Emancipatory Change in US Higher Education

Edited by
Kenneth R. Roth
Felix Kumah-Abiwu
Zachary S. Ritter

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"This path-breaking book augments higher education's long-held aspirations to better serve underrepresented groups. It proposes new avenues to assist a changing student body to succeed, in classrooms and in life. A "must read" for scholars and administrators."

—Walter R. Allen, Ph.D. *Allan Murray Cartter Professor of Higher Education Distinguished Professor Education, Sociology and African American Studies UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies*

"A lot has been written about higher education in the US in terms of the problems and challenges it faces, and its role and place in the development of American society. Emancipatory Change in US Higher Education is unique in that the editors have assembled an august group of scholars to examine the possibilities of higher education in the US. Essentially, this is not a regurgitation of the old but a brilliant examination and proposition of what can be and what should be."

—Sabella Abidde, Ph.D. *Professor of Political Science at Alabama State University*

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Preface

The prospect of radical change facing higher education, particularly US higher education, has never been greater in our recent era. Emerging from a global pandemic, and ground-level rebellion over ongoing structured racism and inequality across American institutions, the nation's colleges and universities continue to be a proving ground for increased diversity, systems and ways of operation that more equitably distribute social benefits across race, gender, class, identity, and abilities. The editors of this book have collaborated on previous projects as contributors or editors. We have been successful in bringing leading scholars to engage with the challenges and problems facing US higher education on critical issues of whiteness, power structures, and the marginality of urban communities in those previous works. Instead of critiquing current processes as we have done in our other Palgrave titles, we have decided to explore aspirational outcomes through new visions for education delivery, shared governance and power shifts within the academy, a reinvigorated focus on democratic ideals and practices within the curriculum, and a shift from neoliberal market-based operational strategies.

For several decades, American higher education has relied on its sorting function as the route to quality employment and life. But that promise has become increasingly fleeting given the growing number of students, parents, and employers who hold a diminished view of the econometric value of the outcomes from higher education. At the same time, the soaring cost of education has mired many in a crushing debt cycle, reducing them to debt service for decades after graduation. In many ways, higher education has retreated from a mass or universal model, in terms of participation and

potential outcomes, to the elitist and privileged model on which it was built. The lack of access to American's higher education by people from underserved communities, especially Black and Brown communities, is raising further questions about the commonly held view of education as the greatest equalizer for all. We have also been successful in bringing leading scholars from various academic backgrounds with shared interests in US higher education as contributors to this volume. The interdisciplinary nature/perspective of contributors, their central ideas, and arguments undergird this unique volume. The following summary of chapters captures the main ideas authors are working with.

Marcela Cuellar's **Introduction** or Chapter 1 captures the totality of the book, with a focus on the aspirational nature of *what can be*. Reflecting on her own personal education journey, Cuellar argues that the future of higher education must represent efforts to reassert dignity and give back to communities long disempowered in our country. In **Chap. 2**, Richard Van Heertum chronicles the growing danger facing American democracy, which he argues has been under attack along multiple fronts. Drawing on the relationship between democracy and higher education, the chapter offers useful strategies and ideas on how educators can help cultivate a renewed faith in the possibility of positive social change in America's higher education. **Chapter 3** takes on the challenges most women faculty of color have had to face during the COVID-19 pandemic. Marie Lo, Patti Duncan, and Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt discuss the idea of how institutional spaces that often marginalize faculty of color can be reimagined through spaces of healing from the trauma associated with oppressive workplaces.

Chapter 4 by Brad Erickson and Wei Ming Dariotis explores equity/efficacy in teaching effectiveness assessment (TEA). The chapter examines the challenges associated with the practice in universities and concludes by offering a practical guidance in the development of transformative TEA practices for all educational institutions.

Chapter 5 extends the central ideas of the book to cover the debate on access for students and their success in American Higher Education. Rashida Crutchfield, Travis Hedwig, and Henoc Preciado argue for equal access to higher education for marginalized students. They also suggest the need for the design of novel initiatives that address students' basic needs. **Chapter 6** by Edgar Lopez and Adrian Huerta connects well to the previous chapter on how higher education can provide resources for marginalized students to increase their academic persistence. Drawing on

examples from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on graduate students, the authors offer useful recommendations for universities to support graduate students of color.

