Chapter 3

The pre-Covid-19 world: race and inequity in higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education[16] must become an engaged, civic institution "dedicated to producing knowledge and educating ethical, empathetic students for just and sustainable democratic societies" to realise its promise of greatness (Harkavy et al. 2020). However, for this to happen, the university must become actively engaged with the life and problems of its community and society (ibid.). The purpose of this chapter is to explore race[17] and inequity in higher education before the pandemic. The "race" concept is viewed differently in various parts of the world, and there are unique ways that it is conceived in the United States, Latin America and Europe. However, regardless of one's theorising on race, the challenges of people of colour lie at the core of building just and sustainable societies (O'Flaherty 2018).

The building of an engaged, civic university is a process that unfolds over time, and the prototypical university is an aspiration and a reference point in assessing higher education. Davarian Baldwin reminds us that higher education is a duality, with a double consciousness. It is focused both on academic and on entrepreneurial activities to generate funds (Baldwin 2017). With the rise of the knowledge economy, universities, now more than ever, are expected to facilitate economic development. This non-traditional role has led universities both in the United States and Europe to increasingly build partnerships between government and the private sector and become involved in entrepreneurial activities (Dabić 2019). In the United States, these "business" activities are producing tensions between the academic and entrepreneurial dimensions within the academy (Knapp and Siegal 2009). The progressive, academic side of this contradiction must triumph if the university is to realise its

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16. In this chapter, the terms "higher education" and "university" are used interchangeably, and both include an assortment of institutions, including community colleges, colleges and research universities.

17. Editors' note: the use of the term "race" reflects the diverging history of the United States and Europe. In the United States, race is a central concept in understanding the history of the country and reflects, in particular, the lingering results of the enslavement of Blacks. In Europe, the concept of "race" is largely avoided, in part because of its connotations of race theories of the 1930s and in part because societal divides are perceived more in terms of ethnicity and migration than as being linked to race.

promise. Within this conceptual frame, this chapter seeks to understand how higher education confronted the pre-Covid-19 race and equity challenge, by examining the recruitment of Blacks, Latinx[18] and Native Americans to US colleges and universities and by exploring higher education's relationship to communities of colour.

What is the meaning of this statement, which describes the higher education prototype? Definitions matter, and as the world moves toward a post-Covid-19 society, cogent, precise definitions of concepts and anchoring statements are more important than ever. Definitions enable us to describe accurately the world that we seek to change, as well as to identify those challenges that must be overcome to achieve our goals. The historian Ibram X. Kendi theorised that "definitions anchor us in principles" (Kendi 2019: 17). The problem of defining concepts is not a trivial issue, he said. Using vague, indeterminate, "wastebasket concepts" is popular because "imprecise" or cloudy meanings avoid debate and divisions, while creating superficial unity. Such imprecise terms also make it possible to sidestep transparency by pretending to implement one strategy while knowingly operationalising another (ibid.: 17). Therefore, the university, to realise its promise, must use a set of lucid definitions to guide its activities.

So, what is meant by the statement that the university must become a "civic institution that produces knowledge and creates educated, empathetic students for just and sustainable democratic societies and that it must be actively engaged in the life and problems of the 'community' and 'society'"? This statement refers to the university becoming an anti-racist institution that produces knowledge for radical social change that will inform and guide the construction of the neighbourly community (Benson et al. 2017). To realise in practice their aspiration of being democratic civic universities dedicated to producing knowledge and educating ethical, empathetic students for just and sustainable democratic societies, they must be "anti-racist" and produce knowledge for racial and social change. It is not enough to simply produce knowledge; they must produce knowledge for "social change" that can inform the creation and development of the "neighbourly community". An anti-racist university consciously seeks to dismantle the structures of racism and social class inequity while fighting to implement policies that promote the development of a racially equitable and just society (Tate and Bagguley 2017). In Dewey's dream (2007), the scholars Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy and John Puckett theorised that the secret to building a just society was the creation of "democratic, cosmopolitan neighbourly communities". Such communities, they posited, would function as the primary social unit in society.

I theorise that such "neighbourly communities" are multi-racial, cross-class places that are characterised by high-quality housing affordable to the lowest income groups and serviced by high-quality schools and social institutions that promote social, mental and physical well-being. They are anchored by community control, participatory democracy and collective ownership, along with the regulation and control of market dynamics. The community residents are bound together by a culture informed by the values of anti-racism, reciprocity, collectivism, solidarity and participatory democracy. The engaged university seeks to create students dedicated to the building of neighbourly communities and sustainable democracies (Luter and Taylor 2020).

