theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Overall, Part Two provides useful information for higher education professionals inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds, whether they be novices in search of strategies and guidance or veterans primed to support their colleagues' development.

Part Three of the book divides into four chapters. Chapter nine by Natasha A. Mitchell and Jaronda J. Miller is entitled The unwritten rules of the academy: A balancing act for women of color. It is based on narrative inquiry with women of color and argues that there are unwritten rules in academe that decide the fate of women of color, and that women of color need to find ways to deal with them. Examples include: you are assumed incompetent until you prove you are competent; the politics of race have no boundaries; and prepare to be lonely, professionally and socially. The authors insist that in addition to individuals developing successful coping strategies, organizations need to find ways to make structural changes to better enable women of color to be successful.

Chapter ten, Female faculty of color: Successful strategies in academia, written by Lisa R. Bass and Susan C. Faircloth, also offer strategies women of color can use to address systemic challenges. They list stereotypes, the good old boys' network, lack of mentoring, and lack of respect as some of the barriers to success. They reference Bendura’s theories of self-efficacy, resilience, and self-agency, and suggest self-mentoring, self-referent thought, persistence, a strong work ethic, spirituality, and connectedness as strategies for women of color.

In chapter eleven, Female faculty of color: Agency and structure in race research, Benjamin Baez seeks to “move beyond the very linear notion of racism and sexism common in the literature on women of color and toward an understanding of the interplay between academic structures (...) and individual agency.” Drawing on his dissertation research conducted in the mid-nineties, he urges race scholars to contest fixed categories of ‘race,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘experience.’ At the very end of the chapter Baez also asserts that as long as scholars, including women of color, leave certain practices unquestioned in academe, they become culpable in their reproduction. An example would be narrow scholarship criteria in tenure and promotion processes that may constrain the choices of women of color.

Lastly, in chapter twelve entitled Building bridges for women of color in the professoriate, Vinetta C. Jones draws on Critical Race Theory and the Newcomer Adjustment framework of the Organizational Socialization Model developed by Bauer et al., to make suggestions as to what has to be in place organizationally for women of color to succeed, and what strategies they themselves might use in order to ensure their success. Familiar themes surface: role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance.

All in all, Part Three of this book looks at the interplay of structure and agency in higher education, and offers diverse perspectives on how individuals can not only survive but possibly thrive in an organization full of dynamics and encrusted structures working against them. It is in that sense useful and thought-provoking.
The fourth part of the book is titled “Transcending boundaries: Lifting as they climb.” It consists of individual examples of how four women of color have developed strategies for tackling professional barriers they faced in higher education.

In chapter 13, Start light, star bright: A black female scholar seeks to find “voice” in the p, Latish Reed shares her struggle to produce and be accepted at the institution in which she first secured a tenure-track position after receiving her doctorate, the different institutional environments she experienced after leaving her first position, and three lessons she learned from those experiences. In addition, she provides profiles of three African-American women scholars who have succeeded in the academy by conventional standards and have mentored her. Reed writes that the three noted scholars, Ladson-Billings, Dillard, and Tillman, were able to create scholarship that meets the academy’s standards for rigor while at the same time speak to marginalized groups. This appears to be what Reed is striving to do. It could have been beneficial to learn about how her role models went about achieving their success and what conditions were present in the academic and personal trajectories of those scholars that allowed them to attain what Reed wants to attain. This may have been useful information for scholars striving to accomplish the same, yet experiencing a struggle similar to Reed’s. Her chapter offers relatable and poignant examples of the hardships she faced in order to pursue a doctorate and a tenure-track position, including the loss of her marriage, single-motherhood, and the unrealized ideal of American meritocracy. Her discussion of the three Fs (family, fit, and moving forward), explores the importance of values and what is essential to her as a whole human being, not just as a professor in the academy.