In **Chap. 7**, Kenneth Roth and Zachary Ritter examine the dearth of focus on *representation* in media production degree programs. They argue that greater emphasis on critiquing media in advance of production is necessary, to question whether stereotypes and historically simple ways of representing people, places, power, and politics are evident in the production plan. They advocate for a Center for Sight and Sound, where studies focus on race, gender, abilities, politick, religion, and other personal characteristics and how they are represented within the televisual frame. **Chapter 8** looks at the quiet revolution occurring in higher education on the issue of trauma. Christopher Kazanjian and David Rutledge argue the humanistic psychology of the 1960s that helped fashion a person-centered multicultural education has the potential to rebuild higher education in the wake of the pandemic's existential trauma.

Chapter 9 by Abigail Tarango examines the experiences of the Latina *Madre* and her education journey. The chapter provides a vivid description of the challenges often faced by Latinas and their inspiring stories of academic success. The integration of Chicana feminist thought and relevant experiences makes this analysis greatly enriching. **Chapter 10** delves into the debate on why race matters in financial literacy in America's higher education. In the chapter, Daniel Harris examines what he describes as the changes to state and federal student aid that have created unprecedented challenges to college affordability for students of color. The author offers useful recommendations on how these issues can be addressed. In **Chap. 11**, Felix Kumah-Abiwu explores Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the record-breaking donations from philanthropists and corporations to these institutions after the death of George Floyd in 2020. Providing explanations for the record-breaking donations to HBCUs, Kumah-Abiwu argues that these donations have the potential to create further funding opportunities for HBCUs to better serve their students. Finally, in **Chap. 12,** Siduri Haslerig and Kirsten Hextrum discuss their experiences, addressing inequity in college sport and a colloquium they developed and presented on the same topic. The chapter traces their steps through the process and their approach and strategies to look at ways that the colloquium can become a model to create humanizing, collective, and enriching academic research, programming, and presentation spaces.

Across the nation and many fields of endeavor, new ideas and models are emerging for social interaction, political exchange, and ways of survival outside those of a less-competitive era. This volume seeks to anticipate some of the possibilities of a renewed purpose in higher education to more adequately meet the demands it faces from an increasingly diverse, discerning, and demanding clientele.

Tucson, AZ	Kenneth Roth
Kent, OH	Felix Kumah-Abiwu
Los Angeles, CA	Zachary Ritter

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Notes on Contributors

Rashida M. Crutchfield is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at California State University Long Beach (CSULB) and the Director of the Center for Equitable Higher Education. She is an advocate committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities through research and service. Prior to her work at CSULB, she served on the staff of Covenant House California, a shelter for 18-to-24-year-olds experiencing homelessness. This experience blossomed a passion for support of this population. Rashida led the phase one of the California State University Office of the Chancellor study on food and housing security and was co-principal investigator for phases two and three of the same study. Rashida has authored or co-authored many publications, including a book entitled *Addressing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in Higher Education: Strategies for Educational Leaders.*

Marcela G. Cuellar is an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis. Her research examines higher education access and equity with a focus on Latinx/a/o students' experiences and outcomes at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and emerging HSIs, campus racial climate, and community college baccalaureates. Her scholarship has been published in *Community College Review*, *Journal of Higher Education*, and *Review of Higher Education*. Originally from Oxnard, California, she is the proud daughter of Mexican immigrants.

Wei Ming Dariotis is co-chair of the Teaching Effectiveness Assessment (TEA) Task Force, Professor of Asian American Studies, affiliate faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, and Faculty Director of

the Center for Equity and Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2019–2022), at San Francisco State University. With Laura Kina and Camilla Fojas, she coordinated the Inaugural Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference (DePaul University, 2010), and co-founded the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*. She serves on the editorial board of *Asian American Literatures: Discourses and Pedagogies*. Publications include *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (2013) and *Fight the Tower: Asian American Women Scholars' Resistance and Renewal in the Academy* (2020).

