
Twice as Hard: A Black Parable for Existing in Higher Education

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“You have to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good” is a Black parable that many African Americans have been indoctrinated with. This belief is not new and has roots deriving from both the politics of respectability¹ and anti-Black racism that exists in the American context. This ideology provides the rationale for the ever-thriving desire to be considered Black and excellent or, as Dr. Imani Perry calls it, *Black exceptionalism*, where all versions of Blackness are measured against it and either accepted or rejected with due course.² This article highlights the lived experience of eight stakeholders at a predominantly white university (PWI), who are all Black, and who agreed to talk with me regarding the performance of diversity and the souls of Black folks in a larger study. This article specifically discusses one of the findings titled *twice as hard*.

KEYWORDS: PWIs; campus stakeholders; twice as hard; Black parables; higher education; liberation; performative diversity; critical race theory

EVERYTHING WE DO; WE DO IT FULL OUT!

One of the most important lessons that many African American people are socialized into is never to be seen as lazy. Although African Americans descend from those stolen to and enslaved on this land, worked until blood was drawn and exploited in every way imaginable, rest is never an option. On the campus of Portland State University, May 30, 1975, Ancestor Toni

¹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251–74, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494730>.

² Imani Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Morrison told us that “there will always be one more thing,”³ and she was right. Regardless of how hard African Americans work, how bright Black people are, and how far they soar, there will always be small reminders that their existence will never be enough. It is because of the many versions of anti-Blackness that exist that African Americans often feel like they are living in a hamster wheel. Running and running, spinning and spinning, until exhaustion, with no relief in sight.

Even the many talented African Americans who many Black people revere face this parable. Black people educate ourselves and overwork ourselves so that no one can credibly deny our greatness. However, the major lesson that many Black people forget is the one where we intentionally release ourselves from the desire to appease the oppressor. For cultural context, Beyoncé herself is not above this lesson. She has, with her exceptional talent, accumulated thirty-two Grammy awards, currently the most of any artist.⁴ It would be fathomable to believe that this great feat alone would be enough to earn her the respect of her peers within every genre of music within the recording academy.

Regardless of her incredible talent, the one thing that even the great Beyoncé cannot leapfrog is her Blackness. Her world-renowned Renaissance tour that brought out the likes of every current celebrity, as well as everyday working-class folks, is still not enough for the white ruling class to perceive her, as Max Weber describes, prestigious.⁵ She has had to defend her Black Texan roots as proof that she is country music—a genre that African Americans ourselves created, like rock & roll, hip hop, rhythm & blues, and gospel. White folks believe that they are best at denying Black people entry into even the spaces that Black people created with our own blood, toil, tears, and sweat—an offensive travesty. Her recent Netflix-sponsored, NFL half-time show, dubbed the Beyoncé Bowl, is a direct response to white folks’ rejection and a statement that she—and we—are no longer asking for permission to take up space.

³ Portland State University, Toni Morrison, Primus St. John, John Callahan, Susan Callahan, and Lloyd Baker, “Black Studies Center Public Dialogue, Part 2,” Special Collections: Oregon Public Speakers, 90 (1995): 11, <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/orspeakers/90>.

⁴ Grammy Awards, “Beyoncé,” 2025, <https://www.grammy.com/artists/beyonce-knowles/12474>.

⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

BLACK PARABLES

Beyoncé's insistence on taking back musical genres that were stolen from us is undoubtedly a real-time writing of a parable of resistance. Parables are defined as simple, non-complex stories, that are used to illustrate a lesson about morality or spirituality, most specifically as told by Jesus in the Gospels. The stories of the Black lived experience within any context of the American social experiment are always heavily scrutinized through the lens of anti-Blackness, intra- and intergroup. It is important to note that Black stories could not be written down for a few reasons: (1) it was a death sentence if the enslaved were taught to read and write⁶ and (2) writing down information makes it easier for it to be co-opted or stolen. Therefore, like the enslaved, Black folks must pass the story from person to person like a Black *griot*. Black people are responsible for how our stories are told and how our counternarratives are applied to push back against anti-Black measures aimed at erasing them.

