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**PITFALLS OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT  
WITHIN THE ACADEMY**

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vol. 16, pp. 40-76]**Abstract:**

A brief historical overview of the ideological shift from multicultural education towards diversity education suggests that the “struggle” paradigm of the Civil Rights Movement has been abandoned in favor of celebrating differences. The paper discusses conflict-laden approaches of managing diverse voices, identities, and discourses within the U.S. academy.

**Introduction**

In North America, the urgency of integration, a key demand of a vibrant Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, gave rise to corporate concerns on how to manage a *multicultural* workforce. Since the 1980s, the multicultural appeal has lost its luster and corporations have increasingly focused on managing *diversity*. Diversity discourse left an indelible imprint on corporations and academe in the United States and elsewhere. Scholars took note of this political shift. James A. Banks, dubbed “the father of multicultural education,” is a case in point. By 1981, he published a primer on *Cultural Diversity and Education* (now in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2016), to adapt to the conservative turn in public policy. For instance, in the United

States, inclusion strategies on narrowly defined multicultural (i.e. racial/ethnic) and gender grounds were considered inadequate (Nagel & Asumah, 2014). Demands for racial justice and women's rights were followed by a "lavender revolution" (i.e., LGBT human rights), and a struggle for recognition for people with disabilities. Black feminists articulated an intersectionality of social identities approach, to protest their endemic exclusion in white feminist and Black political thought. In this paper, I will show the conflict-laden, contentious approaches of managing diverse voices, identities, and discourses within a risk adverse, increasingly corporate academy. Calls for a paradigm shift in general education began with the new disciplines of Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, followed by Women's Studies. Importantly, these demands came from below, engendered by militant student protests, and were not a diversity management decision from above in the 1960s. These interdisciplinary studies programs were granted by besieged administrators (e.g., from San Francisco State, Cornell University, and the City University of New York) as a concession to a revolutionary student body that protested U.S. imperialist wars and racist state repression within its territory, especially on reservations and in cities (cf. Biondi, 2012). What are the lessons from the Civil Rights Movement for today's DREAMers,<sup>1</sup> Ban-the-Box activists, and for the Black Lives Matter social movement within U.S. academia, rallying for citizenship rights, for the rights of persons with conviction records, and for racial equity within historically white institutions? Specifically, what did the struggles and educational practices that aimed at structural reforms look like from the vantage point of administrative report writers, namely those who are tasked with managing diversity?

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<sup>1</sup> Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2013 grants conditional stay to young people without proper immigration papers. For a critique, see American Immigration Council (<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/issues/DREAM-Act>).

To begin with, I argue that diversity management pivots around a subtle shift from a demand for *redistribution* to a fairly uncritical corporate frame of *recognition* of diversity (e.g. by addressing bias through sensitization workshops). Diversifying the academy seems to be an intrinsic good. Here I draw on Nancy Fraser's (1998) famous diremption, recognition vs. redistribution, but I do not support her own analysis and critique of recognition struggles from below. Rather, I draw on her critic's objection, i.e. that recognition and redistribution (in terms of reform or transformation) are always already intertwined concepts (Young, 1998). Iris Young holds that Fraser and other Left critics of multiculturalism overstate "the degree to which a politics of recognition retreats from economic struggles." To be sure, Young concedes that these "culture wars" have been the domain of university campuses (Young, 1998, p. 51). So, we want to ask: Does diversity management always lend itself to an accommodationist strategy, valuing recognition over economics? If so, what are its implications? I offer case studies, from the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY), and I will address what diversity celebration looks like from the vantage point of those who are minoritized, as students who can't get access and as faculty and chief diversity officers who struggle along as they climb the ladder of mis/recognition.

### **The Demand of Access and Equity—The Dream of an Open University (Deferred)**

The university has always been a bastion of privilege for the learned (and wealthy, male) elites. After 1945, the GI bill brought a great expansion of the landscape of public colleges and universities, including the establishment of the State University of New York (SUNY) system and the largest urban university system, the City University of New York (CUNY). New York was the last state to establish a public university (Clark *et al.*, 2010; Steck, 2012). Uniquely, a high school diploma guaranteed many poor Jewish and non-Jewish white

residents of New York City access to the Free Academy or City College in Harlem. Putatively, these were the best and brightest high school students, however, dropout rates were very high (Traub, 1994). Residency was a measure of positive discrimination as an antidote for *private* colleges and universities which adopted other forms of discrimination, namely, on the basis of race, creed, color or national ancestry, targeting Jewish, Blacks, Italians (Berkowitz, 1948). Berkowitz's revealing report made the case for a public university system on moral and political grounds, prohibiting racist and anti-Semitic admission practices. His is perhaps the first publication that assesses (and validates!) Black students' attitudes regarding the importance of addressing a chilly campus climate at historically white institutions of higher learning. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 determined that the chilly educational climate needed to be corrected through systematic integration efforts. That decision created the moral and legal basis for integrating Black and white schools throughout the South (and the rest of the United States). The lofty goal of integration was accepted by the white male justices with the proviso of "deliberate speed." It meant that the implementation would proceed at a snails' pace and such delays in turn created moral outrage and reasons for the ensuing Civil Rights Movement.