Patti Duncan is an associate professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University, where she specializes in women of color feminisms and transnational feminisms. She is the author of *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*; co-editor of *Mothering in East Asian Communities: Politics and Practices*; and co-editor of *Women's Lives Around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*. Her work has appeared in *Women's Studies Quarterly*; *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*; *Qualitative Inquiry*; *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, & Social Justice*; *The Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, and many book collections. Since 2016, she has served as editor-in-chief of *Feminist Formations*.

Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt is the Edith Green Distinguished Professor in the English Department at Linfield University in Oregon and also co-coordinates the Gender Studies program. She is a teacher-scholar and a cultural critic and is the author of *The Postcolonial Citizen: The Intellectual Migrant* and is the lead editor of *Civility, Free Speech and Academic Freedom in Higher Education: Faculty on the Margins*. Her scholarship and creative writing are widely published and circulated in various literary and scholarly journals. Dutt-Ballerstadt also serves as the editor for Inside Higher Ed's column "Conditionally Accepted," a column for marginalized faculty in higher education and the co-editor for a new and forthcoming column in Truthout called "The Corporate University." She is also the founder of Academic Trauma in Higher Education.

Brad Erickson PhD (UC Berkeley, Socio-Cultural Anthropology 2008), is a researcher, educator and activist investigating the intersections of policy, public reasoning, cultural practice, and history to perpetuate or resist inequality. He is full-time Lecturer Faculty in Liberal Studies at San Francisco State University where he is Vice Chair of the Academic Senate, Vice

President of the California Faculty Association Local 1983, and active in Oakland politics where he researches the racial aesthetics of gentrification and resistance. Representative publications include "Utopian Virtues: Muslim Neighbors, Ritual Sociality, and the Politics of *Convivència*." *American Ethnologist* 38(1): 113–130 (2011); "Blue on Black Violence and Original Crime." *Anthropoliteia: Critical Perspectives on Police, Security, Crime, Law and Punishment. 21 Aug.* (2014); and "Abolish the Lecturer: A Manifesto for Faculty Equity." In *Whiteness, Power, and Resisting Change in US Higher Education*, eds. K. R. Roth & Z. S. Ritter. London: Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education. 215–228 (2021).

Daniel Harris, PhD, is the inaugural Bayard Rustin Post-doc Fellow at Whittier College. In his role, Daniel is responsible for equity-based research, programming, and faculty development at the College. His formal research examines the role that race and racism inform the academic options, experiences, and outcomes of Black students to and through higher education. Before joining Whittier College, Daniel taught at the K-12 and higher education levels and worked as a data analyst in the non-profit educational sector. He also served as a fellow for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans under the Obama administration. Daniel crafted policy recommendations during his fellowship that advanced the Initiative's agenda to promote educational advancement among Black communities. Daniel also held two terms as Education Pioneers Fellow with the Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE) and the Broad Center in New York, New York, and Los Angeles, California. Daniel completed his undergraduate studies at Georgetown University and formal graduate studies at Columbia University, Teachers College, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Siduri Haslerig is an associate professor, Linda Clarke Anderson Presidential Professor, and associate dean for Research & Graduate Studies in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education. Her scholarship nests the study of intercollegiate athletics within higher education, emphasizing analysis of race and equity through innovative qualitative methods. In addition to conducting the first study of graduate student athletes' experiences, she is writing a book about racialized and political coverage embedded in college sport broadcasts.

Travis Hedwig is an applied cultural/medical anthropologist and Assistant Professor of Health Sciences at the University of Alaska Anchorage. His primary research interests involve impairment/disability and health

inequality in the areas of housing and homelessness, mental and behavioral health, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), and community-based supported living. Travis has worked extensively on questions related to cultural adoption and kinship caregiving, child welfare, adolescent health, suicide prevention, community-engaged approaches to alcohol and substance misuse risk prevention, and health advocacy. He is passionate about teaching and learning and enjoys the challenge of translating research into practice in collaboration with communities.

Kirsten Hextrum, assistant professor and Edith Kinney Gaylord Presidential Professor, is a nationally recognized expert on college athletic admission and the author of *Special Admission: How College Sports Recruitment Favors White Suburban Athletes* (2021). Her work has appeared in top journals (e.g., *Harvard Educational Review* and *Teachers College Record*) and media outlets (e.g., The Atlantic and NPR). She is a frequent host of equity workshops and the faculty advisor for OU's white athlete ally program and other athlete-equity groups.