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993) is one such work that has resonated through time and has allowed for many to be in relationship with counternarratives of Black storytelling. Butler's work weaves in historical context, faith-based experiences, and the realities of existing during a time when capitalism in the form of corporate greed, climate change, and wealth disparity destroyed lives. The time of Butler's pre-eminent parable text was about now. We currently exist in a country where billionaire oligarchs' ghost-run our country alongside twice-impeached, insurrectionist-inciting, hate-mongering, sociopathic narcissists, who see our liberation as an uncomfortable suggestion that they could do without. Higher education, a place that both provides and restricts access, often operates as a place of uncertainty for Black campus stakeholders. Regardless of how well African Americans perform, how much we give, and how much we take, the opinions of racist wealthy white men will always determine to whom our freedom belongs, they feel.

The interesting thing about white liberalism within the context of the American social experiment and the system of higher education is that it, at minimum, is fickle. White liberals, who are moderate-leaning, have the casual ability to be an ally or an oppressor. Depending on what day you catch them,

⁶ Janet Dustman Cornelius, "When I Can Read My Title Clear": Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South (United States: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 4.

your rank at the institution, and your pedigree, you might experience both. Your value to the institution and your value to whiteness always determine how far they let you rise within higher education and the halls of academia—always chipping away at the core of your being and your Blackness with the intensity and fervor of reunited absent lovers. The ingenuity and flexibility of whiteness allows its membership the ability to enter and exit when and if necessary, so long as they agree to operate in preservation of whiteness.

White privilege is why it is so easy for a pissed-off white lawmaker to run for office as one political party and then switch parties once elected. I will not bore you with painting a picture of the juxtaposition of a Black lawmaker engaging in such a performance because we all know how that would end. White liberals, within the context of higher education, believe that hiring and promoting singular Black individuals means that they have somehow atoned for the misdeeds of their ancestors. However, within the moment of any slight inconvenience, they will remind you to which group they hold their membership dear. One of the first Black parables that is passed down to new academics is to play the game. *The game?* Yes, the one where you do your very best not to upset whiteness until you are tenured.

At which point, I suppose, your liberatory praxis might re-emerge like the phoenix, waging war against all of the misdeeds you, and other marginalized folks, have experienced on your journey toward tenure. Higginbotham teaches us that it is imperative that race be considered in any legitimate analysis of power.⁷ Teaching new practitioners of higher education and academics to be docile and demure without a real conversation on the power dynamics that call for such a performance is inherently anti-Black. The idea that a person rooted in disrupting the status-quo enters academia, puts down their rage to earn tenure, and then picks it back up to lead other practitioners and academics toward liberation is comedic at best and asinine at worst.

RESPECTABILITY POLITICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The *politics of respectability* have been used to disarm white anger and make Black folks feel that it is a worthy cause of which to pledge our allegiance. Quite the contrary, because the politics of respectability have only been useful in making Black folks more palatable to whiteness and unrecognizable to Black resistors and the fight for liberation. A key element in existing in

⁷ Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History.”

higher education as a resistor is to always be recognizable to the people you are fighting for. Regardless of the accolades, citations, awards, and endowed opportunities, the core of your work must remain situated in liberating Black folks, not assimilating into whiteness. This is no easy task, and it is why so many people put down their arms the moment they accept this first parable of entering the halls of academia as presented by the respectable.

The second parable is *publish or perish*: the idea that in order to keep your position, you must always be publishing. The core to this belief is also publishing in places that are not accessible to the public and the people who look most like you. Hidden behind paywalls and fancy invites exists the belief that in order for you to make it within academia your work can only be found in places that whiteness frequents, or it is not considered “rigorous” and up to standard. I personally have never witnessed any Black person in my proximity not connected to academia read paywalled journal articles. I have, however, watched them read *JET*, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Black Enterprise Magazine*, fraternity and sorority journals, and everyday newspapers. These are the places that our people frequent that highlight Black existing through struggle and celebration. These venues operate as the sites and hosts of our freedom words.

A core connection between the politics of respectability and Black folks is Black religiosity. Our connection with religion is ancestral and was also reinforced as a means of coping with our enslavement and forced captivity. However, our relationship with religion has morphed into something much larger than freedom-fighting and survival. In many ways, Black religiosity has co-opted white oppressive norms and is deeply committed to further marginalizing already-othered Black folks.⁸ Teaching us how to assimilate in ways that erase us and our individual and collective identities for the sole purpose of white acceptance is deeply problematic. Although many who exist in academia would take you to the grass over such a bold assessment.