New York state actors also were in no hurry implementing the state university system in the 1950s. It was not until Nelson Rockefeller's election as governor that the vision of a massive university system (SUNY) was fully implemented. Governor Rockefeller has also been credited with skillfully maneuvering around the interests of private colleges and universities, upstate constituents, and civil rights activists (Shermer, 2015). The opening of junior colleges, medical and law schools, and Catholic colleges towards the "giddy multitude" (cf. Takaki, 1993) brought along demands for an inclusive curriculum to reflect the lived experience of students

and an increasingly diverse professoriate. Multicultural education began to shape many general education programs and created further demands for a radical transformation of the university, including diversifying its monocultural professoriate. Open and free access for students of color was one such radical goal, won by Black and Puerto Rican students in the famous 1969 Open Admissions Strike at CUNY. They also demanded that education majors take mandatory courses in Black and Puerto Rican history as well as Spanish. In an unprecedented way, the CUNY students not only pushed back the threat of Rockefeller's budget cuts but instead brought about the doubling of the student body of CUNY. Administrators felt under siege and acted fast in order to gain control. Thanks to the continued militancy by the next generation of students, the open admissions policy lasted for three decades, thus transforming an elite white university system into a racially diverse and working class one in an unparalleled way. However, the free tuition policy lasted only some five years (*CUNY Matters*, 2011; CUNY History, n.d.; Traub, 1994).

Rockefeller, the son of the elite, kept pushing for tuition for CUNY schools but his plans only succeeded after he resigned as governor. While in office, Rockefeller was not only known for his stewardship for a premier public higher education system, but he was also responsible for ordering the mass shooting of prisoners to end the Attica rebellion in 1971. Soon thereafter, he established the most repressive drug laws in the nation, a formula for "crime control" which was spearheaded by U.S. president Nixon, who ordered a "war on drugs" to decimate Black Power politics and to repress the Black-led Civil Rights movement (Hanson, 2016; Perez & Saldaña, 2016). The Rockefeller Drug Laws spurred an unprecedented built up of prisons in upstate New York, and it targeted fairly exclusively downstate Black and Latino non-violent youth for life-long prison sentences. Dollar for dollar state funding shifted from investment in capital expenditures

for SUNY (and CUNY) towards excessive prisons expenditures (Nagel, 2008). Not a single new college campus was built during the last thirty years.

The majority of Black and Latino folks live in segregated neighborhoods with substandard housing, public schools, inadequate access to good jobs, quality health care, supermarkets, recreational resources, etc. However, the state does not spare taxpayers' money for military hardware for policing, containing, and simply harassing residents of color, such that policy makers and activists now speak of a cradle-to-prison pipeline. Policy makers have noticed that when a child fails third grade, a prison cell will have to be budgeted, due to the likelihood of going to jail rather than finishing high school. Race, class, and geography all play a role whether one gets sent to (drug) treatment or to prison (Mauer, 2006). The ascendancy of Barack Obama to the White House has not meant social or economic uplift for Black working class America (Alexander, 2010; Drucker, 2010; Porter, 2016; Rothwell, 2016). In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) already decried the caste system of schooling and found that segregation was worse in 1991 than in 1954, when the Supreme Court desegregated separate and unequal schools. Alexander's bestseller *The New Jim Crow* (2010) confirms Kozol's bleak assessment and brought to light the racial caste system vis-à-vis the treatment of Black men in the criminal justice system. The Nixon presidency, and Rockefeller, started the punitive politics of incarceration (mandatory minimum sentences, ending good time, ending furloughs, etc.) which gave rise to the myth of the criminalblackman (Russell-Brown, 2008) and neoliberal policies that dismantled social welfare infrastructure. These in turn contributed to massive increases in health care costs and, of course, in tuition, even for public colleges and universities, where a commitment to grant funding and other subsidies of economically disadvantaged and academically underprepared students has been shrinking. The racist effects present a double containment of Black working class people with the expansion

of the prison system and with the legal and de facto attack on race-based affirmative action programs. Thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, we may see some crumbling of structural impediments, but backlash is viscerally felt with the ascent of the Tea Party, the “Trump factor,” and a religious belief in austerity, as public investments in the penal and military industrial complexes continue unabated.

The Reagan presidency brought an attack on affirmative action policies, buttressed by U.S. Supreme Court decisions which ruled against racial “quotas” (*Bakke* rule, 1978). President Kennedy had initiated affirmative action as a political appeasement strategy by offering affirmative action to those who were harmed by Jim Crow (segregationist) practices in the South and by racist discrimination elsewhere. It was meant as an empowerment strategy to give Black citizens opportunities for employment, advancement, and education. However, in practice the pool for eligible affirmative action groups was soon widened and businesses and colleges started to hire white women instead. Today, the biggest group of beneficiaries are veterans of war. Starting with president Reagan’s ridicule of disadvantaged groups as “special interests” or racially charged slogans of ending welfare because of (Black) welfare queens abusing the system (sic), we have witnessed an erosion and subsequent cooptation of the Civil Rights Movement’s “borning struggle;” this term was coined by Bernice Johnson Reagon (cf. Cluster 1979) to suggest that Black activists gave birth to a struggle for redistribution and recognition for all other social justice groups (American Indian Movement, second wave feminism, La Raza, the Stonewall uprising by trans, gay, and gender nonconforming Black people, etc.). Even though affirmative action program officers still have a place at the table of human resource offices in the U. S. university, their portfolios focus increasingly on risk management and mandatory sexual harassment trainings, as well as offering resources on how to increase a diverse pool of applicants. There are no sanctions for recalcitrant departments which

repeatedly resort to hiring cis men who are straight, white, and able-bodied and have not been trained in decolonizing their disciplines.

