**Rethinking the Diversity Paradigm in Higher Education:**

**New Frameworks for Inclusion and Equity**

Derek Greenfield

Alcorn State University

M. Christopher Brown II

Alcorn State University

Direct correspondence to: Derek Greenfield, Director of Diversity and Equity Engagement/Assistant Professor of Sociology, Alcorn State University, 1000 ASU Drive 562, Alcorn State, MS 39096, dgreenfield@alcorn.edu.

ABSTRACT

With the growing diversity and global influence in society, higher education institutions have been confronted by the need to develop appropriate programs and policies that create inclusive spaces ensuring access to culturally affirming living and learning environments for underrepresented populations. While these efforts to promote equity can certainly be seen as laudable, the operative narrative continues to implicitly support a hegemonic model of diversity that privileges assimilation of “minority” students into dominant arenas. Almost no consideration is made regarding the construction of diversity at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), both in terms of the unique nature of the discourse around the meanings of diversity and how it operates as well as the plausible benefits for majority group students matriculating into these institutions. In addition, the increasing presence and recruitment of majority and international students, in part due to current economic imperatives, will continue to challenge MSIs to examine their existing frameworks and delivery mechanisms to promote a broader educational agenda. Drawing from these factors, we offer a new critical diversity paradigm that disrupts traditional practice and advances discussion of the multidimensional gains which can be realized through achieving richer diversity at all institutions.

**Introduction**

Ever since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that established de jure desegregation of public education in the United States and continuing until today with the significant rise in underrepresented populations in higher education, scholars and educational practitioners have struggled with establishing clear definitions and policies associated with the implementation of diversity. To be clear, desegregation has never automatically been correlated with true integration or equal opportunity for members of all social groups in America (Hurston 1954), even despite more recent attempts to “celebrate diversity” on college campuses. It will be argued here that, in the contemporary context, the seemingly benevolent efforts end up supporting a limiting framework that embodies a hegemonic agenda for understanding diversity in postsecondary education. In particular, the diversity narrative continues to emphasize an almost singular focus on race and conceptualizes this work primarily in terms of recruitment of students of color into majority institutions. While the notion of creating and sustaining culturally inclusive spaces for all students is valuable, this emphasis implicitly privileges assimilationist thinking regarding the benefits of “minority” students enjoying access to predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Little attention is granted to the experiences and realities of MSIs, both in terms of extending the diversity discourse as well as appreciating the potential benefits for majority students electing to enter into non-PWI schools.

In this paper, we draw from and further develop a critical race theory perspective to analyze the framing of the discourse surrounding diversity in higher education and present an alternate perspective for broadening the conversation. By contesting majoritarian paradigms, we challenge higher education institutions – as well as the governmental bodies that regulate their operation – to reflectively assess their own operative paradigms and move towards more progressive policies and practices that allow for a richer appreciation of the complexity of diversity and yield more meaningful outcomes for all students. As one considers global shifts and the current economic exigencies, this matter becomes even more salient to be appropriately understood and incorporated into the fabric of all institutions. Most specifically, we connect these issues to our own home institution, a public historically Black institution that is intentionally seeking to adopt a more critical and wholistic stance on diversity.

**Theoretical Foundations: Critical Race Theory and Deconstructing Normative Whiteness**

As an epistemological framework, critical race theory has been used to challenge dominant “colorblind” paradigms in education, asserting that racism is a fundamental factor shaping educational thought and practice (Feagin 2006; Ladson Billings 1996). Building from Bonilla-Silva’s thesis advancing the importance of recognizing the existence of “racism without racists” (2006), Harper (in press) suggests that practitioners and researchers in the field typically fail to appreciate the deeply embedded nature of racism in education. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) propose, the very notion of ignoring how racism is deeply imbued within the structural apparatus of institutional life results in belief systems that inevitably blame the victim for educational disparities and further reify hegemonic conditions that continue to oppress marginalized groups. Thus, critical race theorists intentionally seek to identify and expose the complex and dynamic mechanisms through which race operates, privilege the subjective and personal narrative as evidence in the understanding of the effects of these phenomena, and proactively pursue mechanisms for eliminating institutional discrimination in order to achieve true social justice (Dixson et al 2006).

