

NOTES AND RESOURCES ON ANTI-BLACKNESS AND RACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This is a live document, please feel free to add more sections, notes and resources

It was initially focused on anti-Blackness, but can address any/all forms of racism in higher ed

TOC

1. Anti-blackness in Higher education
2. Challenges for Black leaders
3. Being “anti-racist” at The New School
4. References

1. Anti-blackness in Higher education

- Universities remain racialized spaces. Most universities in the US are historically White institutions, and white cultural ideology remains embedded in the language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge (Gusa, 2010).
- Black students, staff, faculty and administrators often have to navigate a system that was not designed with them in mind, and is either covertly or overtly hostile to them.
- In higher education, racism remains ubiquitous, anti-blackness is pervasive (but often goes unnamed), and white culture is often embedded, accepted and goes unexamined (Gusa, 2010).
- Nonwhite students, staff, faculty and administrators are often without mentors, peers, or specific resources to address problems at their predominantly white institutions because higher ed is unable to recruit, retain, and encourage the development of nonwhite folks (they often burnout and leave).
- In these sites, ‘aversive racism’ manifests when people consciously support economically or racially egalitarian principles while unconsciously harboring and acting on negative perceptions of Black people (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005).
- Kendi (2012) provides four tenets in higher education that aided in masking overt notions of white supremacy and Black inferiority:
 - a. Strictly enforced respectability politics, which were a set of rules based on white standards and divestment from Black culture;
 - b. The standardization and normalization of Black people’s exclusion from faculty, staff, and student bodies;
 - c. Allegedly objective notions of qualifications, academic worthiness, and priorities, which masked white racial reproduction
 - d. The promotion of ladder altruism, which argued individual Black progress supposedly trickled down to become racial uplift.
- Black faculty are often made to feel as though they do not deserve their positions or are "phony" in some way - impostorship theory and imposter syndrome are at play:

- a. Feeling like a fake, or, the belief that one does not deserve his or her success or professional position and that somehow other have been deceived into thinking otherwise;
 - b. Attributing success to luck, or, to other external reasons and not to one's own internal abilities; and
 - c. Discounting success, or, the tendency to downplay or disregard achievement of success (See Dancy 2014).
- Black people are punished more harshly for errors or infractions, to the extent that responses are disproportionate or not commensurate with any harm done.
 - Black Women are, in particular, required to be everything for everyone at once, and often asked to complete tasks on the basis of how they are perceived or stereotyped over material qualifications.
 - Black faculty become responsible for doing additional work of mentorship and care for students of color that they aren't compensated for or recognized for, and that they might find deeply taxing because of how personal that work can be
 - Whiteness regards the role of academic administrators/leaders as the purview and property of whiteness (the norm), with non-white administrators becoming, by default, "imposters".
 - There are structures that stop or void critical analysis or acknowledgement of the structural conditions that were never intended to account for Black leadership (Beatty et al, 2020).
 - Black leaders are often leading in spaces that are subtly or overtly hostile - challenges for "a group for whom [this] future was never imagined" (Cooper, 2016).
 - Anti-blackness towards university leadership is mobilized by questioning, discrediting, delegitimation and dehumanizing black leadership, in a manner that never happens to/for white leaders. This behavior is normalized and has severe effects on community wellness, particularly for faculty, students and staff of color.
 - Black administrators have to contend with others' perceptions and the judgments about their "fit" in traditionally White-led organizations (Tevis et al. 2020)
 - The power or authority of a Black senior administrator can chafe with a white student or faculty body that may unconsciously regard that authority as unearned or unjustified or a corruption of the natural order or perceived culture or an institution.
 - Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam coined the term "glass cliff" in 2004 to conceptualize challenges people of color and women often face when brought into leadership roles in organizations. [This 2021 WNYC Takeaway episode](#) features Michelle Ryan, Alex Haslam, and Loretta J Ross discussing the "glass cliff" and "how people of color and women are often positioned to fail."
 - Academics for Black Survival and Wellness. From the website, <https://www.academics4blacklives.com/> : "Academics for Black Survival and Wellness provided a 7-day anti-racist training in June of 2020 and 21-day training in August of 2020 for non-Black academics to honor the toll that anti-Black racism has on the Black community and their colleagues. As a collective, we have decided to keep the training materials from those time periods unlisted on the website. However, this page provides an overview of the content covered during the training and video discussions for those topics. We also have a [list of consultants](#) for those who would like further training or to host a training for their school or organization." – Training materials are available for purchase, <https://www.academics4blacklives.com/anti-racism-training>

2. Challenges for Black leaders

- They have to be everything to everyone - the bar is much higher for them
- They are under higher levels of scrutiny in terms of their performance (under the microscope)
- They are held responsible for situations of inequity they did not create
- They need to continually prove their credentials, skills and legitimacy as leaders
- They are subjected to model minority discourses, and if they do not comply to stereotypes associated with Blackness, they are punished by being disliked (for example, when a Black person is in a position of power, prestige or influence, rather than in need of their help, assistance or allyship, they are more likely to be punished)
- Critiques against them become personalized attacks - dehumanizing them in a way that does not happen to white leaders, and with harmful outcomes experienced by other Black faculty, staff, and students
- They have to overperform and outperform - the pressure is high on Black leaders. This is a function of a prevailing belief that Black leaders are promoted because of their race, not because of their qualifications and capabilities. Many of us have seen and heard multiple references to this by faculty at The New School. This makes it much harder for Black leaders to be seen as legitimate and appreciated, and it exacerbates Black faculty and staff feeling like imposters. Black leaders, faculty and students have to work twice as hard and need to accomplish twice as much as their peers to be viewed as on the same level. And even when they succeed, they have to repeat that success over and over before they are provisionally permitted to lead. This is a phenomenon that persists for Black leadership who, unlike their white colleagues/co-workers, are frequently given opportunities based on their perceived potential. The case is even more dire for Black women, as they are members of two underrepresented groups.

3. To be “anti-racist” at The New School, it is important to reflect on:

- In our important and critical pursuit of a progressive institution, how are we grappling with the *ever present reality of racism and anti-Blackness*, even as we construct needed arguments for change?
- How do we build our capacities to transform structural inequity, seek justice and hold people in positions of power accountable, while also diffusing the power of racism and anti-blackness in our discussions and debates?
- Denying the presence of racism and anti-blackness does not erase their existence.
- How do we proactively guard against the repetitive, casual and spurious adjudication of Black students, staff, faculty and leaders’ credentials, capabilities, motivations and skills?
- Can the singling out of Black leaders with demonizing language ever produce truly progressive outcomes, even if some believe their tactics to be motivated by important and fair demands for compensation on behalf of vulnerable, and in many cases, minority faculty? Do we share an understanding that intent is unnecessary for the reproduction of racist rhetoric?
- What kind of poetics are reproduced for Black and/or vulnerable faculty, staff and students who experience the simultaneity of progressive action (e.g., for a living wage for PT faculty) together with demonization of Black leaders?
- What campus policies and practices need to be eradicated because they disproportionately impact BIPOC people?
- What specific role can we play in rejecting perpetuating Racist or anti-Black or ideologies in higher education spaces, including Zoom meetings and other organizing spaces, let alone our important pedagogical spaces?

4. REFERENCES - resources that address these issues:

Racial Equity & Anti-Black Racism

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[Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics \(And Everything Else\)](#) - by [Olúfemi O. Táíwò](#)