The Reagan administration also ushered in a backlash against multicultural education, which conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation furthered with headlines about the dangers of multiculturalism and shored up with Islamophobic sentiments after Samuel Huntington's publication of "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993). Most recently conservative journalists use a shrill defense of cultural assimilation (i.e., Euro-American, Christian values) targeting refugees, preferably those who practice Islam, and their left-wing apologists in the academy and encouraging European governments to take note of the peril of non-occidental values and peoples (Gonzalez, 2016). Such a conservative turn is a particularly troubling tendency in primary education, because teachers are often captive to the ideological leanings of school boards and to monocultural standards by federal and state education departments, which schools of education within universities have to adopt in order to get accreditation. Liberal educators such as Banks (2016) also admonish that competent multicultural educators should not "make students cynics nor ... encourage them to desecrate European heroes such as Columbus and Cortés" (p. 11). By contrast, progressive authors such as Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (1980), Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, *Rethinking Columbus* (2003) or James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1995), Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (1991) go "astray" and offer a cogent ideology critique of triumphalist U.S. history telling. Their counternarratives to crass patriotism provide histories from below which resonate with diverse student populations, whereas standardized, white-washed victors' histories may hinder quality education and produce oppressive outcomes. In fact, a Mexican-American studies curriculum in a school district in Arizona was shut down because it defied parroting



the patriotic racial frame so prevalent in schools across the United States. Might it be dangerous recognition politics that a Chicana student should find herself reflected in the stories told about conquest, genocide, and persistent struggles against racism? Indeed. A school commission report showed that teaching progressive revisionist history to Chicanos and Chicana children enhances critical thinking skills and increases students' academic performance. White politicians filed a lawsuit and denounced ethnic studies for creating resentment against whites. A judge agreed. Instead of pursuing the commission's recommendation of expanding a Mexican American Studies program, it was shut down (*Huffington Post*, 2013). Here are the markings of the ultimate cooptation of Affirmative Action cum multicultural politics of recognition: whites are now the veritable victims of history told from the vantage point of people of color.

In this politically charged climate and a veritable corporate intrusion into education and standards, e.g. by the British-based Pearson Corporation (Reingold, 2015), the mainstream curriculum that touches on diversity education is filled with feel-good, colorblind rhetoric; the teacher's focus is on prejudice reduction (cf. Banks, 2016) and not raising questions about systemic inequality and divide-and-conquer victor's history (e.g., settler colonialism, capitalism, chattel slavery). Recently, Texas schoolbooks eliminated the word "slave" in favor of "workers" who were transported from Africa, till a Black parent protested and created a social media outburst of resistance (Moser, 2015). More euphemisms endorsed by the Texas Board of Education include the following: "The slave trade would be renamed the 'Atlantic triangular trade,' American 'imperialism' changed to 'expansionism,' and all references to 'capitalism' have been replaced with 'free enterprise'" (Paulson, 2010).

Contradictions prevail in today's diversity landscape. The online newsletter *Insight Into Diversity* (May 2016) reports in the same issue, divergent trends: an increased focus on

diversity and inclusion classroom strategies within Pomona College for tenure review, while in Tennessee, the legislature abolishes the diversity office at the University of Tennessee and redirects its funding to scholarships for minority engineering students. The reason: “State lawmakers had been threatening to withhold funding from the office since last year, after staff posted a guide for using gender-neutral pronouns and promoted inclusive ways to celebrate holidays, which angered some Republican lawmakers” (Prinster, 2016). Trans\* struggles have risen in importance and even got unusual support: New York’s governor Cuomo has issued a boycott for non-essential state travels to North Carolina. The Southern state has come under fire for its repressive (binary) bathroom politics, nullifying the right of transgender persons to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity (Governor Cuomo, Executive Order 155, 2016).

#### **“The Fire Next Time”**

We’ll have to keep in mind that representation and redistribution struggles came from the streets and radicalized students took the fight into academia. They included armed takeovers, e.g., at Ivy League Cornell University in 1969 (Wilhelm, 2016) by black undergraduate students who were tired of the hegemonic Eurocentric curriculum. They demanded representation of diverse faculty whom they could confide in as mentors and teachers, who have the (cultural) competence to understand their frustrations and develop cognitive and psychosocial strategies for survival in a historically white institution. (The survival struggles of ALANAA faculty, i.e. African, Latina(o), Asian, Native and Arab Americans, will be discussed below.) Today’s Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement has repeated yester-years demands of radicalized students during the Civil Rights Struggle and the anti-Vietnam war activism. BLM started in 2012 with a nation-wide protest about the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a self-appointed vigilante cop who killed African American teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida. The protest action became a national

movement in the aftermath of the police killing of another Black teenager Michael Brown in Missouri, 2014. In 2015, Black activists around the country took the fight into the academy to protest racism in the classroom, residential life, sports, and at the level of administrative leadership. In fact, these demands appear to be cyclical although the methods are vastly dissimilar thanks to the global reach of social media coupled with an intensification of government surveillance.