As a result, critical race theory offers a useful framework for evaluating the racial implications of the frames specifically applied to educational phenomena. Indeed, as Varene and McDermott (1998) suggest, even our definitions of “school success” and “school failure” represent socially constructed categories, with racial ideologies impinging on these perceptions and the responses to them. From this perspective, the debate surrounding the “achievement gap” becomes understood as again reinforcing a majoritarian perspective (Love 2004) – as if White children represent the educational standard needed to be attained by students of color. Indeed, if solely using test score performance as a barometer for achievement, White students would be experiencing an achievement gap with reference to their Asian American peers, yet this discussion rarely emerges in the literature or educational circles. By focusing on the supposed educational problems and pathologies of African American students, the discourse of the achievement gap reinforces popular stereotypes by suggesting that these children – and not the institutions that fail them – need to be fixed (Lewis et al 2008). Ladson-Billings suggests the phrase “educational debt” to replace “achievement gap” in order to shift attention away from victim blaming and instead towards conversations that recognize the historical and contemporary institutional philosophies and habits that marginalize and educationally oppress certain populations.

In an analysis of the contemporary educational realities of Latino youth, Noguera, Hurtado, and Fergus (2011) present a critique of these dominant paradigms, referring to the need to address the “disenfranchisement” of students of color, not their supposed educational inferiority. If the institutions were reshaped to provide an appropriately affirming and intellectually engaging context, the students would perform, as can be evidenced in the success of Latino and African American youth at innovative schools which have been framed around promising practices and a narrative resounding with expectations of success. Harper (2009) also posits a strength-based approach to understanding the issue of Black male achievement in higher education, arguing that a research emphasis on promising factors leading to success can drown out the deafening pathology discourse that pervades the literature.

Connected to these ideas is the notion that Whiteness functions in ideological fashion as the implicit normative standard in society. As DiAngelo (2006: 1984) suggests, “Whiteness is both ‘empty,’ in that it is normalized and thus typically umarked, and content laden, or ‘full,’ in that it generates norms and reference points.” Operating as unmarked category, the effects of Whiteness become even more salient, as ideology is most powerful when its presence and influence are obscured from conscious recognition. To illustrate with an example, one can position the typical busing practices in school districts that move students of color into majority institutions and rarely the reverse as yet another example of a hidden ideological position that encodes Whiteness as the standard and the ideal (Wells et al 2004).

In her analysis of the colorblind philosophy operative in public education, Lewis (2003) suggests that this approach ultimately functions to reinscribe Whiteness in normative fashion by ignoring the different experiences and realities faced by students of color. Indeed, many Whites are not taught to consider Whiteness as a mechanism for identity, instead viewing race as something belonging to others (Delgado & Stefancic 2000). Paralleling this reality with other identity markers, Bricknell (2000) discusses how the popular framing of gay pride parades casts these events as “invasions” on public heteronormative space through the “flaunting” of sexuality, failing to see similar displays in the heterosexual community as problematic. Greenfield (2005) also recounts how his students considered the use of the book *Heather Has Two Mommies* in elementary schools as “teaching sexuality,” while they failed to label books about heterosexual couples in similarly sexualized terms. Additionally, the media framing of female college sports teams as the “Lady \_\_\_\_” version of the non-male referenced nickname again encodes maleness as the unspoken norm.

**The Diversity Narrative in Higher Education: Mainstream Hegemony, HBCU Invisibility**

Despite the increasing interest in general regarding diversity as an important issue in education, we contend that the predominant emphasis centers on increasing representation and retention of people of color within predominantly White colleges and universities. While this focus among likely well-intentioned schools certainly represents an ostensibly meaningful goal, it maintains a hegemonic framework by positioning people of color as being in need both of services and of assimilating into mainstream institutions. As Closson and Henry (2008) propose, little attention is paid to the realities of diversity to be found at HBCUs or the experiences of White students and faculty who exist in these arenas. Indeed, using content analysis, we found that only two out of the 79 articles published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* since its inception in 2008 have explicitly incorporated a focus on HBCUs.