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18. "Latinx" is a gender-neutral term used to describe people of Latin American origin.

Building the neighbourly community brings us to the question of democracy. There exist multiple types of democracies, so the term must be carefully defined. In *Dewey's dream* (Benson, Harkavy and Puckett 2007), the authors define elitist, neoliberal democracies as democratic societies, such as the United States, where the mass of citizens have limited ability to influence the government, institutional decisions or the economy. In neoliberal democracies, the citizen's power to influence government is mainly through the vote, where they select between or among elites competing for office or authority. In these democratic societies, the citizenry has almost no power to influence the economy or large institutions, and racism, income inequality and wealth inequality are the norms (Mounk 2018).

Participatory democracy, posit Benson, Harkavy and Puckett (2007), is an alternative to neoliberal democracy. Participatory democracies reflect a way of life that actively involves its citizenry in all issues that affect their lives, from the family, school and economy to religion and government. The mass of citizens participates in the elaboration of systems that drive social development, along with the formulation of policies that guide their actions (Taylor H. L., Jr 2009). In advanced societies, citizens ought to integrate social democracy and participatory democracy, with participatory democracy driving neighbourhood-scale actions. Social democracies, then, are people-centred societies that seek to monitor and control market dynamics while promoting social entrepreneurship and human development with the intent of equitably distributing income and wealth while simultaneously raising the quality of life among all citizens. The intent of social democracies is thus to harness market forces and use them to produce socially and racially beneficial outcomes (Stuart 2016).

RACE AND INEQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Defining this prototype of the engaged, civic university is vital because it functions as the reference point in our discussion of race and inequity in higher education before the pandemic. Before 1968, the university was an exclusive, racist institution. The rise of the US university was thus rooted in the slave economies of the colonial world. The slavery industry was a huge economy that played a vital role in the building and functioning of many of the nation's most significant colleges and universities. Higher education not only extracted wealth from enslaved Black labour but also produced knowledge and an intellectual climate to support this economic system and way of life (Wilder 2013). In the years after the slave enterprise was outlawed, higher education continued to support Black exploitation and Jim Crow[19] racism, and to produce knowledge that justified it. In the age of Jim Crow, there were only a handful of Black students on white campuses. Most Blacks, if they wanted a college education, had to attend Black colleges, mostly located in the South.

In the era after the Second World War, the racist activities of higher education took the form of engaging in place-based neighbourhood development. The break-up of the colonial world led to a Cold War between the capitalist and socialist camps

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19. The term "Jim Crow" refers to the age of legalised segregation in the United States. These laws were enacted following the Civil War in the United States and lasted until 1954, when the United States Supreme Court declared the doctrine of Separate but Equal to be unconstitutional.

and spawned the rise of a knowledge economy. The emergent knowledge economy ignited the explosive growth of higher education so that it could produce the new breed of knowledge workers: scientists, chemists, engineers, physicians, financiers, accountants, lawyers and stockbrokers, along with a cadre of cultural, clerical, sales and other white-collar workers. Between 1940 and 1980, college enrolment leaped from about 1.5 million to a little over 12 million (Snyder 1993).

The dramatic growth in enrolment led to a corresponding need for more faculty and staff members, as well as new facilities and new apartment buildings and houses to accommodate the enlarged campus community. The physical requirements to accommodate university growth created an intense struggle over land use between the university and its host community. Universities are landlocked anchor institutions that need to expand in place to accommodate growth. This need for physical expansion meant seizing land surrounding the university, then repurposing and converting it for higher education uses. The problem was that the growing Black and Brown populations surrounding universities needed that same land for community development.

The same forces that triggered the explosive growth of higher education also catalysed the Second Great Migration of Blacks to the city, along with significant increases in the Mexican and Puerto Rican populations and other immigrants of colour. This migration of oppressed populations to cities was part of the transformation of the industrial city into the knowledge city. Black migration led the way. Between 1945 and 1970, more than five million Blacks poured into northern, mid-western and western US cities, with New York and Chicago leading the way. Concurrently, even more whites rushed from cities to the new homeownership zones opening up in the suburbs.