How African Americans view and see professional Blackness springs forward from how we conceptualize our *Sunday best*. Appearance and demeanor are essential attributes of how respectable Blackness not only shows up on Sunday for church, but also how it shows up for work on Monday. Regardless of where a Black person grew up in this country, we were all force-fed these

⁸ Frederick Engram, “Higher Education and Its Ongoing Relationship with Anti-Blackness,” *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 20, no. 2 (2024): 66–68, <https://www.americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-2-2024/IFOTSv20n2-art6.pdf>.

parables of respectability. It only makes sense that these teachings would follow those of us who do not reject them early on, into academia. Okello invites us to consider that admirable Black behavior, respectability, and achievements considered extraordinary (Henryism) are what produced one of respectability's most fervent advocates, Booker T. Washington.⁹ When we conceptualize Washington's teachings as a free pass for making Black folks feel like our hard work is only worthy if it meets the needs and demands of whiteness, without overstepping and creating panic, it further emphasizes the weight of their opinion upon our living condition.

Booker T. Washington operated as one of African Americans' early heroes. He rose out of oppression and into a beacon of admirable, respectable society, so it only makes sense that many of our elders strived to be like him and others of his ilk. What must also be understood is that when we view many of these fore-heroes through a contemporary lens, much of their efforts to appease whiteness actually worked against Black folks and were operationally anti-Black. Washington's perspective allowed for there to be an upholding of Blackness as inferior, which provides a contradiction given that he himself was Black. As stated by Okello, Washington's "bootstraps ideology" served him well but ultimately did not and does not serve the Black collective well at all.¹⁰ So why is that lesson still being passed onto new higher education practitioners and academics?

By the numbers, African Americans are not the majority of tenure-stream or tenured faculty in academia. In fact, we are lumped into the 26 percent of the total population of folks considered of color and on the tenure track.¹¹ Our numbers are not sizable and as such it makes sense that we mentor and advise our students who intend to enter academia to do good work, but most importantly, to be themselves. Teaching people to murder the parts of themselves that make them unique while simultaneously teaching them to pour that uniqueness into their approach to scholarship is counterproductive,

⁹ Wilson Okello, "Organized Anxiety: Respectability Politics, John Henryism, and the Paradox of Black Achievement," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 24, no. 4 (2021): 523–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798916>.

¹⁰ Okello. "Organized Anxiety."

¹¹ Kathryn Palmer, "Tenure and Promotion Barriers Persist for Women, Faculty of Color," *Inside Higher Ed.*, May 3, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2024/05/03/tenure-and-promotion-barriers-persist-women-faculty-color>.

anti-Black, and hypocritical. The parable that should be passed down is the one stated by Audre Lorde: *your silence will not protect you*.¹²

BLACK EXCEPTIONALISM IS A DEATH SENTENCE

Black exceptionalism is a death sentence for the soul. It calls for us to be exceptionally Black at all times, which is not humanly possible. Some days we need to be *rested Black*, *fed-up Black*, *lazy Black*, *well-supported Black*, and *I am not doing anything else Black*. Take a note from the sistas of the 92 percent who after the 2024 presidential election have decided that they are taking a seat and everyone else will deal. The responses from white women and other people of color have not been in support of our sistas choosing rest for themselves. They have been expressing their demands that Black women not choose themselves for once.¹³ The innate idea that Black women must always show up perfect, be emotionless while also likable, and center everyone else above herself is another aspect of white supremacist culture; it is *misogynoir*.

Demanding that Black folks, and Black women in particular, continue to work while we grieve is a remnant of the antebellum period, a period where the humanity of the enslaved was never considered, especially their heartache and pain. Black people were treated as less than animals and were always expected to keep on going regardless of what they may have been personally dealing with. For rest during the antebellum period, without permission, most certainly equaled a call for death. Rest, as Tricia Hersey instructs, is resistance.¹⁴ And for the folks who need to hear this, we do not need the oppressors' permission to rest anymore!