To offer an illustrative example from our home state of Mississippi, the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) serves as the regulatory agency for colleges and universities. Following decades of discriminatory practices and the *Ayers* court settlement that recognized historic disparities between the state’s PWI and HBCU schools and mandated financial redress, IHL has worked more deliberately to support efforts to engage with issues of diversity. In its official published “Diversity Statement,” the IHL asserts that diversity represents a “strength” in the state that “enriches higher education.” Yet, in the same paragraph, it is written that “dealing with this diversity continues to be a challenge,” with this phrase insinuating a more problematic outlook. Indeed, we contend that diversity is not an entity to be merely “dealt with,” but rather, presents an exciting and critical opportunity for active engagement to generate significant growth and transformation of our institutions and students.

Later, the statement is argued to apply only to “citizens or lawful residents of the United States who are: African American, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Female.” On one hand, we can appreciate the direction of the policy in its intention to promote greater opportunities for populations that have long experienced disenfranchisement in education. Yet, the document has broader implications than policy alone, as a “diversity statement” also suggests a philosophical stance and a reference point for institutional standards. Thus, while the IHL values the need for students to develop skills for “living in a multicultural and interdependent world,” the work of achieving these goals ought not be linguistically framed as belonging solely to marginalized populations. Certainly, Whites and males (as well as everyone else whose lives are shaped by other unnamed variables such as social class, religion, sexuality, ability status, etc.) benefit from examining their own socially derived identities and accessing multicultural milieus.

Finally, the statement outlines the four diversity goals for all institutions in Mississippi:

* To increase the enrollment and graduation rate of minorities
* To increase the employment of minorities in administrative, faculty and staff positions
* To enhance the overall curriculum by infusion of content that enhances multicultural awareness and understanding
* To increase the use of minority professionals, contractors, and other vendors

Again, while the goals contain beneficial elements, the overall paternalistic thrust continues to emphasize increasing numbers in various categories at PWIs rather than encouraging schools to exercise a full interrogation of the dynamics of their overall institutional practices. To be certain, the three public HBCUs already engage significant numbers of “minority” students, faculty, staff, administrators, and contractors – and yet, little consideration is made for the multiple benefits potentially realized through enrollment of White students at these schools; of course, unlike Whites, other students of color would still qualify under these criteria as they comprise minority groups at all types of state institutions.

In essence, the failure to effectively incorporate the HBCU experience into the conversation implicitly suggests that HBCUs are not perceived as representing diverse institutions. Not only does this assessment ignore the considerable diversity found within a single racial group, but it also runs counter to the demographic shifts in student enrollment that have been taking place at HBCU institutions in recent years as well as the rich diversity among HBCU faculty (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, & Ransom 2010). Roebuck and Murty (1993) suggest that, in terms of staff and student enrollment, HBCUs are more racially desegregated than PWIs.

At present, non-Black students comprise approximately 17% of the enrollment at HBCUs (Shellenbarger 2011) – and constitute the majority of students attending three schools (Hill 2011). Furthermore, with the dire economic conditions plaguing many colleges, several HBCUs have quite publicly expressed a desire to recruit students from diverse racial backgrounds in order to maintain financial solvency. While somewhat scarce, the existing literature on White students at HBCUs has identified a positive educational experience for them (xxx); interestingly, White students at HBCUs have alcohol consumption than their PWI counterparts (Meilman, Presley, & Cashin 1995). Clearly, more work is needed, especially in terms of their own encounters with a being a “minority and the impacts on identity development and construction of racial ideologies.