The government's ability to scrutinize student protesters today is unparalleled with respect to COINTELPRO, the FBI's secret counter intelligence program to spy on a multitude of social/political dissenters and to destroy the Black Panther Party. To date (December 2015), Black Lives Matter has spread to dozens of campuses and its non-violent actions have led to the resignation of several white senior administrators across the country (Wilson, 2015). It remains to be seen how their demands will be absorbed at historically white academic institutions. Thanks to the vibrant Black Liberation Collective, which encompasses Black Student Unions from over 80 universities, radical terminology and demands for redistribution of resources are back in vogue. They include resisting oppression, disrupting white hegemonic institutional power and consciously noting the interconnectedness of oppressive systems (racism, heterosexism, transphobia, class oppression, xenophobia, etc.). Their manifesto (BLC 2015) resonates with that of the Combahee River Collective (1977), a Black feminist statement that disrupted the monoculturalism of the second wave of white feminism in the 1970s. However, the CRC's insurgency demands remain an elusive ideal and instead their struggle paradigm was coopted and reframed into a diversity-cum-intersectionality model, which suggests that all social identities have equal value (Wallis, 2015). Will the Black Liberation Collective continue to disrupt the neoliberal ideological hegemony of the academy by demanding no tuition fees for Black and Indigenous peoples and the corporation's divestment from prison shares (Gladney, 2015)? Will the BLC

continue to contest administrators who are happy to make concessions to symbolic recognition politics but divert attention away from debt-free demands and monetary reparations to descendants of enslaved persons on university grounds in the North as well as the South? Robin Kelley (2016) is hopeful:

That the fire this time spread from the town to the campus is consistent with historical patterns. The campus revolts of the 1960s, for example, *followed* the Harlem and Watts rebellions, the freedom movement in the South, and the rise of militant organizations in the cities. But the size, speed, intensity, and character of recent student uprisings caught much of the country off guard. Protests against campus racism and the ethics of universities' financial entanglements erupted on nearly ninety campuses, including Brandeis, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Harvard, Claremont McKenna, Smith, Amherst, UCLA, Oberlin, Tufts, and the University of North Carolina, both Chapel Hill and Greensboro. These demonstrations were led largely by black students, as well as coalitions made up of students of color, queer folks, undocumented immigrants, and allied whites.

Perhaps CUNY administrators were also caught off guard in 1969, when several African American and Puerto Rican students demanded desegregation. But they had to act quickly, since the students occupied buildings and even set one on fire. In the end, they ceded with a compromise to organized labor: open admissions for all city high school graduates. A report's subheading reads "policy by riot" (Renfro *et al.*, 1999, p. 19) and notes with disdain that CUNY sacrificed high standards ("excellence") for mere "access" when dispensing with standardized testing and offering remedial education for all underprepared first-year students: "Access and excellence are CUNY's historic goals. Over the past 30 years, the 'access' portion of the mission has overwhelmed the university at the expense of excellence" (Renfro *et al.*, 1999, p. 1), a sentiment which James Traub's (1994) book on the City College put in

motion with his critique of open admissions, i.e. affirmative action. Only recently, “inclusive excellence” has been used to overcome the opposites of “access” and “academic excellence,” and politicians from Obama to education department officials extoll the virtues of a diverse classroom as enriching the college experience for all. Yet, the Renfro report also reluctantly acknowledges that the senior colleges of CUNY have not kept their promise of access to Black and Latino students, thanks, of course, to the prohibition of race-based affirmative action measures. The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision on affirmative action (*Fisher II*, June 2016), reversing over thirty years of outlawing “quotas” and racial diversification of college admissions, breathes new life into “inclusive excellence.” Interestingly, because of a shrinking pool of high school graduates admissions officers of SUNY are now forced to recruit in multicultural schools that they have in the past ignored. For decades, SUNY Cortland mainly recruited students from white dominated areas of Long Island and neglected racially diverse metropolitan areas such as Syracuse or New York City. Today, the incoming first-year cohort is about twenty percent students of color. However, the goal of inclusive excellence rings hollow, when only twenty-five percent of Black students graduate from the college, while whites graduate at the rate of seventy-two percent.

### **The Legal Context: The Meaning of Affirmative Action in an Age of Diversity Management**

In 1961, during the militant “borning struggle” of the Black-led Civil Rights Movement, President Kennedy issued an executive order (10925) to prohibit racist discrimination in the workplace and also to encourage business to consider “affirmative action and equal opportunity” and diversifying their workforce (DiTomaso, 2013, p. 257). In his famous “I have a dream ...” speech, Martin Luther King (1963) powerfully noted that Black people are still not free and furthermore, they have been given a bad check, which reads “insufficient funds.” Kennedy had made a timid reparative gesture to Black America: apply to jobs

and colleges, and some of you might get coveted college entry into historically white (and some elite) academic institutions, which were denied to generations of Black Americans due to Jim Crow practices of exclusion. It was a fantastical proposition: to attain placements despite cumulative disadvantages in education and second-class citizenship status.

The dream was deferred: In the end, the Executive Order concerning “Affirmative Action” was amended to address sex discrimination in the Johnson administration (DiTomaso, 2013, p. 257). As such, it turned out to be a corrective measure benefiting white middle class women (like myself) to get jobs that were beyond our dreams and reach in the 1960s. An elastic interpretation of “Affirmative Action” would include opening doors to white women, who were thought to “fit” into a white male boardroom with much greater ease than Black people and other folks of color. To date, what is left of Kennedy’s lofty ideal is a mere nod to “equal opportunity.” Or: everybody is affirmed, because we are all diverse!

