

## EDITOR'S NOTES

There are approximately 519,870,000 black women around the world. As Sharp (1993) says, "There's a Black woman on each of the seven continents, in almost every country and in the space program. So no matter where you go, she's already been there. She travels with forces greater than herself. Her presence is everywhere" (p. 7).

This quotation provides a clear image of the African American women who surround us on a daily basis. These are women who influence lives and prevail, often in the face of adversity; often they are seen but not heard. Their voices remain unheard because many people assume that issues that pertain to women in general or to African Americans in general pertain to African American women in the same ways.

The last *New Directions for Student Services* sourcebook that focused on the needs of college women, *Facilitating the Development of Women*, was published in 1985. In that sourcebook, only one chapter was devoted to addressing the special needs of minority women. Several paragraphs focused on four racial or ethnic groups as a collective and provided suggestions for programming for "minority women" in general (Evans, 1985). That sourcebook was, undoubtedly, groundbreaking, because few writers had focused on needs of women of color in higher education at that time. I note, regretfully, that many of the recommendations at the end of that 1985 chapter (for example, adequate funding, career planning and counseling geared specifically to women of color, more women faculty and administrators of color on college campuses) are echoed in this sourcebook. In addition, although the number of African American students on college campuses has grown exponentially over the past four decades, matriculation and retention challenges still exist.

More recently, in 1997, Michael Cuyjet edited a *New Directions for Student Services* sourcebook called *Helping African American Men Succeed in College* (Cuyjet, 1997). This was a major step in identifying within-group differences, as the sourcebook noted that experiences of African American men are unique, and the ways that they meet the challenges they face might be vastly different than those of African American women. Yet when research is conducted about African Americans in higher education, African American men and women often are treated as a monolithic group, thus masking potentially significant developmental and gender-related differences.

The purpose of this sourcebook, then, is twofold. First, we identify and explore critical needs of African American women as students, faculty, and administrators on college campuses. Second, we offer recommendations and suggestions for meeting those needs.

In Chapter One, Eboni Zamani provides a context for the rest of the sourcebook with an overview of the current status of African American women in higher education (in historically black institutions, community colleges, and public institutions). She also describes the similarities and differences among the settings and their implications for African American women.

Chapter Two introduces two theoretical frameworks, critical race theory and black feminist thought, which are rarely referred to when administrators and faculty attempt to interpret and address the challenges faced by African American women. Following an overview of the frameworks, I discuss ways in which the theories can be applied to practice.

Sherry Watt opens a discussion of developmental issues in Chapter Three by offering results of her research on identity and spiritual development of African American women. She describes spiritual connections that black women embrace in order to fight oppression, build resiliency, and strengthen their identity. Chapter Four continues the dialogue on interventions and methods for promoting a healthy identity for African American women. Authors Madonna Constantine and Tawanda Greer provide a case study and counseling techniques that can help African American women in higher education cope with the daily pressures of shifting from one identity—an African American woman—to an identity that may require her to assimilate and act in ways that are not part of her culture or psychological development.

Alexandria Rosales and Dawn Person explain the importance of programming support in the recruitment and retention of African American women students in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, Lori Patton and Shaun Harper describe mentoring programs that help with academic challenges and preparation for careers. They offer many suggestions for campus policies and practice based on a qualitative study of the needs of African American women in graduate and professional school.

In Chapter Seven, Carol Patitu and Kandace Hinton describe the personal and professional experiences of African American women faculty and administrators on predominantly white campuses, based on two research studies conducted by the authors. The challenges these women face are often emotionally and intellectually debilitating, thus they choose to leave academia. Suggestions for recruiting and retaining African American women faculty and administrators are shared.

Where do we go from here? In Chapter Eight, Robin Hughes and I present challenges to change the existing campus environment for women. Also, changes in personal attitudes could open the dialogue between African American women and those who lack the desire to be supportive. Individual challenges and questions are presented.

Of course, African American women in higher education also are not a monolithic group; they have different challenges, concerns, contexts, and cultural heritages. Therefore, one must keep in mind when reading these

chapters that one size does not fit all. Instead, this sourcebook is designed to begin the dialogue among and between all women who hope that their voices might be heard on college campuses and to validate the experiences they face. The eloquent title of Jeanne Noble's book, *Beautiful, Also, Are the Souls of My Black Sisters* (Noble, 1979), describes the contributors' hope for our sourcebook: we hope that the research and ideas shared here will challenge, inspire, motivate, and encourage you to promote the healthy development and souls of African American women.

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Editor

## References

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