Contrary to popular discourse which essentializes the Black community as a monolithic entity, it is also critical to acknowledge the vast ranges of experiences and identities found among African Americans (Cross 1991) – a vital learning opportunity to be accessed at all types of institutions. While both might be Black, the gay middle-income student from the suburbs brings a far different set of needs, interests, and experiences than the inner-city, first-generation student-athlete. Indeed, one could argue that, as a result of internalizing the dominant narrative, many educators at HBCUs have failed to thoroughly appreciate this diversity and utilized it to foster greater understanding and identity development.

In addition, by focusing almost exclusively on students of color, diversity work tends to evade the critical experiences of White students and the need for them to invest in their own racial identity projects. While curricular inclusion of multicultural perspectives begins to ensure that multiple voices are represented, typical practice in this domain usually results in merely sprinkling in a few authors of color rather than the more meaningful exercise involving critical interrogation of the ways in which knowledge is constructed and presented in the curriculum (Banks 1993). Again, this approach perpetuates the “othering” of people of color through normative Whiteness.

*HBCUs as Critical Context for Enriched Diversity Work*

Considerable research has delivered solid evidence that highlights the success that HBCUs have achieved historically and in contemporary times, especially in terms of providing access to individuals in the present who otherwise might not be able to pursue higher education (e.g. Hale 2006; Freeman 2005). Studies have identified how students attending HBCUs report incorporation of best practices in instruction (Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella 2006), satisfaction and engagement in the campus community (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005), long-lasting relationships and mentoring (Davis 2006), and a sense of empowerment and ownership (Willie 2003), especially in comparison with their peers at predominantly White institutions (Rankin & Reason 2005). Students at HBCUs are more likely to interact and collaborate on research with their professors and to engage in leadership activities on campus than their counterparts at other institutions (Harper 2006). As Palmer and Gasman (2008) discuss, the family-like atmosphere at HBCUs typically fosters the development of nurturing relationships that promote academic success, with other researchers suggesting that predominantly White institutions would benefit from adopting the kinds of meaningful habits found on HBCU campuses (e.g. Rodgers & Summers 2008). According to one student, “the teachers here just took me in and saw something in me, and said, ‘I think you will be successful’” (Pope 2009).

Normore (2008) suggests that, as a result of their traditional mission for equity and the contemporary opportunities for diversity, HBCUs represent ideal institutions for energizing the pursuit of social justice. According to Brown and Ricard (2007), HBCUs “practically invented the open door policy that welcomed all that applied… and literally reversed the tradition of social-class and academic exclusiveness that has always been characteristic of higher education” (118, 122). Part of the “Black college mystique” celebrated by Willie et al (2006) is its role in bringing together and uplifting the various segments of the Black community, particularly those whose talents have not been properly appreciated elsewhere (Jewell 2002). Research by Perna et al (2006) documented that Southern public PWI colleges and universities persist in providing unequal educational opportunities for Black students, while the region’s historically Black institutions achieving the greatest level of equity and access.

The scarce research on Whites at HBCUs indicates that White students typically report positive experiences in terms of feeling a sense of acceptance and belonging at HBCU schools, although further work is needed regarding the resulting impact on identity or the ways in which their presence potentially influences the dynamics of the racial discourse on campus (Closson & Henry 2008). Carter’s (2010) study on variables impacting White students’ engagement at HBCUs offers valuable insights in terms of institutional response to creating an inclusive environment for diverse student populations at HBCUs. Kupenda (2008) outlines a number of benefits to White students who receive direct exposure to diversity encounters from challenging their belief systems to helping eliminate lingering feelings of subtle superiority, or conversely, guilt and shame.

It is argued here that, by matriculating at HBCUs, White students not only can obtain a high quality, affordable education, but they also potentially become more engaged in exploring matters of cultural identity and committed to serving as allies in the mission for social justice (Henry & Closson 2010). Peterson and Hamrick’s (2009) study of White male undergraduates offered evidence that enrollment at an HBCU was correlated with enhancement of their sense of racial consciousness as well as a process of questioning issues of White privilege and normativity. Back in 1981, Willie expressed optimism for the role of Whites at HBCUs, contending that they could also gain a parallel double consciousness as a result of their matriculation: “The addition of White students to predominantly Black colleges and universities will strengthen, not weaken, them. The institutions that pursue this policy will not lose students but will gain new allies and friends.”