In many ways, African Americans have also adopted the oppressors' mindset by clutching at this idea of *Black excellence!* Black brilliance is excellent and as much as we have tried to adopt it and make it fetch, it is akin to Washington's bootstraps ideology. Similar to the thinking of Washington, it demands that all who are born under the racialized category of Black must always show up in ways that do not demean or embarrass the culture. It is steeped in classism and considers itself to be a resistance call when in reality it's a call for assimilation—to be seen, to appear, to be revered as just-as-good-as-whiteness. If Black people believe that Blackness is separate and apart from the rules of

¹² Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (UK: Silver Press, 2017).

¹³ Moya Bailey, "Guest Post: 'An Open Letter to Nelly.'" Black Youth Project, November 14, 2013, <https://blackyouthproject.com/guest-post-an-open-letter-to-nelly/>.

¹⁴ Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022).

engagement within whiteness, why do we demand that Blackness shows up as monolithic depictions of a suitable performance of palatable Blackness?

More pointedly, who is the performance for? Especially since Black people claim to not care what racist white folks think. I am just as excellent in my Blackness while wearing a durag, not in a suit, and smoking a blunt if I wish. For that is what it means to be in direct opposition of the roaring call of the oppressor. Higher education, as a practice and discipline of study, does not consider the expansiveness of Blackness and it does not know how to—or prefer to—make room for it. It forces us to concede our identities and overwork ourselves to remain. In many ways, the Black exceptionalism is reproduced through the generations from Black mentor to Black student, which only reaffirms that whiteness is still present without interruption. The idea of being *twice as good* permeating the soundwaves, a sound so specific that only we can hear it.

Perry helps us to understand the limitations of Black freedom in white spaces due to inherent surveillance, voyeurism, and the maintenance of inequality.¹⁵ My take on this work is in application to higher education and academia and how its erasing of our identity morphs into a critique of your brilliance and ability to be seen as exceptional or excellent. The Breonna Taylor–George Floyd–Ahmaud Aubrey era of academia was supremely performative. It allowed for Black scholars whose work is deeply critical of higher education, the academy, and its practices to be briefly centered. This brief centering allowed for white folks in and around academia to create white guilt zones within our institutions and communities. For a brief moment in time, each of these organizations pretended to care about anti-Blackness and its impact on the lives of Black folks.

For a brief moment in time, Black scholars did not have to perform excellence via exceptionalism; it was just so. Within the past five years we have witnessed white people, institutions, and organizations perform atonement until they grew tired of it, and it became old. We are quickly racing backward into a time that precedes 2020, a time where stepping over Black bodies was allowed, and not seen as deleterious. A time where racialized dog-whistles could be said with the boldness of your next breath and there were no consequences. The impact of anti-Black racism will be felt everywhere, and most certainly within the halls of academia and higher education at large.

¹⁵ Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible*.

The recent deaths of Black women in higher education and academia who, by all their merits earned, are considered exceptional and excellent, serve as reminders of how easily disposable Black folks are in this country. By all measures, the United States, academia, and higher education are each complicit in the harms caused by *performative diversity*.¹⁶ Drs. Antoinette “Bonnie” Candia-Bailey, JoAnne A. Epps, and Orinthia T. Montague all died within the 2023–2024 academic year. Each of these deaths were completely unexpected; these women were not retired and the oldest of the three dying at the age of seventy-two. It would be easy to dismiss their deaths as random, except Dr. Candia-Bailey left a paper trail. Her paper trail showed a direct cause of her death and it being directly related to the stress of her job and her white male boss.

Learning that the memorial where President Epps collapsed continued on after her body was removed is further proof of the disregard of Black life. Black people are quite literally killing themselves because of workplaces that refuse to see our worth, even in death. In our burning desire to recapture our humanity and be seen as just-as-good while operating at *twice* the capacity, we forget that we are not superhuman. The stories of the eight participants in this study further reminded me that we should all be reminding ourselves to rest, resist, and disassociate from the idea of needing to work twice as hard.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY COUNTER-STORYTELLING

To best tell the story of the eight participants and their relationship with higher education, academia, and the notion of *twice as good*, I applied the lens of critical race theory. Critical race theory is a legal framework that helps us as critical scholars be able to ascertain the connection between race, racism, and any particular phenomenon. Critical race theory as a concept was birthed from critical legal studies (CLS). CLS was a noble concept for white liberal scholars and scholars of color to understand the way that discrimination determined outcomes within the law. Like most white liberals, CLS had its limitations, in that it refused to acknowledge race and did not choose to center the voices of those who often experienced discrimination. Matsuda