Higher education believed that the urban crisis jeopardised its institutions. Administrators were fearful that the expanding Black and Latinx population, creeping blight and crime threatened their world-class reputation, assets and ability to recruit students, faculty and staff. Therefore, the university made transforming Black/Brown neighbourhoods into university communities their top priorities. This aspiration led to a marriage between gentrification and university growth and development. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the University of Chicago and Columbia University developed the university community prototype. The gentrified university community model was a chic, racially integrated and middle-class community imbued with a culture that reflected the lifestyle of white faculty, staff, students and knowledge workers.

In this gentrification model, the university intended to purge the university community of "undesirable" low-income Black and Brown workers, while retaining the Black middle class (Taylor K.-Y. 2019). University officials used an urban renewal strategy to halt blight and expand their campuses by usurping lands occupied by Black and Brown residents. By 1964, the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency reported that 154 urban renewal projects involving 120 colleges and universities and 75 hospitals had been implemented (Taylor, Luter and Miller 2018; Taylor, Luter and Uzochukwu 2018).

THE DISRUPTION

The 1968 assassination of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr disrupted the universities' racist expansion schemes and catalysed the process of dismantling systemic structural racism in higher education. In this turbulent setting, the intervention of Black students

forced higher education to defer the university community dream. In retaliation for the King killing, Black rebellions occurred in more than 100 cities across the United States (Blakemore 2018). As cities burned, Blacks lost hope in the possibility of changing America. Blacks believed that America was beyond redemption after the killing of a preacher who spoke of love, peace and justice. Floyd McKissick, director of the Congress of Racial Equality, angrily stated that "nonviolence is a dead philosophy, and it was not the Black people that killed it. It was white people that killed nonviolence and white racists at that" (Johnson 1968: 26).

Higher education, in response to the growing anger and cynicism, sought to reignite hope among Blacks and atone for past racism by recruiting large numbers of African Americans and Latinx to higher education. The resultant influx sparked a revolution on campuses. Blacks, with aid from the radical white student movement, started to dismantle structural racism on campus and defer higher education's quest to build the university community. The movement started with Black students demanding the hiring of Black faculty members and administrators and calling for the establishment of Black Studies programmes. The students also demanded that the university create a welcoming campus environment for them.

To realise their demands, from 1968 to 1973, Black students staged protests on about 200 college campuses. These protests led to increases in Black enrolment, the recruitment of Black faculty and staff and the establishment of Black Studies programmes and departments at universities across the country. In 1968, San Francisco State University hired sociologist Nathan Hare to establish the nation's first Black Studies programme (Bondi 2012). Black militancy had a revolutionary multiplier effect on the broader freedom movement. It activated other groups, which led to the establishment of Women's Studies programmes and various ethnic studies programmes.

The revolutionary Black students also disrupted the university's quest to build the university community. The students demanded that higher education end its expansionist, colonial white settler relationship with the Black community. The land-use conversion struggle between Columbia University and Harlem over Morningside Park most dramatically illustrates Black student intervention in town–gown relations. Morningside Park separated Columbia and Harlem, and during the 1960s Columbia University tried to convert the parkland into recreational space for its students and a buffer zone between the university and the growing Black Harlem community. Columbia ignored the protests of community residents, including Black politicians, but the intervention of Black students in 1968 created an internal crisis on campus, which ended their effort to take over the park (Carriere 2011; Luter and Taylor, Jr. 2020). The revolutionary actions of Black and white students and their faculty allies forced the university to turn inwards and address its racism and sexism. These students catalysed a radical change in higher education and paved the way for the rise of the engaged university movement in the late 1980s.

COLOUR BLINDNESS AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF RACISM

A convergence of three inter-related forces spawned the resurrection of racism in higher education. During the 1970s, the severe economic crisis became the midwife that delivered neoliberal capitalism and globalism. An economic recession followed

this crisis in the 1980s and 1990s (Kalleberg 2018). The neoliberal "small government and limited taxes" mandate forced public universities to become more entrepreneurial in order to increase revenues and replace lost public dollars (Clark 1998). Neoliberalism thus caused higher education to re-evaluate its spending priorities while empowering its business and real estate and property management units to generate more funds (Etienne 2012).