A plethora of popular press stories have documented how many White students at HBCUs report the incredible learning opportunity of being the “minority” with the concomitant appreciation of the acceptance they have encountered (e.g. Jones 2010; Shalash 2010). In an online discussion forum, one White student at an HBCU medical school posted a statement addressing some internal concerns about her matriculation, ultimately asking her fellow Black participants whether they felt she should be enrolled at an HBCU and what she could do to make herself more welcome. Through the process of reflecting on the thoughtful responses, this student acknowledged how much she has personally gained from thinking about these issues and added that “attending an HBCU is an amazing experience.” In reflecting on his “beautiful experience” at an HBCU, one student commented, “Not only did I get an academic education, I got a cultural education… I don’t believe I would have gotten that anywhere else (Thomas-Lester 2004). Lipman’s (2011) account of a Jewish athlete at an HBCU included comments from the student and other community leaders about the chance to debunk stereotypes and build bridges between different populations. Joshua Packwood, the first White valedictorian from Morehouse College, rejected a full scholarship to Columbia University, with his belief that he would benefit more from attending Morehouse validated in his Commencement address (Rosenblatt & Lemon 2008).

**Critical Diversity Perspective**

Thus, we argue for a critical diversity perspective that seeks to broaden the scope and definition of how diversity is operationalized as well as recognizes its centrality in the overall functioning of institutions of higher education. Drawing from critical race theory, this concept asserts that issues pertaining to diversity are inextricably woven within the fabric of the institution – from the demographics of the student population to the dynamics of the curriculum to the extracurricular activities available to the campus community. Thus, our approach seeks to challenge institutions to more intentionally engage in self-reflective analysis about the overall experience that students receive and to consider how disparate groups of young people might encounter this education. In particular, if diversity is solely framed as a matter of race – and treated in numerical terms alone – rich opportunities for students to gain considerable insights into their own identities and the realities faced by others will be lost.

As a result, institutions need to look more critically at the subtle but powerful messages being transmitted about diversity based on current practices. One of my former community college students who went on to play basketball at a PWI expressed considerable shock and difficulty adjusting to the fact that all of the other Black students at his new school were athletes. Not only was the experience challenging for him emotionally, but one can imagine that such realities reinforced certain stereotypical images in the minds of White students as well, problems identified in research by Melendez (2008). The presence or lack of a support mechanism or student organization for the LGBT community speaks volumes about the perceived climate as well as opportunities for meaningful programming about these issues. And in an era where nontraditional students have matriculated in greater numbers, institutions must think carefully about way to ensure that these individuals have access to student service offices (such as Financial Aid) at after-hours times convenient to their schedules.

In the authors’ work with many schools, we have been introduced to a great number of diversity initiatives that embrace the spirit of inclusion and social justice. At Niagara University, the student organization handbook is printed both for right-handed and left-handed individuals. To be clear, this decision is not about the handbook itself, but rather, symbolically informing left-handed students that the school acknowledges their presence and the need for true equity of access on campus. The Intercultural Center at Highline Community College and the Cross-Cultural Leadership Center at California State University, Chico both provide models for inclusionary initiatives that are designed to promote dialogue and learning opportunities for all students. Diversity and global course requirements at many schools demonstrate institutional commitment to guaranteeing that students receive exposure to diverse perspectives; while this goal might be highlighted in recruitment brochures, the policy decision actually works towards positioning it as equally important intellectually as other curricular requirements.