¹⁶ Frederick Engram, *Black Liberation through Action and Resistance: MOVE* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2024); and “Why Are There Cops Here? How Anti-Blackness Increases Police Interactions on White College Campuses,” *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 19, no. 1 (2023): 13–24, <https://www.americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-1-2023/IFOTSV19N1-Art2.pdf>.

made a declarative statement regarding this problematic stance: she states that those who have had the direct experience with discrimination should speak and be heard.¹⁷

As simple as Matsuda's concept was, and as we know through the sordid history of African Americans in this nation, everyone believes that they have the right to speak for us—even the most well-intentioned of white liberals. The early legal thinkers of CRT, Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Daniel Solorzano, and countless others, provide context for why the white voice was to take a backseat to the experiences and *counter-stories* of the impacted. White American scholars have long operated as the expert of the Black lived experience while simultaneously talking to none of us about it. It has often been accepted that non-Black folks are the truth-tellers of Blackness, and not only is it offensive and anti-Black, it is also false. Black people are the best auto-ethnographers of the Black lived experience, whether it be in concert with oppression, liberation, or celebration, to be clear.

Solorzano and Yosso, made the case that critical race theory helped with the advancement of a strategy to account for and foreground the ever-existing role of race and racism within education. The intent of this theoretical framework was to eliminate the subordination of people by race as well as gender, social class, sexual orientation, national origin, and language.¹⁸ Prior to the work of Solorzano and Yosso, we had the blessed and courageous work of Ladson-Billings and Tate, who were the first education scholars to conceptualize CRT for education.¹⁹ Their early and necessary work allowed for the work of several other K-12 and higher-education scholars like me. Patton highlights how the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate provided a platform to extend CRT into higher education.²⁰

Dr. Lori Patton's work is pivotal to this very conversation because it was intentional in the disruption of *racelessness* within the context of higher educa-

¹⁷ Mari Matsuda, "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 22 (1977): 323–99, <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/65944>.

¹⁸ Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 23–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>.

¹⁹ Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 97, no. 1 (1995): 47–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104>.

²⁰ Lori Patton. 2015. "Disrupting Postsecondary Prose: Toward a Critical Race Theory of Higher Education," *Urban Education* 51, no. 3 (2015): 315–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542>.

tion discourse.²¹ Patton, Higginbotham, Ladson-Billings and Tate, as well as my own work, are intentional about redirecting people to understanding the role of race and racism in our analysis of power, and in this context, within higher education. In order to appropriately understand the way that Black people and other folks of color are othered within higher education and academia, we must do so by first acknowledging the way that race and subsequently racism are weaponized within the everyday experience of non-white campus stakeholders. Critical race theory, although not the appropriate theory to be used to assess each and every nuanced dynamic that exists within higher education, is useful in its providing of core tenets like counter-story-telling to tell this particular story of being twice-as-good from the perspective of the historically othered.

In further understanding the dynamic nature of centering the voices of the oppressed in their own stories, it helps us realign our commitment to social justice. It also reinforces our need to constantly challenge dominant ideology as encouraged by the writing of Solorzano and Yosso.²² Black people are the artists and curators of our own dynamic experiences, and we do ourselves a disservice when we forget this. When we allow for the dominant white voice, whom we know does not mean us well, to articulate our deferred dreams and deepest fears, we do so at our own peril. Our experiences in higher education and in academia are deeply vast and nuanced and there should be no minimization of these experiences to force us into a monolithic agreement. However, the truth in our lived experiences often intersect, like our multifaceted identities.

INTERSECTING PARABLES OF A SHARED EXPERIENCE

The eight participants highlighted in this piece are strangers to each other. None of the participants knows who the others are, where they work, or how they identify. This phenomenological qualitative research approach was intentional, as it allowed for each of the participants to feel safe in sharing their experiences without fear of retribution or retaliation. However, the participants each have intersecting identities that are shared. As an example, each of the participants has, at the bare minimum, attended a four-year college or university and earned a bachelor's degree. All of the participants identify and present as Black or African American. Below is a table that displays

²¹ Ibid.

²² Solorzano and Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology."

the pseudonyms of the eight participants, as well as their gender identity and stakeholder roles within higher education and academia.