Favoring a focus on “diverse voices” is akin to moving chairs around so that some workers of color will have front row seats (and being given prizes for their diversity work), but few, if any, new chairs will be added to the white dominated workplace, offering a cohort of people of color a seat at the table. Such liberal focus on awareness raising about inequalities has also left its imprint in the academy. Diversity trainers inform us about a plethora of social identities, which all (ought to) take up equal space: racism should be dealt with on a continuum of challenges such as classism (sic), ableism and sizeism/weightism/lookism (Wallis, 2015). And Audre Lorde (1983) is (mistakenly, I believe) quoted for her bon mot: “There is no hierarchy of oppressions.”

So, it is interesting to see that today, military veterans are the single largest beneficiary group of scholastic opportunities and government employment, and many of them

are white men. At all colleges and universities, another trend is noticeable: Many of the Black students enrolled (and a number of faculty/staff) are first (or second) generation immigrants.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to blame the victim, as politicians are quick to do. However, the deeper root of the problem, namely, a prison epidemic that has ensnared practically every U.S. Black family: one in three Black men will face incarceration in his lifetime. In an era of mass incarceration, there are more Black males in prison than enrolled in colleges and universities. This has a lasting psychic impact. Testing has shown that Black male applicants *without* criminal records have a higher chance of being denied a job than *convicted* white males (with parole status, etc.). As Devah Pager writes: “The effect of race was very large, equal to or greater than the effect of a criminal record. Only 14 percent of black men without criminal records were called back, a proportion equal to or less than even the number of whites *with* a criminal background” (Pager, 2004, p. 46). President Kennedy did not sign a true reparative measure that included “guarantees” of jobs and education (never mind housing or excellent k-12 schooling). It was simply “an opportunity.” So, in the post-Jim Crow era, people of color may

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<sup>2</sup> “[S]triking immigrant-generational status differences were found in analyses of the 1999 National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF; Charles et al., 2008; Massey et al., 2007), which included more than 1,000 Black entering-freshmen at 28 selective colleges and universities. In 1999, Black immigrant-origin (i.e., first- or second-generation immigrant) entering freshmen made up 27% of the NLSF Black freshmen population, although they comprised only 13% of the U.S. Black population aged 18 to 19 (Massey et al., 2007); they were thus over-represented by more than double their share in the population. Moreover, the proportion of immigrant-origin Black undergraduates increased as school selectivity increased: first- and second-generation Black immigrants made up 24% of Black students at the least selective institutions, but 41% at Ivy League schools. In fact, Charles and colleagues (2008) found that, even after controlling for students’ social origins, academic backgrounds, and pre-collegiate experiences, second-generation African and Caribbean Black students were twice as likely as U.S.-origin (i.e., third-plus-generation) Black students to attend the most elite NLSF institutions” (Tauriac & Liem, 2012).

be handed a job application, but it is not assured that they will get a call back, even when they are more qualified than white counterparts. And because of criminal records which are public information, admissions officers are prone to deny worthy applicants a place at the (college) table. The risk-averse academy gives no second chances thus ensuring that a “record” will follow the person for the rest of his or her life hampering significant educational opportunities and gainful employment (CCA, 2015).

Why is all this relevant for an analysis of diversity management? While all white institutions clamor for gifted U.S. born Black applicants, they also quietly pursue an internationalizing strategy, as their data of Black students (or faculty/staff) tend not to separate out national origin status, and the presence of African or Caribbean faculty and students will be all that matters to make the university look diverse. It is a matter of presenting a score sheet that receives a “diversity” stamp of approval by national organizations such as the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, *DiversityInc*, and regional educational accrediting agencies.

### **Diversity Tactics: Roles of Chief Diversity Officers in the Neoliberal University**

Diversity Management is a *corporate* approach that, for the most part, ignores the complexities of lived experiences, of intersectional oppression, and lacks praxeological clarity: understanding the interaction of critical discourses and practices. As mentioned above with respect to the exclusion of applicants with convict status, it is a *risk-averse* approach, and it is peculiar how effortlessly diversity management has been introduced into the academic institutional framework. Students of color, still labeled by administrators as “minorities” (sic), disappear into aggregate statistics about recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. The term “diversity” lends itself to much confusion, being a hot topic among academics who engage with



the term in a critical way, while administrators use it normatively or instrumentally (Vertovec, 2014, p.1).

In the SUNY system, which encompasses over 60 campuses including my own college, the Chancellor has pursued an ambitious diversity strategic plan promising to become “the most inclusive university system in the United States” (Zimpher, 2015, p. 3), She mandated every campus to appoint a Chief Diversity Officer to coordinate diversity management of all units and departments (Zimpher, 2015). So far, so good. In reality, these officers have this (impossible) mandate:

- a) to conduct trainings of search committees in order to diversify the workforce while being one of a few diverse persons among the senior administration (reality of tokenism);
- b) to assuage any conflicts rising from the student body (the most likely body that speaks up or worse, occupies the presidential suite) by inviting select students to join a diversity council.
- c) to issue reports on diversity scores (aligning with national standards and practices);
- d) to be the “fall person” in case something goes awry (the next racist incident, sexual assaults against women in fraternity housing, etc.); it will be the diversity officer who will take the blame, thus preventing a holistic review of systemic failures of providing a welcoming and safe environment for all;
- e) to lead positive directives (award ceremonies given to those who have an equally positive outlook on diversity management).
- f) to partner with faculty on curriculum initiatives (cf. Worthington *et al.*, 2014)

For any person considering advancing to the level of Chief Diversity Officer, it will be prudent to study some

historical cases. For those of us who are employed by the State University of New York system (SUNY), it is paramount watching the Gallagher's documentary film *Brothers of the Black List* (2013), which chronicles the aftermath of the SUNY Oneonta administration's fateful decision of turning over a list of 125 Black male students to the city of Oneonta's police department in search of a suspect. This blatant incident of egregious racial profiling occurred a mere 20 years ago and the litigation was one of the longest civil rights suits in U.S. history. The film shows that the Multicultural Resource Director failed to be a resource for traumatized students; instead they turned to a Black college counselor for crisis intervention and advocacy.