The issue is not simply about replicating successful models by just adding it to one’s campus. Instead, each institution benefits from a careful and collaborative process of interrogating current policy and practice and collecting information from a wide cross-section of constituent groups about their experiences and desires. Campus climate surveys deliver a meaningful vehicle for gaining insight into the realities facing students and staff – information that might be hidden from daily interactions out of fear, shame, or lack of an appropriate mechanism for expressing it. Sedlacek (1994) suggests that this type of assessment can play a powerful role in advancing institutional diversity efforts, yet officials must take great care in the design and implementation of these instruments to yield the most meaningful results. For example, assessment specialists who lack training in multiculturalism might be prone to misinterpret or misunderstand the intent of some comments or statistics based on their own limited perspectives.

**Putting it Into Practice: Emerging Diversity Work at an HBCU**

Our institution is in the midst of the initial stages of this work, with the first author’s newly established position (perhaps the only HBCUs with a Chief Diversity Officer) indeed reflecting a Presidential-level commitment to this endeavor. While the Office of Diversity and Equity Engagement has sought to introduce a series of dynamic initiatives in the first semester of operation one of the critical elements has been the focus on listening and learning. Each school has it own history, issues, challenges stories, expectations, and concerns – and it was soon discovered that with the university’s dedicated alumni base and a staff and faculty comprised of many long-time employees, relationships must be nurtured and action taken somewhat at a slower pace to gain support and limit any negative backlash.

The initial thrust of diversity work centered on community building, believing that efforts to promote unity and bring people together would generate greater support for the work of the Office. As individuals feel connected to the Office and see themselves as representing aspects of diversity, they internalize an expanded vision and understanding of diversity and become more interested in engaging in these efforts. Considering the previous lack of attention to diversity, the idea of building relationships became paramount. As a result, the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) worked diligently to be visible all across campus and simply engage with people to build connections and hear their stories. Being a White male coming from the outside, it was important for the CDO to build trust and not be perceived as seeking to impose an agenda. For example, in the faculty dining room, the CDO learned about the difficulties experienced by many international students gaining access to culturally appropriate foods, especially when the cafeteria had limited vegetarian options; this reality prompted conversations with the dining hall manager and chef, both of whom resolved to increase options on the menu.

Other activities sought to further these efforts. Monthly Diversity Dialogues were implemented, with considerable interest across campus being generated for discussing topics of relevance to the broader community. Bi-weekly “Courageous Conversations” established a safe space for students to support one another and engage in dialogue around difficult topics. The CDO also made himself available to present workshops for classes and departmental units, intentionally blending messages about diversity and equity with activities that enhanced the spirit of community. Indeed, as people from different backgrounds shared openly, they broke down presumed barriers of difference and found common ground upon which to move forward in exploring topics pertaining to diversity. In addition, wristbands featuring the school colors and the Office website became quite popular on campus, further branding the Office in a positive light and generating greater interest in its initiatives.

In addition, taking the broader sociopolitical climate of our Southern state into account, some issues have to be more delicately addressed. Perhaps reflecting the sentiments of many employees on campus, one staff member mentioned to the CDO, “I’m all in support of this diversity push, as long as it’s not that LGBT stuff.” Clearly, the diversity agenda carries tremendous potential for education, yet in order to gain traction with certain topics and sustain long-range viability, it is important at times to wait until one can capitalize on critical moments that necessitate a diversity response. Thus, following an NCAA certification visit, it was determined that the university had not sufficiently paid attention to matters of sexual orientation, providing a politically meaningful window of opportunity for including the topic in subsequent programming.

Certainly, considerable work lies ahead for the Office and the university, in terms of reinforcing the spirit of affirmation and inclusion for all individuals and recruitment of diverse groups of students. A campus climate survey and five-year campus diversity plan are already in the works, with involvement from a wide range of units and constituent groups on and off campus. Since the university President has been vocal about increasing the number of “other race” students, strategies for recruitment and retention have been explored and developed. The context for engaging White students more meaningfully into campus activities and gaining more insight into their experiences will be realized. In terms of outreach and recruitment, Mutakabbir’s (2011) research identified a host of salient issues for schools to consider, such as featuring the success of White alumni in promotional materials and identifying a smaller list of diverse schools for admissions personnel to visit more regularly to build credibility and trust. Symbolically moving to a more inclusive stance, the President has been intentional about positioning the university as not only an HBCU, but also, a regional university that delivers the only source of four-year higher education in Southwest Mississippi.

