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SPECIAL ISSUE: SIMILAR CHALLENGES IN A DIFFERENT SETTING: RACISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

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**Special Issue: Similar Challenges in a Different Setting:
Racism and Higher Education in Prison**

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This Special Issue is a labor of love from activists, professors, practitioners, and community organizers committed to addressing racial inequity in higher education in prison. Amid an ongoing pandemic, people across the globe wrote, read, and revised thought-provoking pieces in hopes that they would transform one's thoughts. This Special Issue predominately features articles authored by individuals impacted by incarceration to provide those closest to the issues with a platform to recommend solutions.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your time reading the *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity's* (JCSCORE) Spring 2022 Special Issue. This Special Issue is a labor of love from activists, professors, practitioners, and community organizers committed to addressing racial inequity in higher education in prison. Amid an ongoing pandemic, people across the globe wrote, read, and revised thought-provoking pieces in hopes that they would transform one's thoughts. We do not have all the answers but hope the

articles presented in this Special Issue will begin necessary conversations prior to Pell grant implementation for incarcerated students in July 2023.

The Special Issue intentional begins with a piece from an incarcerated college student of the Second Chance Educational Alliance program. We, the Guest-Editors insisted the typewriter format remain to demonstrate the determination of the student to write such a piece and their access to only a typewriter in this digital age. Our incarcerated students deserve more. Our incarcerated students deserve a chance to change their lives through education. Our incarcerated students deserve access to resources and opportunities that change the trajectory of their lives. These are some of the arguments of the pieces in this Special Issue. Moreover, the Special Issue predominately features articles authored by individuals impacted by incarceration to provide those closest to the issues with a platform to recommend solutions.

Racism and Higher Education in Prison

There is growing momentum to provide incarcerated students with access to quality higher education in prison programming. What's more, getting an education in prison can positively affect those who serve long-term or life sentences without parole, changing the culture inside facilities. And for the families of those serving time, seeing their loved ones work to better themselves can help break cycles of poverty, addiction, and involvement in the legal system. It's beyond time for criminal justice reform that includes access to quality post-secondary education in prison. However, we cannot talk about reforming our criminal legal system without acknowledging the systems of injustice and racism that have harmed Black and Brown communities—for generations. The U.S. has nearly 2.3 million people in jails, prisons, and detention centers – and due

to injustices and racism, a disproportionate amount of those individuals are Black and Latino. Moreover, Black and Brown children are often shuttled from under-resourced schools to overcrowded jails via a school-to-prison pipeline. Black and Brown children also overwhelmingly attend schools with no school counselor but a school resource officer and 'zero-tolerance' policies that criminalize them for minor infractions (Whitaker et al., 2020).

Higher education and higher education prison programs often mimic U.S. systems founded on injustice and racism. In more ways than not, the historical remnants of segregated colleges continue to affect the racial climate on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 2008). Poor racial environments can negatively influence students' academic and social engagement, sense of belonging, and chances of completing a degree. One aspect of a healthy racial climate is the appropriate representation of students, staff, and faculty of color. Unfortunately, Black and Latino students are underrepresented in higher education, and representation within faculty is equally egregious (Nichols & Schak, 2019). Moreover, faculty often do not benefit from receiving culturally responsive training and development specific to teaching and pedagogy.

Culturally responsive training and development are even more critical in higher education in prison programs. According to Erzen et al. (2019) in the *Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison* report, one of the primary challenges of prison education programs is that they fail to provide adequate training, support, and professional development for their leadership, staff, and instructors. Few professional development opportunities focus on best practices for teaching and engaging students impacted by the criminal legal system.

Thus, as higher education moves toward expanding access to higher education for justice-impacted students, the field must contextualize and understand the experiences of justice-impacted students. Including how federal-, state-, and institutional- policies shape issues at the intersection of higher education and the criminal legal system. As the U.S. higher education system prepares for a shift in the student population they serve, we hope they consider the concerns and asks of the authors included in this Special Issue.

The Process and Questions Guiding this Special Issue

As co-editors, we actively interacted with authors throughout the submission period; thus, we hoped individuals directly impacted, activists, scholars, and students submit their work to this Special Issue, as this will be a developmental and inclusive process. Submissions by individuals directly impacted, which we define as those currently or formerly incarcerated, those who were previously confined in a jail, prison, or detention camp, those with arrests or convictions but no incarceration, and those with only a juvenile record – were prioritized. In this Special Issue, we were open to multiple modalities, including but not limited to empirical research, scholarly work, poetry, scholarly personal narratives, essays, briefs, autoethnography, participant action research, and more. All submissions were peer-reviewed, and we provided feedback to the authors when possible.

The following questions guided this Special Issue:

- How do students and faculty of color navigate the structural and systemic barriers at their institutions and the correctional facilities within their disciplines?
- What do students want and need from all parties involved in administering a higher education in prison program?

- How can a racial justice framework help to (re)imagine higher education in prison?
- What can we learn from racial justice movements about intersectionality, campus climate, and more in our current educational context?
- What concrete policy solutions can activists, researchers, scholars, and students collaborate to address quality higher education in prison programming for students of color?

Thank you to all authors that submitted papers for review. Thank you to JCSCORE for creating this space to publish this Special Issue.

In solidarity,

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