
Editors' Introduction: Special Issue by Sisters and Brothers of the Academy Institutes

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African Americans in the United States occupy an unusual space. While we are Americans, our contributions are devalued through the use of language and stories about the founding of the country. The American educational system celebrates the supremacy of Whiteness and continually adopts assessment strategies that reinforce the superiority of race and class. Simultaneously, we are also Africans. Yet, the negative connotations of Blackness deter some of us from connecting to that heritage, thereby challenging our ability to establish an authentic sense of self esteem.

Sisters of the Academy Institute (SOTA) and *Brothers of the Academy Institute* (BOTA) are attempts to overcome the systemic challenges that African Americans face. By providing vehicles to discuss the challenges to our health and well-being, economic success, and intellectual prowess, authentic strategies to transcend systems of domination can emerge. The BOTA Think Tank, first held in Kansas City, Kansas, during fall 2004 and then in Atlanta, Georgia, during fall 2006, is such a vehicle. By creating a bridge between local communities and members of the academy, we support the work of a new breed of scholars—community engaged scholars. Faculty members whose research or scholarly activities take place in and influence the community have a vehicle to develop new partnerships and to engage in conversations that give birth to new strategies to overcome a legacy of discrimination.

SOTA's signature event scheduled for August, 2007 was designed to facilitate the success of Black women in the academy by creating spaces

to develop the type of research skills necessary to succeed in graduate school programs and as junior faculty at research institutions. By creating mentoring networks and disseminating what we have collectively learned from our experiences in the academy, we have the ability to influence conversations, policies, and strategies that influence the quality of our existence as Black people. Furthermore, affiliations at overwhelmingly White institutions with climates not necessarily conducive to nurturing voices divergent from the mainstream are ideally less of a challenge because our disseminated voices can sustain other scholars feeling marginalized by their experiences in higher education.

The *Journal of Thought* has provided SOTA and BOTA with a forum to showcase some of the work underway within our organizations. As co-editors, we have collaborated to nurture the voices within SOTA and BOTA. The process of editing this volume has taken more time than the traditional editorship of a special issue because many of the voices you will read are those of emerging Black scholars. Nurturing these voices is necessary because these are the voices poised to develop more effective strategies for redressing the problems in our community.

A myriad of challenges face Black communities. These challenges are oftentimes caused by an intersection of race, gender, and poverty. Dannielle Joy Davis examines the critical role that research plays in defining policy. Davis warns against the adoption of color blindness when conducting policy research. To this end she identifies methodological strategies for conducting research, which directly examines the roles of race, class, and gender in our society. This is a necessary discussion because of recent and successful attempts to dismantle affirmative action and other race-conscious initiatives. After all, few institutions of higher education were able to achieve student or faculty diversity without considering the race and gender of applicants. Without doing so, campuses across the country would be more racially and class homogenous.

Necoal Holiday-Driver, Chippewa Thomas, and Monica Hunter highlight the impact that HIV/AIDS has on heterosexual African American women. While the world indicts developing countries for the growth in the transmission of HIV, these authors report an increase among African and Hispanic American women. Given the degree to which children are likely to reside in female-headed households, what will this mean for education? In countries like South Africa, the result has been a growth in the number of children orphaned because of AIDS. Yet the response to health issues are gender-biased. Like Davis, authors Driver, Thomas, and Hunter call for a response to the AIDS crises that is more responsive to the context of those who exist at the cross section of race, class, and gender.

L. Octavia Tripp and Kimberly L. King-Jupiter examine how notions of Black inferiority continue to permeate and influence educational outcomes. More importantly, how can equity in education be truly achieved when our nation's classrooms are staffed by a predominately White teaching force that has consciously or unconsciously embraced the tenets of Black inferiority? What is the relationship of teacher perceptions to the poor performance and high drop out rates among African, Hispanic, and Native American populations?

In essence, Alicia C. Collins and Bradford F. Lewis identify a successful strategy for increasing graduate success rates of Black women. The strategy centers around the rituals used to socialize women at the two historically Black women's colleges in the United States. What they discovered was that the bonds of sisterhood are an integral part of the collegiate experience at Bennett and Spelman colleges. This bond perpetuates institutional tradition and fosters a sense of *belong-ness* among the students. A review of their work leads one to ask whether or not similar rituals would be useful within K-12 and predominately White colleges and universities committed to the success of Black women? Having attended the induction ceremonies at several HBCUs, might similar strategies lead to the evolution of campus climates across the United States that authentically embrace humanity in all its diversity?

While Collins and Lewis illuminate the necessity of bonding to the success of Black women in higher education, the marginalization of African Americans in higher education is examined by Lamont A. Flowers and James L. Moore III. If one is led to ask why the bonding rituals used at Spelman and Bennett colleges are not adopted by predominantly White institutions (PWI) struggling to retain African American students, the lack of diversity among the academic leadership in American higher education may be part of the explanation. Without diverse representation among academic administrators, it becomes difficult for PWIs to authentically strategize how to bridge the gap between an increasingly diverse country and campus enrollments that remain overwhelmingly White.

As we diversify the faculty ranks at PWIs, challenges emerge. Sharon L. Holmes poignantly chronicles the experiences of African American women in the academy. One of Holmes' respondents reported "Doing so much service cost me when it came time for promotion . . . when I first arrived on campus, I felt as if I was the university's private documentation for minorities. I was on every committee, council, whatever, you name it." Here is the crux of our relationship as Black people to the academy; we are simultaneously used up and marginalized. PWIs purportedly committed to diversity use the limited number of faculty and staff on their campus to provide a service yet maintain the same

level of expectation for publication. Instead of using up those limited number of faculty and staff present, greater levels of diversity have to be aggressively pursued so that this country's colleges and universities reflect the faces in the greater society.