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Introduction for the special issue: Race and Rurality in Education

In May of 2020, protests around the country and the world erupted to draw attention to the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and many other Black individuals, as well as other Indigenous and People of Color. These protests prompted many individuals and organizations to reflect on their complicity in anti-Blackness and the structures, policies and practices that create barriers for Black, Indigenous and People of Color in the United States. We at *The Rural Educator* have been engaged in our own on-going reflection on our work as a result of the global outcry. In September of 2020, the editors of the three major rural-focused education research journals (*The Rural Educator*, *the Journal of Research in Rural Education*, and *the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*) co-authored a letter acknowledging the state of the field with regard to research on race and rurality, anti-Blackness, and recognizing the responsibility that we have as stewards of the field to promote research examining the relationship between rurality and race. We stated,

We acknowledge that we have not done enough to represent this diversity in our work as editors or in the broader field and that omission has caused active harm and systemic disrespect to communities of color and the broader scholarly community. To that end, we commit to actively soliciting scholarship that provides a broader and more balanced perspective of race and rurality from insider perspectives, decentering whiteness in our work as editors, and listening to ideas from the rural education research community on how to elevate the voices of Black educators, youth, and communities in rural places, as well as other communities of color.

As one part of our commitment to these goals, we initiated a call for this special issue on race and rurality, which we are now pleased to present for publication. The articles in this issue center the achievement of and barriers faced by people of color in rural communities across the nation, from the rural South to New England to the Midwest and the West coast.

One of the strengths of this collection of articles is the way in which it highlights the perspectives of

many rural stakeholder groups, including students, parents, administrators, and community voices. First, Cain and Willis explore the ways in which the intersection of a rural background and diverse social identities shapes the narratives of self that students from rural areas share in post-secondary contexts. They find that participants' perceptions of rural stereotypes and their own race, biological sex, and class, as well as their political beliefs, shaped how they identified or othered their rural background as they made sense of themselves in these post-secondary spaces. Similarly, Thompson examines divergences in the ways in which students and adults understand issues of racial equity in the context of community segregation, racialized violence, and discriminatory school discipline policies. Through a youth participatory action research design, she finds that students as investigators of these issues highlighted both new opportunities and new challenges for the school in addressing these issues in their community; most importantly, perhaps, the YPAR design provided a stable, student-led vehicle for keeping prioritizing racial equity in a sea of competing demands.

Shifting from student to adult perspectives on issues of race and rurality, Ruggiano bring attention to the often ignored voices of parents of youth of color in predominantly rural community and school contexts. Acknowledging the intersection of deficit views of youth of color and deficit views of rurality, Ruggiano considers how Black parents draw on navigational and resistant capital as part of their cultural wealth to help their children through their experiences of "onlyness" and racism in these contexts. Oudghiri acknowledging the changing racial demography of many rural communities around the nation, explores how one white rural female teacher built relationships with undocumented students of color in her school community, drawing on both critical race theory and care theory as frameworks for understanding these relational moves.

Finally, Sutherland and colleagues approach race and rurality from the perspective of administrators, carefully unpacking the competing community narratives that school leaders must navigate in a southern rural community context as they seek to

achieve educational equity in a K-8 school. They found leadership practices around issues of educational equity were constrained by the community's strong bonding capital and lack of bridging capital, creating a tight-knit but exclusionary community, a system upheld through a legacy of racism and segregation and maintained through controlled land and home ownership.

While many of the articles in this issue investigate the educational experiences of youth and families of color in predominantly white rural communities, DeMars and colleagues examine how approaches to STEM education in a school predominantly attended by indigenous students might incorporate indigenous ways of knowing and cultural wealth. Through interviews with STEM educators in Indigenous student serving schools, they identify several key levers for achieving these goals, including a holistic approach to STEM education, culturally responsive curriculum, adequate funding and the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. Similarly, Anthony-Stevens and colleagues investigate the ways in which Indigenous teacher mentorship enriches rural teacher education using a TribalCrit framework and drawing on the long history of situated learning within many Indigenous communities. They point out the nature of the rural/urban spatial divide as a colonial concept, and further describe the importance of mentor teachers naming settler colonial logics in education, as well as engaging in relational epistemologies, honoring sovereignty, and fostering Indigenous leadership in Indigenous-serving schools and communities.

In addition to these empirical pieces, this issue also includes several promising practices, designed to assist in the spread of practices that have found success in addressing the many complex challenges inherent in racial equity work in rural education settings. First, Crumb and Chambers provide an

overview of the assets that secondary and post-secondary institutions have for recruiting, retaining and ensuring the flourishing of African American students as they transition to higher education institutions. Their overview highlights the diverse insights of the contributing authors to their edited volume, *African American Rural Education College Transitions and Post-Secondary Experiences* (Chambers & Crumb, 2020). Similarly, Azano and Means reflect on the lessons they learned in working to elevate issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion as part of their executive leadership roles in the American Educational Research Association Rural Education Special Interest Group. They point explicitly to the ways in which addressing equity and inclusion required addressing core organizational structures and inviting a more diverse group of scholars to engage with the group's common interest in rural education.

We want to acknowledge that one issue is not enough to counter the historical inattention to these issues in the field of rural education. While we are encouraged by the increase in submissions that we have seen which explicitly address the intersection of race, racism and rurality in education, we know that there are still voices and perspectives that are missing from rural education scholarship – particularly research on the intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and rurality, as well as the intersection of ability, marginalized identities and rurality. We as editors are committed to continuing to foreground these topics in future issues of the journal. To that end, Dr. Alex Redcorn will be guest editing a special issue of the journal in the next year which will focus specifically on Indigenous education and rurality, and we will continue to make space for research on marginalized and minoritized populations in the pages of *The Rural Educator*.

Reference

Chambers, C. R., & Crumb, L. (2020). *African American rural education: College transitions and postsecondary experiences*. Emerald

Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-2317202107>

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