Adrian H. Huerta, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Education in the Pullias Center for Higher Education, Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. His research focuses on boys and men of color, college access and equity, and gang-associated youth and young adults. His scholarship appears in *Boyhood Studies*, *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *Teachers College Record*, *The Urban Review*, *Urban Education*, and other practitioner and scholarly journals. He is a past recipient of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Minority Dissertation Fellowship and is Racial Equity Fellow with Health Affairs.

Christopher J. Kazanjian, PhD, is Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at El Paso Community College. Kazanjian is the author of *Empowering Children: A Multicultural Humanistic Approach* and *Creating Meaning in Young Adulthood: The Self-Actualizing Power of Relationships*. Since 2015, he has served as the program director for the after-school program Kidz n' Coaches, El Paso, which pairs volunteer college students coaches with emerging children in prosocial group activities to support culturally relative self-actualization processes.

Felix Kumah-Abiwu, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Africana Studies at Kent State University. He is also the Founding Director of the Center for African Studies at Kent State. He received his

PhD in Political Science from West Virginia University. He also studied at Ohio University and the Legon Centre for International Affairs & Diplomacy, University of Ghana. His research focuses on Black males and public education, US higher education policy, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the politics of development/democratization in Africa, African security issues, and African-centered theories. In addition to his published book and several book chapters, Dr. Kumah-Abiwu's articles have also appeared in academic journals such as *Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *West Africa Review*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Journal of Men's Studies*, *Journal of Economics/Sustainable Development*, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, and *Urban Education*.

Marie Lo is Professor and Chair of English at Portland State University. Her work explores the settler imperial genealogies of contemporary US culture, from the intersections of nineteenth century US Indian removal policies and anti-Asian exclusion laws to the intersections of empire, race, and craft. Recent publications can be found in *The Global South*, *ASAP/Journal*, and *Critical Ethnic Studies.*

Edgar F. Lopez is a PhD student in the Urban Education Policy program and a research associate at the University of Southern California's Pullias Center for Higher Education. His research primarily explores educational equity, mentorship, and support systems for graduate students of color toward degree completion and career preparation. He holds his undergraduate degrees from UCLA and an MEd in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Texas, Austin. He is a recipient of the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

Henoc Preciado joined the California State University (CSU) Office of the Chancellor in October 2019 and serves as the Systemwide Manager of Basic Needs Initiatives having worked with marginalized and underserved student populations over the past eight years at CSU Fullerton and CSU Los Angeles. Prior to his role, Henoc served as the Director of the Dreamers Resource Center at Cal State, Los Angeles. In his role, Henoc works closely with the 23 campuses in the CSU as programs and services are created and delivered to support students who experience food and housing insecurity and homelessness. He provides regular oversight of state-funded grants, totaling more than $21M, including one-time funds to expand basic needs programs and ongoing funds to pilot the implemen-

tation of college-focused rapid rehousing programs. Henoc is a proud product of the California State University, holding his Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Cal State Fullerton and his Master of Science degree in Higher Postsecondary Education from Syracuse University.

Zachary S. Ritter is Interim Associate Dean of Students at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), where he focuses on conduct issues from a restorative justice lens. He also teaches civic engagement and social justice history at UCLA. Prior to CSUDH, he was Associate Dean of the Office of Institutional Diversity at Harvey Mudd College and Associate Director of the Office of Campus Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Redlands. Ritter recently co-edited *Marginality in the Urban Center: The Costs and Challenges of Continued Whiteness in the Americas and Beyond*, for Palgrave Macmillan.

Kenneth R. Roth is a Research Associate with the Choices Program at UCLA, where he examines access and equity issues associated with college-going among underrepresented groups. Previously, he taught research methods and organizational communication at USC's Rossier School of Education, in addition to 13 years of teaching in the Art, Digital Media and Communication Departments at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Roth began his professional career as a print journalist, writing and editing for daily newspapers and magazines in five Western states. He co-edited *Marginality in the Urban Center: The Costs and Challenges of Continued Whiteness in the Americas and Beyond*, with Zachary Ritter and Peary Brug, and *Whiteness, Power and Resisting Change in US Higher Education: A Peculiar Institution*, also with Zachary Ritter.