In chapter 14, Poised to shatter the glass ceiling in the ivory tower, Mary V. Alfred offers a fluid and compelling personal story about her childhood in St. Lucia, transition to the United States, her early career experiences in this country, and present day role in academe. She allows the reader to see how her upbringing and educational opportunities in a Caribbean culture laid the foundation for her expectations, aspirations, and achievements in the United States. Part of her professional journey in the U.S. educational system was development of her “voice” and the ability to name the phenomena she lived. Of the weight of the experience of being a “Black female immigrant in a white professional society,” she stated that she “had not acquired the voice and power to call what she was experiencing hegemonic practices.” Alfred’s experience of leaving her nascent but distinguished professional career in her home country to forge a new career in the United States exemplifies the concepts of changing directions and new perspectives set forth in the book’s title as well as the concept of transcending boundaries specifically featured in Part Four of the book. Because she does offer an international perspective, it would also have been useful to learn about the trajectory of higher education professionals in St. Lucia, or in the Caribbean as a whole in order to develop a continual comparative theme throughout her chapter and to get a glimpse into what her life as a higher education professional back home might have been like. Her chapter is an excellent example of the unique experience immigrant professionals face upon starting a new life outside of their country after having already started a career.

Chapter 15, Nurturing intellectual voices: “Stirring up” conversations about cultural competence in the university classroom by Carolyn Walker Hopp is as much about the transformative experience she cultivated for her students as it is about her own experience preparing future teachers to work with diverse populations. In this respect, Part Four’s theme of “lifting as they climb” is especially applicable. Not only did she have her own mountain to climb in tackling cultural issues that were, at first, not well-received, she brought others up with her as they began to experience the value in culturally-focused learning activities. She recounts her efforts to incorporate knowledge of culture, culturally responsive teaching, and cultural competency into a teacher education program and work with her institution’s faculty-based Cultural Competency Consortium. While an essential aspect of her chapter was how she maintained her own voice and resolve that she had something essential to bring to the table, namely a focus on understanding and valuing the cultural experience of others, she also communicated a detailed and rich educational process that resulted in students developing a cultural voice they didn’t know they had and new perspectives about themselves. In recounting a colleague’s feedback which
communicated that “the topic of cultural competence was being shoved down their throats by an African-American” she emphasized the importance of who delivers a message, others’ perception of the message, and how that perception is affected by who delivers the message. This chapter could have broad appeal to professionals across disciplines charged with facilitating conversations about difference.

Chapter 16, *Mentoring transformed: When students of color see diversity in leadership*, by Milagros Peña and JeffriAnne Wilder provides an overview of mentoring definitions and types of mentoring relationships and the impact mentoring has on the path to academic leadership. Peña and Wilder also address mentoring in their chapter, however, they preface it with a discussion of the challenges Latinos and African-Americans face in higher education. They go on to discuss the importance of role models and the value to students of color seeing faculty of color in those roles. They offer that major challenges faculty of color face are their limited number and the additional responsibilities they take on in order to guide students of color. Also echoing the message of “lifting as they climb,” Peña and Wilder elaborate on the practice of mentoring as a strategy for “paying it forward.” Wilder states that her approach to mentoring is a result of the treatment she received from faculty in her doctoral program. This communicates an especially important message in the cultivation of an academic community and is an important lesson in the preparation of future faculty.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Women of Color in Higher Education: Changing Directions and New Perspectives covers a lot of ground and offers a great deal of information. The quality of writing varies, and a more thorough editing job, including the correction of typos, would have made the work more attractive. Yet and still, scholarship on women of color in academe is much needed, and therefore this book helps fill a void in the literature on higher education.

We would like to reference again the prologue where Olga Welch introduces Bergquist and Pawlak’s (2008) definitions of culture. According to them, one of the characteristics of culture is that it “furnishes guidelines of problem-solving” for those people who share the culture. Our question for the scholarly community to consider is: what guidelines may we, consciously or sub-consciously, follow in academe that may make us blind to addressing the unique context and challenges of women of color? And conversely, what might be an inherent strength in the culture of higher education that might help us address the myriad challenges discussed in this book?

In conclusion, Women of color in higher education: Changing directions and new perspectives provides as wealth of information, written from a diverse cadre of scholars, on a variety of aspects pertaining to how academe continues to be a challenging place to work for women on color. It also, however, provides a narrative of hope in that the authors offer institutional and individual strategies for improvement combined with stories and real-world examples of progress and success. It is, therefore, a worthwhile read for all of us invested in making higher education more equitable, more inclusive, and therefore a better place to work, live, and learn, for everyone.

**References**