Despite best intentions, the diversity officer's key role, in this hyperreal world of diversity management, is to shield the president and other power brokers from liability and to provide maximum damage control. Because they are "management confidential" or otherwise worry about job retention, these diversity officers are unlikely to go to bat for a Black student applicant with a criminal record and draw the ire of a powerful admissions director. If they are savvy, they call on allied faculty (with tenure) diversity workers to do the job they (as diversity officers) were hired for: assist in diversifying the student body, participate in "difficult dialogues" with admission officer, etc.

In fact, the diversity management blueprint for universities authorized by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education outlines the following social identity categories: race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, national & geographic origin, language use, socio-economic status, first generation, veteran/military, political ideology (Worthington *et al.*, 2014). So, in addition to protected classes of groups, one's worldview (including pagan or atheist) is also a notable diversity dimension. This blueprint is mentioned in SUNY Chancellor Zimpher's policy memorandum (September 2015).

What is notably still missing in the extensive list is “convict status.” Worthington’s policy paper that outlines national “Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers” leaves out a diverse group of people who exited the penitentiary to seek entry in the other place of higher learning. The effect of such a silence or benign neglect in this age of mass incarceration is that millions of U.S. citizens are quite intentionally locked out. By contrast, the other major public university system in New York state, namely CUNY—the City University of New York—consciously invites returning citizens to apply, because they do not have to check a box disclosing a felony conviction when they apply to CUNY schools. There is a silver lining. Thanks to the social activism by multi-racial coalitions and celebrity authors such as Michelle Alexander, whose book *The New Jim Crow* (2010) critiques a decades-old racist drug policy, the Obama Administration has rallied some two dozen universities and colleges together, including SUNY, to take a pledge to ban the box for student applicants with prior convictions (The White House, 2016). Perhaps thousands of New Yorkers will now get a second chance instead of permanent second-class citizenship.

### **Diversity Discourses – Civility Discourses (“we all need to get along”)**

So far, I have argued that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement have been slowly eroded. Discursively speaking, this means the virtual disappearance of critiques of power, hegemony, oppression, and ideology, and of course, resistance to systemic injustice (cf. Bart, 2016). Cultural critic Robin Kelley (2016) implores student activists to keep pushing the institutions into a life-affirming direction. He notes “resistance is our healing. Through collective struggle, we alter our circumstances; contain, escape, or possibly eviscerate the source of trauma; recover our bodies; reclaim and redeem our dead; and make ourselves whole. It is difficult to see this in a world where words such as *trauma*, *PTSD*, *micro-aggression*, and *triggers* have virtually replaced *oppression*, *repression*, and

*subjugation*” (his emphasis). What was formerly discussed as problems of structural or systemic injustice is now being reduced to personal slights or personal responsibility, replete with counseling sessions and risk-management assessment reports.

During the academic year 2015-16, one campus performs diversity management in the following manner: The Black Student Union held town hall meetings on behalf of the Chief Diversity Officer and the campus administration. The president of BSU read out managerial language ostensibly to make such meetings safe for senior administrators and white students. Ground rules for engagement even suggested refraining from labeling one’s traumatic experience as “racist.” Instead, the speaker was encouraged to speak of it as “racialized experience” and do so within one minute of allowed airtime. Audience responses were collected and perhaps discussed at a President’s Cabinet meeting. A faculty/staff committee on campus climate never received the responses and failed to make recommendations for a campus that values inclusive excellence. Perhaps these campus conversations offer up the hope that discussions about racism can be carried out in a “safe space” and welcome interracial dialogue. Yet, social media with anonymously posted hate mail or classroom discussions which pit students of color against the white teacher, who educates the class about race as a biological fact speak volumes of the presence of a racist climate, not a “racialized” one. Social media may be new, however, what is not new are the students of color complaints.

At SUNY Cortland, a report “Toward a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse academic community” (Steck *et al.*, 1992) makes clear that students of color should not be unfairly tasked with “instant expertise” on matters of urban affairs in a classroom, something that continues to haunt well-meaning white teachers’ pedagogy today, as students’ feedback makes clear. The Steck report also emphasizes the role of meaningful mentoring and recommends the expansion of a mentoring

program for students of color. Twenty years later, this program that helped to retain students on campus was disbanded by an administrator, because it did not include white students. However, all strategic proposals regarding overcoming achievement gaps between white and student of color cohorts emphasize the role of advising and mentoring as a key to retention and graduating students of color within six years. Diversity management “levels the playing field” in a way that this tactic again disadvantages ethnically and racially diverse students on a white dominated campus. A subsequent report, “Recruitment and Retention of Ethnic Minority Report” (Peagler, 2000), focuses on key offices, including admissions and recommends: “The College should establish an on-going assessment of what is being accomplished related to campus climate and issues pertinent to diversity” (p. 14). However such committee has never put together an annual progress report (card), nor has it been tasked to report to the president of the college, as the Peagler report had advised.