David Rutledge, PhD, is Associate Professor of Educational Design and Learning Technology at New Mexico State University. Rutledge is interested in the role technology plays in teacher professional development. His areas of research focus on technology integration for inclusionary teaching practices, language learning, and equitable educational approaches. Rutledge has multiple publications related to equitable teaching practices for members of marginalized populations.

B. Abigail Tarango has demonstrated capacity and expertise in the field of education by working in early childhood, secondary and postsecondary instruction and administration for the last 20 years. Her experiences in academics (curriculum design, instructional methods, and assessment) have provided a solid foundation in student-centered practices, and Tarango's

work in school district operations (long-range facilities planning, transportation, bond referendums—over 855M to date, and other areas) has allowed for a deep understanding of public school systems. Most recently, Abigail served in a Pk-12 administrative role and as an Executive Cabinet-level Director at a large urban school district in the Southwest Borderlands; her diverse background has expanded from educator and practitioner to tactician and strategist. Additionally, serving in the last three legislative sessions, government affairs, and policy on public education has proven invaluable to understanding the effect of local, state, and federal policy work in education. As of 2021, Tarango left education to pursue a career in the nonprofit world, as the Executive Director of the University Medical Center Foundation of El Paso, El Paso Children's Hospital Foundation, and Presidenta de la Fundacion de Mexico UMC.

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List of Figures

Introduction: Transforming Higher Education—Reflections on the Past and Possibilities for the Future

Marcela G. Cuellar

Higher education often is touted as a great social equalizer through its potential to provide social mobility for anyone regardless of racial or economic background. My own trajectory into and through higher education is an example of the possibilities it holds, especially for minoritized students. I attended a private selective university six hours away from home for my undergraduate education. As a first-generation, low-income Latina, the environment at Stanford was so foreign to my home and community in Oxnard, California. In this space, I observed and directly experienced the disparities in educational resources and preparation among students from different zip codes and family backgrounds. I encountered culture shock in this predominantly white institution and navigated my way toward graduation through much trial and error. At the same time, this was a transformative experience through the knowledge and friends that I gained. My awareness of educational inequities subsequently inspired me

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to pursue a career supporting other college aspirants to achieve their goals, which eventually led me to graduate school to research and produce solutions to these issues. Now, as a tenured faculty member, I teach students about these issues, learn from their current experiences, and generate knowledge on how we can reduce education inequities in higher education.

While much has changed in the world in the 25 years since I first stepped onto my first college campus, this trajectory into and through higher education still reflects the story of many of our students—many of the students with whom I engage with in the classroom and in my research. The importance of a college degree for upward mobility has only intensified. Even in the midst of growing costs for a postsecondary education, a college degree remains a primary pathway toward career and economic advancement. Social mobility has become the primary goal for many students. Students from the lowest income backgrounds, many of whom are students of color, know a ticket to a better life is contingent on earning a postsecondary degree, especially from the most elite institutions. Paul Tough (2019) captures the psychological and emotional toll this takes on students when they anxiously wait for admission decisions after years of intense preparation, planning, and dreaming of going to college. Tough (2019) draws from Dr. Raj Chetty's research illustrating how these patterns are consistent and increasingly stronger though the enrollment patterns of students from the lowest income brackets and remain low at approximately 3–4% annually. In other words, students who would benefit most from these institutions have the least access. On the other hand, low-income students, many of whom are students of color, are more likely to enroll at less selective public institutions, including the two-year sector, where graduation rates are generally lower and institutions receive the fewest resources. This structure reinforces inequity in its design.

The role of higher education in supporting the nation's economy cannot be overstated. However, this provides only a partial view into the multiple roles higher education occupies in society. The United States' aspirations for a more democratic and just society are intertwined with goals of higher education. However, the reality of achieving these democratic ideals falls short. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fissures and inequities in our higher education system, as well as the possibility of immediate changes responding to a global health and economic crisis. These challenges remain moving forward. To address these challenges, González (2011) reminds us we must reflect on the history of higher education that has led us to this point. Despite changes throughout the past 400 years since its

inception in this United States, essential elements of higher education endure.