Then, in 1978, the US Supreme Court made a landmark ruling that undermined the Black presence in higher education. In the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case, the Supreme Court ruled that affirmative action was constitutional but invalidated the use of racial quotas to address historical oppression and exploitation. The Supreme Court insisted that race was only one of several criteria that universities could use in admission policies (Yosso et al. 2004). Significantly, the decision validated reverse discrimination, which refers to the discrimination against whites by institutions seeking to overcome the cumulative effects of Black and Brown oppression and exploitation. This decision opened the door for higher education to decelerate the recruitment of Black students and faculty (Spratlen 1979; Harris 2018).

Universities, to avoid exposure to legal risks, started to adopt a colour-blind diversity-equity-inclusion model to act as watchdog for the recruitment of students and faculty of colour (De Welde 2017). The results were disastrous. At the University at Buffalo, for example, the percentage of tenured Black faculty members fell from 4% (52) to 2.6% (31) between 2009 and 2019. By 2019, the combined number of Blacks, Latinx and Native American faculty was less than 6% of the tenure track[20] faculty members (Sinclair 2017; Office of the Provost 2020). The Buffalo experience became the norm for most institutions of higher education (Schneider and Saw 2016). The use of a diversity-equity-inclusion model to act as watchdog and support affirmative action on campus was an abject failure. The reason is that whiteness becomes the default group whenever race is not explicitly centred (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The typical definition of diversity helps to explain why: "while diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, and physical appearance" (National Council of Non-Profits 2020). In a society based on a racialised social system, colour-blind definitions, such as this one, render invisible the racial hierarchy, thereby hiding the position of whites at its top. The result is that whiteness is protected and prioritised.

Higher education, then, resurrected its university community dream in the 1990s and 2000s. The urban crisis persisted, and the university borrowed language from the community engagement movement to disguise its university community model (Ehlenz 2015; Etienne 2012). The engagement movement's naivety about land development economics made it possible for the university's real estate and property management offices to mask their gentrifying actions (Yamamura and Koth, 2018; Galster 2019). In city after city, masking its profit-making motives, higher education built the gentrified chic university community by masking it under the guise of neighbourhood improvement.

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20. The "tenure track" is the professorial pathway to promotion and job security. An assistant professorship is the entry level to tenure-track positions. In the United States, lecturers and adjuncts are not on the tenure track.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CAN HIGHER EDUCATION HELP SHAPE THE POST-COVID-19 WORLD?

The question undergirding this chapter is: "Can higher education play a leading role in shaping the post-Covid-19 world?" Higher education had serious issues before the pandemic, including the growing influence of the entrepreneurial spirit. The university must address these issues in this liminal period if it is to play a leading role in shaping the post-Covid-19 world. The American Awakening,[21] triggered by the Floyd Rebellions,[22] created the conditions to transform higher education. According to the *New York Times,* from 15 to 26 million people actively participated in the Floyd Rebellions, and millions more vigorously supported them (Buchanan, Bui and Patel 2020). When we add international participation to the count, it makes the Floyd Rebellions perhaps the greatest mass demonstration in history. This massive protest was against police violence and the failure of neoliberal society. The university must acknowledge the failure of neoliberalism to legitimise its capacity to lead.

Significantly, the Floyd Rebellions illustrate the importance of centring racial equity and anti-racism in the struggle for justice, and also provide evidence that the Black struggle always opens the door to the more massive struggle to change America (Taylor K.-Y. 2020). The rebellions are spawning conversations throughout society about radical social change, reimagining institutions and centring anti-racism in the battle for justice, democracy and revolutionary economic change. Across the globe, people are also talking about changing the calculus undergirding our institutions, culture and way of life (*Women's Health* Editors 2020).

The uncomfortable truth is that higher education must break with the elites and turn away from their vision of limited democracy and inequitable wealth distribution if it is to play a lead in shaping post-Covid-19 society. This uncomfortable truth poses the question: can the progressive campus forces dominate the business side of the university and defeat the nemesis of the engaged university – the entrepreneurial university? I believe they can. The Floyd Rebellions unleashed a cultural revolution on campus. If that revolution triumphs during this liminal age, then the university will lead the movement to reshape the post-Covid-19 world.

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21. I use "American Awakening" to describe Americans' growing awareness of racial injustice and racial and social class inequality in the US.
22. The "Floyd Rebellions" refer to the street protests that took place in the United States and around the world in response to the police killing of the African American, George Floyd.

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