Chapter 5

Black, Female, and Foreign: The Triple-Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Women in the Academy

Christina Ramirez Smith
Hampton University, USA

ABSTRACT

Society has failed to acknowledge intra-group differences, and as a result, disregarded the ethnic distinctiveness, cultural practices, and norms of Afro-Caribbean emigrant (Rogers, 2001; Vickerman, 2001). In this chapter, the “triple-invisibility” of the Afro-Caribbean woman in the academy is explored within the context of race, gender, emigrant status and the goals concerning broader diversities related to higher education in the US.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter relates to my emigration experiences to the United States in the early 1990s under the legal emigration status of “scholar”. The reason I emigrated to the United States was to accept a faculty position in a School of Education. I was responsible for teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in Special and Elementary Education. The aim of the invitation was a bid to improve racial diversity of a Predominately White Institution (PWI) during its transition from a college to a university.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8321-1.ch005
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My experiences in Higher Education include thirty years of faculty, tenured faculty, educational administration and a marriage to a college president. The impact of my personal experiences weighs deeply on my mind with respect to the actualization of America’s changing demographics and the discourse about diversity that continues to permeate its goals concerning higher education. Additionally, a curiosity about the experiences of women of color in academic circles made me question the role of Black, foreign, emigrant females in the United States higher educational system. This also takes the impact, if any upon campuses that are in pursuit of diversity into consideration.

The primary goal of this chapter is to enhance the dearth of information concerning Afro-Caribbean females in Higher Education in the US. Additional objectives in the chapter include an examination of the triple-invisibility of Afro-Caribbean women in Higher education. This is done through a brief review of the impact of gender, race and emigration status, an over-view of prevalent challenges and successes experienced by the Afro-Caribbean woman concerning Higher Education in the US and a look at some of the most prevalent misconceptions and/or controversies related to the triple-invisibility. Finally, the chapter provides a tool-kit of recommendations and/or solutions and a bibliography that aims to provide supportive pathways for women of color in positions of faculty or administration in US higher education settings. This chapter includes my personal opinion supported by authors and referenced research all of which aims to assist readers in understanding the complexities surrounding the triple-invisibility of Caribbean Females in the Academy.

BACKGROUND

Almost a century ago, journalist John Reed observed that participating in a diverse community may bring “pain, isolation of separateness, [or] intellectual exhilaration, greater self-knowledge and ...human reconciliation” (Lowe, 1992, p. 22).

Colleges and universities across the United States invest in diversity workshops, seminars, require students to take at least one course on diversity, sponsor diverse student groups on campus, host a variety of activities to encourage productive interactions between people from different backgrounds and attempt to revise curriculums to reflect content on diversity. Yet, the literature on the unique experiences of the Afro-Caribbean woman in higher education is insufficient. Women of Afro-Caribbean backgrounds suffer triple-invisibility in academe because of their emigrant status and related challenges, such as differing accents. Questions such as “do I fit in?” “How will I excel in this environment?” and “do they really like me better?” plague their minds and are topics of concern.
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