Part and parcel of a risk-adverse strategy is to champion a “crucial conversations” re-education campaign. The ideological framework is focused on the *individual* (disgruntled) employee, who will need a “stern, but kind talk” with her supervisor. “Crucial conversations” packaged workshops were first tried out in the corporate world and then imported via Human Resources and Affirmative Action Officers to the academic context. This “effective communication” program whisks away any need for “diversity dialogues,” e.g. regarding intent and impact of speech; it steers clear from any critical discussion of systemic powerlessness and a cycle of oppression. We are all supposed to belong (and behave civilly). And (ideally) employees would be “allowed” to talk back at their unkind boss, as long as they follow the civilly outlined rules of conduct. Supposedly, the workers do not have to fear retaliation. But noting a pattern of sexism or racism in the manager’s actions would be anathema to the corporatist agenda of “crucial conversations” conduct: those are

construed as fighting words and the complainant might face reprimand.

Diversity management often devolves into “managing” diversity: a homogenous, white (male) management presides over a workforce that may have a few white gays or lesbians or straight-identified persons of color in decision-making roles, but otherwise it relegates gender queer or gender fluid persons as well as ethnically and culturally diverse cis gender workers to the backroom, low-paying, and invisible, glass-ceiling and sticky-floors jobs such as janitorial staff (cf. Cox, 1991).

Hence, despite the ideal-case scenarios played in workshops and attention to socio-economic class (in theory), few workers, especially secretaries or professional salaried staff members dare to challenge a supervisor by challenging her to a “crucial conversation.” Working class college professors with working class roots and first generation identity, because their parents never attended college, are also unlikely to speak up, even in contentious department meetings, lacking the required cultural capital and self-esteem (Kadi, 1996).

Within the U.S., this management model thrives on a post-Civil Rights business ideology of nominal inclusion of diverse populations and interest groups in the workforce and academic institutions. The model’s focus is squarely on diversity trainings that minimize conflicts (e.g. “10 things not/never to tell your (diverse) co-worker,” *DiversityInc*, n.d.). In the academic context, the awareness-raising approach is adopted by professionals who manage student affairs. Studies of private business companies show that training programs that simply target managerial bias are fairly ineffective, whereas “affirmative action plans, diversity committees, and diversity staff positions are more effective in increasing [workforce] diversity” (Wrench, 2014, p. 259). The business case for outcomes, i.e. diversifying the workforce, is indeed helpful and addresses the findings of perception research, identified by Sara Ahmed (2012):

One project finds that external communities perceive the university as being white. Rather than responding by accepting this perception (and thus assuming the task of modifying the thing perceived as white) the perception becomes the problem. The task becomes changing the perception of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of the organization. (p. 184)

This means that diversity managers draw the wrong conclusion by including more students of color in glossy welcoming brochures and promotion pictures in the admissions office. But the pictures of white professors adorning the hallways or offices of most departments cannot be changed, can they? However, one change might be, following Ahmed's analysis, that the smiling photographs of the white professoriate disappear from the walls. By contrast, effecting transformative change and making a "business" case for diversification, cluster hires of faculty of color have been quite effective in increasing their retention rates.

Yet, businesses also report a rise of conflicts in a diverse workforce and question the efficacy of conflict management. Do they simply reinforce double standards and double binds or do they dismantle structural, cultural, psychological barriers, and systemic exclusion?

### **Facing the Double Bind**

The shared realities faced by ALANAA faculty in historically white institutions, can be summarized as "Sisyphean." Stephanie A. Fryberg and Ernesto J. Martínez's book (2014) shines a critical light on the presentation of data with respect to hiring and retention practices of faculty of color. "What does it mean for universities to claim progress with respect to diversifying faculty ranks when 73 percent of faculty of color hold non-tenure-track or adjunct faculty positions that do not provide job security (American Federation of Teachers, 2010)?" (2014, p. 5). Such claims of progress in diversifying the faculty hides in plain sight the fact that a myopic

perspective is more comforting to gatekeepers at historically white institutions than an honest look at the macroscopic picture of understanding the diverse pressures faculty of color face vis-à-vis tenure-track level positions, especially at elite colleges or research universities.

In the case of tenure-track faculty of color, Fryberg and Martínez describe the presence of interrelated narratives that have all the trappings of a double-bind oppression, outlined in Marilyn Frye's (1983) classic article on oppression. What is considered meritorious research tends to be contested ("Striving, but Falling Short"), even as some scholars are applauded for tackling diversity or ethnography ("Inching toward Progress"), and their clincher: "Service Is (Not) Necessary." Several Ivy League institutions have been under scrutiny for failing to tenure its faculty of color and Black Lives Matter gives new attention to these interrelated oppressive narratives. Take the recent case of Professor Aimee Bahng who was denied tenure at Dartmouth College. An angry student post reads: "Professors who engage with activism & advocate for students are disproportionately denied tenure [#Fight4FacultyOfColor](#) [#DontDoDartmouth](#)" (5/13/2016). Her colleagues say Bahng stands out for her innovative work in Asian-American studies, for gaining national attention for leading a faculty collective on Black Lives Matter, and participating in a collaborative book project. Yet, it seems that she ran up against Dartmouth's "culture of politeness" and for confusing service with activism (Flaherty, 2016; Silverstein, 2016). Echoing Fryberg and Martínez's shrewd analysis of faculty of color as the university's convenient diversity jugglers, Professor Ellison voices her disillusionment with Dartmouth:

