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## Making Equity a “Reality”: Structural Violence, Community-Engaged Scholarship, and Social Transformation

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# Making Equity a “Reality”: Structural Violence, Community-Engaged Scholarship, and Social Transformation

From the Guest Editor

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**Editor’s Note:** Following is an essay by Dr. Kimberly L. King-Jupiter, guest editor of a forthcoming special issue of *JCES*. Set to be published in 2020, this special issue shines a spotlight on the research conducted predominantly at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs), as well as on these institutions’ immense contributions to the communities they serve and the disciplines they represent. Dr. King-Jupiter’s essay is an excellent framing piece for the two research articles that follow, both providing a preview of the kind and quality of research you will find in the special HBCU issue. We believe these articles will stimulate your interest in learning more about the critical role these important institutions play in their communities and in our society.

Historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs, emerged in the United States to perpetuate an existing system of racial segregation. Under the guise of “separate but equal,” racially identifiable institutions were created to maintain segregation, thereby constraining individuals’ opportunities because of their group identity. Despite these beginnings, and amidst debates about the inferiority of black intelligence, HBCUs educated generations of African Americans who proceeded to deliver scientific innovations and educational excellence while seeking to transform the nation. The irony is that these institutions typically have the least resources allocated to them despite the fact that they typically serve those populations most economically challenged.

Johan Galtung (1990) broadly defines violence as a system of relationships designed to marginalize opportunities and diminish outcomes. These structures exist in a society that touts equality and self-reliance as the necessary ingredients for upward mobility. More insidious than the direct violence that occurs between two individuals, Galtung’s definition of violence allows us to reconceptualize slavery; the establishment of reservations; the system of share cropping; the existence of a minimum wage for labor that perpetuates poverty; segregated schools; inequitable funding in schooling post-desegregation; the school to prison pipeline (Redfield & Nance, 2016); the continued reliance on standardized tests deemed culturally biased yet not significantly correlated with college completion; racial and class inequities in the

justice system; and police brutality as a system of relationships in a society that perpetrates violence disproportionately against African Americans and other diverse and economically marginalized populations. This framework of violence allows me, as a researcher, to adopt different questions to guide my research. After all, once you accept that society isn’t broken and inequities are produced and reproduced at a systemic level, then the solutions you can devise to redress these inequities are possible.

Community-engaged scholarship was an avenue for me, as an African American faculty member at a predominantly white institution, or PWI, to conduct the type of work that allowed me and faculty like me to make a difference in the lives of those students least served by our nation’s schools because of their class and skin color. Mind you, pursuing tenure at a research intensive university while conducting this type of research does present challenges. How does one maintain a trajectory toward tenure while designing and delivering programs, or developing solutions, that are meaningful for communities that our society cares little about?

Demonstrating the impact of enrichment programs like Project Nia and Kemet Academy on students from economically challenged communities took time. It took time to demonstrate that the students who participated in Kemet Academy were more likely to graduate from high school and matriculate in college than similar students from the same communities. And yet

the ability to pursue tenure at a research intensive institution requires that type of evaluation or critique of the work we do if we are to remain in the academy and prosper—i.e., achieve tenure and promotion.

*Two examples of the kind of research that HBCU faculty are producing follow this essay. One presents an innovative approach to using community-based participatory research as a way to assess the needs of individuals from rural communities who are living with HIV/AIDS. This preview section concludes with a discussion of how an institution is prioritizing community engagement through its Quality Enhancement Plan.*

The challenges of working in the communities that matter most to me while at a PWI have led me to a career at an HBCU. I have found greater latitude to develop programs and initiatives to transform the system of relationships that perpetuate violence. However, with this freedom comes constraints of resources caused by a public system of funding that subsidizes the education of the haves at a higher level than for the education of the have nots. This reality requires the establishment of collaborations across types of institutions in order to redress the

problems that community-engaged scholarship has the capacity to solve. Although the magnitude of problems facing poor and disenfranchised populations in the United States seems almost insurmountable, I would urge my colleagues at PWIs to establish collaborative partnerships as part of your unit's standard operating procedures and remember to work *with* not *for* them. It has happened more than once that faculty from a PWI invite faculty from an HBCU or other MSI at the last minute. By the time the collaboration is initiated, the concept for the project had been developed, the resources allocated and we were asked for a letter of participation.

The existence of food deserts, health disparities, illiteracy, the school to prison pipeline are features of a violent society that disproportionately impact the poor and populations historically marginalized in our society and reduces their chances to live the American dream. And while the nature of the professoriate does not always lend itself to grappling with these social issues, the ability to demonstrate the immediate and long-term impact of community-engaged scholarship is essential and requires the existence of community-engaged researchers capable of engaging diverse, oftentimes marginalized populations.