Purposes of Higher Education in Steady Tension

Throughout history, higher education has held multiple purposes. On the one hand, higher education is strongly aligned with building and supporting strong economies. On the other, higher education aims to produce knowledge that may not yield immediate economic returns but offers tremendous social value. Specifically, higher education has been central in the development of educated citizens who engage in democratic processes and advance communities. Though the tensions between utilitarian and liberal education coexist, the emphasis toward one or another is shaped by different social, economic, and political contexts.

History teaches us higher education has been central in the establishment of powerful nations. Great nations build and invest in strong education systems (González, 2011). This is also true in US higher education. In 1636, the Pilgrims established the first college, Harvard, only 16 years after their arrival here to colonize as the United States. Harvard was modeled after Cambridge and Oxford with a strong emphasis on teaching. Each colony similarly erected its own institutions of learning (Geiger, 2016). The primary purpose of these institutions was to educate white men who were land owners to become the future leaders and clergy in these colonies. Our institutions of higher education in the United States are thus Eurocentric and patriarchal in design.

As the United States developed as a nation, higher education remained a key feature in establishing its growth and emergence as a global power. The federal government invested in the creation of new institutions to expand access and meet its economic goals. In 1862, passage of the Morrill Act fundamentally transformed higher education for a broader populace and solidified its role in advancing the economic needs of the country. This act provided "federal land" to states to support the establishment of new public institutions in more practical areas of study. The curriculum at these institutions would emphasize agriculture and mechanical arts to support and build the local economies in newer territories. States could use this land to build a college if one did not exist or sell these lands to invest in existing institutions. Land-grant institutions are thus often romanticized as providing greater access to higher education and serving the public good. Later, the development of a robust system of community colleges

emerged from earlier conversations in the 1947 Truman Commission report to provide an education to support the economy and an educated citizenry for our democracy (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). But who has access to higher education and how has the public good been defined?

Leigh Patel (2021) reminds us the structure of higher education has been serving the public good but at the expense of many marginalized people, including the exploitation of slave labor and stolen indigenous lands. Settler colonialism undergirds higher education creating a system that creates and protects wealth for a select few. The dominant cultures within most institutions of higher education remain Eurocentric and promote norms and values that preserve the status quo (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). Deficit thinking pervades these systems as students who fail to assimilate or succeed are held responsible without any blame falling on institutions. While most institutions are shifting their cultures to be more diversity-oriented, many of these efforts frequently remain peripheral and/or confined to certain spaces, such as ethnic studies or ethnic student organizations (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). Diversity may be espoused as a value to enhance learning across the institution without addressing racial inequities at a structural level. As a result, many students of color, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, continue to encounter culture shock and feel like they are "guests in someone else's home"—a feeling that extends to faculty and staff from minoritized backgrounds (Turner, 1994; Yosso, 2006).

The contemporary shift toward social mobility as the primary goal of higher education complicates matters further. As a result, social mobility views higher education as a commodity that serves to increase individual opportunities and meets individual needs over those of a collective. This orientation diminishes the value and emphasis on goals that are more oriented toward serving the public good (Labaree, 1997). While this has become the tagline for the importance of a college education, students express more emancipatory visions. In the classroom, undergraduates often remind their aspirations and hopes for a college education are deeper than a monetization of learning, which compelled me to probe their thoughts on higher education more systematically in a recent study. Students, my colleagues and I interviewed, shared how social mobility was emphasized consistently at home, in school, and in society throughout their life as the goal for pursuing a college education (Cuellar et al., 2022). This was true for first-generation students, those whose parents did not have a college degree, and those with college-educated parents. Many

students, however, were motivated by other goals that were oriented more toward becoming engaged citizens, and effecting change in society broadly. Most first-generation students also connected their college goals to uplifting their families and communities. Some described how their views had changed during college to include more than social mobility, contrary to dominant narratives. These students thus give me hope for the future.

Progress, Constraints, and Potential for Transformation

Despite the limitations in its design, some transformation has occurred throughout the history of higher education. Powerfully connecting the struggles of oppressed individuals and study, Leigh Patel (2021) recounts how minoritized students and social movements are at the heart of these changes. Access to a college education during the 1960s helped the development of many Black and Chicanx/a/o students groups. Student movements in this time pushed for more inclusive practices. These collective efforts produced lasting changes in higher education with the inclusion of ethnic studies, ethnic cultural centers, and ethnic student organizations (Chang et al., 2005).