Furthermore, in the spirit of equity, other matters of the expanded focus of diversity have received greater interest and attention. The recognition that young men on our campus graduate at a far lower rate than their female counterparts prompted the creation of a male initiative to be implemented in the near future. The hiring of the university’s first female Vice Presidents has also generated further discussion around women’s issues in ways that perhaps remained relatively silenced in prior years. Overall, the notion of broadening the diversity conversation at an HBCU has provided unique challenges and opportunities critical for the institution, students, and employees.

**Conclusion**

As institutions of higher education continue to engage with diversity, it is essential for them to effectively interrogate their philosophies and practices to ensure that the underlying belief systems embody a genuine ethos of equity. The authors argue that, while ostensibly well intentioned, the overall thrust of diversity work continues to reinforce hegemonic and majoritarian constructions, often ignoring the realities and benefits of diversity at minority-serving institutions. Thus, this diversity narrative constrains collective efforts to promote true understanding.

Further research is clearly needed to better appreciate the unique dynamics of diversity efforts at MSIs, including the experiences of majority individuals who study and work at these institutions. In addition, policy makers can assist in the process of encouraging initiatives that promote greater attention to these matters as well as concrete plans for fostering increased contact between institutions serving disparate populations. University administrators are also challenged to envision strategies for building partnerships such as student and faculty exchange opportunities that can result in heightened awareness and understanding.

Indeed, reflecting the prescient words of W.E.B. DuBois (1903) who argued that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line,” the line continues to be drawn that inhibits meaningful appreciation among the general population and even researchers and policymakers of HBCUs as spaces of richness in diversity. It is argued here that failure to cross the line has generated a deficit of understanding of these institutions and the possibilities of diversity and equity efforts. Perhaps then, we can reconceptualize DuBois’ sentiments by challenging the higher education community to more intentionally and thoroughly examine the problem *and potential* of the diversity lines.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES**

Derek Greenfield currently serves as Director of Diversity and Equity Engagement/Title IX Coordinator/Assistant Professor of Sociology at Alcorn State University.  As a testament to his talents as an educator and dedication to students, he has been named five times to the list of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers* and received Faculty of the Year honors in a previous position at Shaw University.  His innovative course, "Hip-Hop and American Society," has been featured twice in *Source* magazine.  He also spent seven years as an award-winning youth worker in inner-city Chicago.  Derek has published several academic papers on issues related to diversity and innovative teaching and is author of the widely acclaimed motivational book, *The Answer is in Your Hands*.  He is also a nationally requested speaker on a range of topics from cultural diversity to motivation to youth empowerment. Derek earned his BA and Main Sociology from Northwestern University and the EdD from Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and he is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of Washington.

M. Christopher Brown II is the 18th president of the nation’s first historically black land-grant institution, Alcorn State University in Lorman, Mississippi. He is the former executive vice president and provost at the historic Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he held the rank of university professor.  Prior to this appointment, he served as dean of the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, vice president for Programs and Administration at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, director of Social Justice and Professional Development for the American Educational Research Association (AERA), as well as executive director and chief research scientist of the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute of the United Negro College Fund.  Dr. Brown has held faculty appointments at The Pennsylvania State University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

The author or editor of fifteen books and monographs, Dr. Brown has earned a national reputation for his research and scholarly writing on education policy, governance/administration, and institutional contexts. He is especially well known for his studies of historically black colleges, educational equity, and professorial responsibilities.  Dr. Brown has lectured and/or presented research in various countries on six continents – Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America.

Dr. Brown received his B.S. in elementary education from South Carolina State University and his M.S.Ed. in educational policy and evaluation from the University of Kentucky.  He received a Ph.D. in higher education from The Pennsylvania State University with a cognate in public administration and political science.