Beyond tenure denials, some faculty members of color have left Dartmouth on their own. In a [Facebook post](#) about the departures, Treva C. Ellison, a lecturer in geography and women, gender, and sexuality studies, wrote that the "lack of critical faculty here always



means that any new person hired who can feel what direction gravity pulls in is going to be inundated with more work than their white cisgendered male counterparts and other zero-G hires.” Dartmouth doesn’t have a “diversity problem,” she added, “rather, the temporary, precarious, and disavowed labor of people of color at Dartmouth is their purposeful and intentional diversity solution.” (cited in Flaherty, 2016)

The neocolonial university relegates faculty of color to the ranks of precariate labor while showing off in glossy magazines that they are “doing diversity.” This leaves junior faculty of color “with mixed messages and double standards, while the university gets to claim diversity as a core value” (Fryberg & Martínez, 2014, p. 8).

Inclusive excellence goals are still tenuous, especially in research universities which prize publication with certain publishing houses and journals; and they devalue faculty committed to action research and publish those in “low impact” journals. Faculty who pursue such work and still hope for tenure and promotion need to be mindful that service to the community and the profession does not really count towards enhancing their reputation. For some junior faculty of color it is simply impossible to pursue a false choice, i.e., of either being part of the struggle or being an acceptable public intellectual who will keep politics out of the classroom (June, 2015). With increasing attention to assessment, what can be said about something as simple as disaggregated recruitment and retention data of U.S. and international faculty of color? A data-driven university will cloak itself in silence over such simple analysis. Stephanie A. Fryberg and Ernesto J. Martínez (2014, p. 3) clarify: “With rare exceptions, universities frequently invoke narratives of progress in lieu of providing measurable outcomes (Moreno, Smith, Clayton-Pedersen, Parker, & Teraguchi, 2006). This often comes in the form of overidealizing administrative ‘goodwill’ and generalizing campus-wide ‘efforts.’” Universities such as Yale are under increasing

scrutiny why faculty of color are not receiving tenure. Often, Black Student Unions are driving this social justice call for action, unwilling to settle for empty gestures by administrators who favor discourses of equity and inclusion and cultural competence.

Fryberg and Martínez perceptively note another constraint imposed at research universities, which cannot break free from narrowly conceived academic standards:

[W]omen of color feminism as a field of study would not have existed without the 1980s and 1990s institution-building labor of creating publishing houses like Third Woman Press and Kitchen Table Press. Groundbreaking volumes of interdisciplinary inquiry like *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), *Making Face/ Making Soul* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1990), and *All the Women Are White, All the Men Are Black, but Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982) might not have been published without these alternative publishing venues. More important, the methodologies that arose from these volumes—methodologies that now form the foundation of established schools of thought in the humanities and social sciences—would never have reached their paradigm-shifting potential, if these writers had waited to be published separately in journals or individual single-authored books. (2014, p. 7)

Never mind that these are now classic textbooks taught at research universities' feminist studies programs! Part of the paradigm shift is a nod towards the intersectionality of "unruly categories" (cf. Young, 1998) in contemporary North American feminist and critical race theoretical discourses, which are clearly indebted to the transformative texts by women of color. Recently, the progressive women of color INCITE! collective organized inspiring grassroots conferences and publishing activist-oriented books, e.g. *The Color of Violence* (2006).

Their intersectional work helped make connections between the mutually reinforcing oppressive matrices of oppression, settler colonialism, racism, heterosexism, and that feminist work entails being vigilant about one's complicity with agents of the criminal justice complex. White feminist activists and scholars often failed to critique the role of police and social workers vis-à-vis stigmatized work, sexual violence, and relationship violence. Black Lives Matter's gender queer founders Alicia Garca, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Garca, 2014) brought to international attention what is at stake and with this new social movement were able to influence discussions in all sectors of society, including, of course, the university curriculum and social climate. BLM signifies the power of coupling the politics of recognition with the demands of structural change.

In these volatile times, college presidents and their diversity actors are advised to create real accountability measures on structural diversity questions, which clearly go beyond perfunctory celebrations of diversity or unity. In an environment of diversity management, they may ask themselves whether they can rely on the support of the institution's diversity officer who has been trained to diffuse resistant practices. Sara Ahmed (2012)'s advice is clear of what is the proper approach: "We might need to be the cause of obstruction. We might need to get in the way if we are to get anywhere. We might need to become the blockage points by pointing out the blockage points" (p. 187). Yet, so often, the academy leaves no room other than leaving one's post, as Sara Ahmed just did in May 2016. In her resignation letter she writes: "Sometimes we have to leave a situation because we are feminists. Wherever I am, I will be a feminist. I will be doing feminism. I will be living a feminist life. I will be chipping away at the walls." Arguably, "diverse" members of any campus community who face some or all aspects of the "five faces of oppression," outlined by Iris M. Young (1990), namely, powerlessness, exploitation, marginalization, cultural

imperialism, violence, have little if anything to “gain” in a corporate model of “diversity management.” The effective exclusion of their affective physical and emotional labor can be quite carefully managed under the elusive goal of diversity inclusion, access, and equity. Clearly, world-renowned Professor Sara Ahmed, Professor of Media and Communications and Director of the Centre for Feminist Research, did not feel included at Goldsmiths and as “feminist killjoy” scholar-activist certainly could not be “managed” within a risk-adverse institution.

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