Progress in postsecondary access and equity, unfortunately, is not always linear. For example, the steady postsecondary access Black students gained throughout the 1800s through the establishment of various colleges that opened their doors to these marginalized students (Harper et al., 2009). With the passage of the Morrill Act of 1890, the federal government established public land-grant universities to educate African American students, thereby legalizing segregation in public postsecondary institutions across 17 states (Harper et al., 2009). While the creation of these public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) expanded access, inequities remained. These HBCUs generally offered a lower quality education than predominantly white land-grant institutions established under the 1862 Morrill Act. Desegregation and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ushered still greater education opportunities for African American students. However, these gains were short lived. Harper et al. (2009) outline the various ways inequitable funding for and desegregation of HBCUs along with removal of affirmative action policies diminished opportunities for African American students. These patterns

reinforce at a larger scale the natural inclination within campuses to be selectively inclusive as opposed to truly transformational (Patel, 2021).

Yet, some educational leaders illustrate that institutional change and transformation to better serve historically underserved students is possible. In *The Empowered University*, President Freeman A. Hrawbowski III and colleagues (2019) discuss how the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, enacted a shift from mostly a top-down leadership approach to a more inclusive process that deeply engage faculty, staff, and students. This cultural model encourages individuals to be leaders in their respective areas of influence by challenging and working with the university's administration to take action on critical issues or propose and implement new programs and initiatives that more intentionally support students. While cultural change is hard, it is possible. The empowered university recognizes its strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities, as well as embraces and incentivizes innovation and risk taking. Institutional members share a narrative of where the institution has been, where they are, and where they are going. This work, however, is grounded in being unapologetically aspirational. Institutional leaders must aim to be what America wants to be and recognize the critical role of higher education in achieving this vision. While this vision may seem unattainable, President Hrawbowski draws on the powerful words of Nelson Mandela to remind us, "it always seems impossible until it is done."

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) also serve as models of what is possible in our stratified system of higher education. While the histories and missions of MSIs differ, these institutions serve many minoritized student populations historically excluded from higher education (Gasman et al., 2015). For more than 150 years, HBCUs have fostered validating environments where faculties are committed to student success in culturally affirming approaches. For the past half century, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) have provided a similarly affirming education for Native Americans rooted in tribal traditions and indigenous knowledge. Newer types of MSIs, such as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Asian American Pacific Islander Institutions (AANAPISIs), respectively, provide postsecondary access to a significant proportion of Latinx/a/o and Asian American and Pacific Islander students. These institutions are defined by enrollment criteria established by the federal government, which makes them eligible for competitive grant funding. The mission of most HSIs and AANAPISIs does not explicitly center these students, but rather reflects growing enrollment among these student populations.

Yet, several HSIs and AANAPISIs adopt institutional changes that are culturally responsive to the educational needs of their student populations. Sheer comparisons in graduation rates between HSIs and non-HSIs show gaps, with HSIs graduating fewer students. Dr. Gina A. Garcia (2019) argues these negative portrayals of HSIs reflect our racially stratified post-secondary system. The best predictors of graduation rates are incoming students' backgrounds and institutional resources, indicators of white normative standards, which automatically privileges institutions that are more selective and enroll larger proportions of white students. Research, in fact, shows gaps in graduation rates between HSIs and non-HSIs disappear when accounting for student- and institutional-level inputs (Flores & Park, 2015; Rodríguez & Galdeano, 2015). Thus, these institutions are historically oppressed like the students they educate.

As our system of higher education disrupts historical legacies of exclusion, Garcia (2018) argues HSIs serve as models for inclusion by decolonizing traditional modes of operation steeped in whiteness. Through counterstories in *Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions*, Garcia (2019) illustrates how some HSIs may integrate pedagogical and organizational practices that honor the cultural values of Latinx/a/o students but struggle in increasing graduation rates. Others reframe what success means among this student population altogether while others may succeed in graduating Latinx/a/o students similar to their white peers but through Latinx/a/o neutral approaches. These narratives represent the challenges HSIs and institutions, more generally, face in adopting more inclusive practices for racially minoritized students. Garcia ultimately charges educators at HSIs to decolonize our (and their) minds to reimagine how HSIs can and should operate in a racially stratified postsecondary system. This charge applies to all institutions of higher education.

Reimagining Higher Education for the Next Generation

In this moment of racial reckoning and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, enduring elements of higher education are open for questioning. Persistent inequities in college access and degree attainment merit scrutiny. We have agency to question, reimagine, and enact different approaches that meet societal demands to more closely reflect the emancipatory system generations before have aspired to achieve. In this sense, the goals and

structure of higher education must unapologetically realign with the ideals of the United States as a democratic nation. We are now at a critical juncture where we need to create institutions that serve as models for the next generation of students. These institutions must be restructured in a manner that confronts their past and reimagines their future to serve increasingly multicultural student bodies.

Since 2015, I have taught an undergraduate course at UC Davis covering contemporary issues facing higher education. Common topics include the tensions between public and private goals, access for the historically underserved (including students of color, undocumented students, low-income students, student parents, etc.), campus racial climate, and the challenges the new economy of college-going that Sara Goldrick-Rab (2016) describes poses for students, families, and society. I value teaching this course because discussions with students ground me. Each term, I conclude this course by reminding students they have a unique and important vantage point on these higher education issues. Most of them navigate these challenges directly. I remind them students have often been at the center of major transformations in higher education, which has usually aligned with pushing our institutions to be more responsive to society's problems (Rhoads, 2016).

As I complete this introductory chapter, I just finished teaching this course for the seventh time. When I started the semester in January, UC Davis was transitioning back excitedly yet cautiously to large-scale in-person instruction since the shutdown due to the global pandemic in March 2020. That also was the last time I taught this course. Unfortunately, almost two years later, like so many campuses across California and the nation, we immediately shifted to virtual instruction given the surge of the omicron variant. While my university planned to shift to in-person teaching at the end of January, I requested and was granted permission to teach the course remotely for the remainder of the term given students' and my own concerns over our health and safety, as well as a need to minimize the continued uncertainty in all aspects of life in these challenging moments.

In our final week of the course, I also gathered students' thoughts on the future of higher education. Given their unique views in this time I asked them to describe where they would like to see higher education in five or ten years. Their answers were illuminating. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many addressed college affordability and the need for decreasing college costs and student debt. Others noted recognizing students' mental health needs and providing more resources to support students in general,

especially those who are returning students, student parents, transfer students, and commuter students. Another set of students wanted to see greater access to a college education and leveraging technology for this purpose. Others described the need to value the holistic goals of education, including the value of humanities and liberal arts, preparing students for more than career readiness, and helping students find purpose. These answers demand a shift away from neoliberal forces engulfing the American university, to creating institutions that humanize students. This is what higher education must do.

Education thought leaders have long theorized and advocated for the adoption of humanizing approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. bell hooks (1994) asserted our school system is a system of oppression and we must teach liberation. Our education practices in higher education too often remove *the emotional self* from the learning process, creating a split between our mind and our body. Rendón (2009) similarly calls for the transformation of teaching in higher education to be more holistic and encourages faculty to educate students who are socially conscious. Lea, a fourth-year undergraduate in my class this past quarter, echoes these demands for changes in the classroom. In her response to what she hoped to see in higher education over the next five to ten years, she responded, "instructors to care deeply about their students and understand the power of the role they have. Even if they are lecturing to an audience of 600 a day, every word they speak has the power to transform and/or tear down the lives of the next generation." This is an emancipatory vision for teaching in higher education.

Most of our institutions are structured to educate a population that vastly differs from the majority of students we serve today. Institutions we revere in the higher education imaginary were built on problematic premises. If higher education is a mirror of society, the reflection shows us it is sorely falling short on delivering the promises it promotes. At the same time, this image perhaps suggests the system is working fine if the goal is to maintain a social hierarchy. Yet, a desire for a higher education for many students extends beyond making more money or simply gaining status for their own personal gain. For many, higher education represents collective efforts to reassert dignity and give back to their communities that so often remain disempowered in society. History shows us how higher education has been influenced by society and how it contributes to the betterment of society through the students it educates and the knowledge it produces.