TABLE 1. Eight is Enough! The Participants

Pseudonym	Stakeholder role	Gender identity
Xavier	Lecturer	Male
Ruby	Doctoral student	Female
Devan	Associate Professor	Female
Malcolm	Doctoral student	Male
Bruce Wayne	Part-time faculty	Male
E. Brady	Assistant Professor/Assistant Director	Female
Elle	Sr. Assoc. Director of Alumni Engagement	Female
Christopher	Consultant/part-time faculty	Male

In addition to these *intersecting identities*, a term that extends upon Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw’s *intersectionality*,²³ allowing for the shared marginalized identities not solely exclusive to Black women and femmes to be reconceptualized as a coalition between men and women across racialized and gendered categories. Like many African Americans who grew up within the United States and have never met before, there are certain teachings that were passed from generation to generation. We are all familiar with what it means to be Black within the context of the American social experiment and we all know how it feels to be targeted and othered. Especially within higher education, an experience that all eight of the participants eagerly resonated with.

XAVIER

Xavier is a recent doctoral graduate who serves as both a practitioner of higher education in his role as Director of Career Services, as well as a lecturer in the department of sociology. When asked the question regarding working twice as hard, Xavier immediately related to the parable as something that was taught to him by his parents. He indicated that the conversation was not intended to “demean” him but to inform him that as a Black person in

²³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

America, he would have to “do more.” He specifically cites that this teaching is directly related to institutional and systemic anti-Black racism that is pervasive within the American context. He states: “I was taught that had to be better than folks, specifically white folks.”

DEVAN

Devan serves in the role of Associate Professor at her hometown HBCU. She began her career and earned tenure at a midwestern PWI. Devan begins with highlighting that a great deal of her understanding of “twice as hard” connects to her southern upbringing in Alabama. She states that her relationship to the parable was different because growing up in her majority-Black hometown, people were affirmed by their community. They were taught to be “Black and proud!” However, because of the history of African Americans in this country, it was instilled that you would indeed need to work hard. She states: “My mother informed me that the world would not reflect the same as my hometown,” which was a statement that Devan indicates feeling confused by until she left for college at 17 to attend the University of Alabama.

Devan talks of being in college during the beating of Rodney King and then the trial of O. J. Simpson. She also discussed seeing the Confederate flags proudly represented on campus as she walked to and from class. Her professor asked her one day: “Wouldn’t you feel more comfortable sitting in the back of the class?” Devan states the two other Black students in her class had already made themselves comfortable in the back, which left her conflicted. Devan called her mom, who reminded her, “The world does not look like Tuskegee.” It was then when her mother stated that she would just need to work harder.

CHRISTOPHER

Christopher works as a part-time faculty member and a consultant. Christopher talks about his identity as Indigenous not being considered because of the preconceived notions of what the aesthetic of a member of a Native Nation should be. In terms of his understanding of the parable “twice as hard,” he mentions the “Black tax,” particularly around working twice as hard to only receive half as much. He further goes on to discuss how the parable reinforces the idea that we must submit to being overworked and under-recognized. Christopher offered his own experience in reference to his work

being significantly better than his white colleagues. He believes reimagining this parable allows for him to consider how his hard work sets the stage to make it easier for those “who come after.”

ELLE

Elle works as a Senior Associate Director of Alumni Engagement at an Ivy League institution. When asked about the parable of working twice as hard, Elle offered an interesting response: “When you say this, I think about being a Black person and working twice as hard means that you constantly have on more than one hat.” Wearing multiple hats indicates that the expectation is that you carry on multiple tasks, and at most times simultaneously in an attempt to prove that you can keep up and that you belong. She also mentioned doing the role that you were hired for but then all of the other “hidden curriculum” that many Black folks who serve as practitioners or as faculty have become accustomed to. “Hidden curriculum” is a simplified way to describe how the goalposts are often moved for people of color and women. How expectations are placed upon you, and you are expected to master them, but no one gives you the exact list of things that you are responsible for knowing.

MALCOLM

Malcolm is a first-year doctoral student at a university located in a northeastern city. Malcolm is active within several higher-education professional organizations and was an undergraduate at Mizzou shortly after the Concerned Student 1950 era (2015–2016). When asked about the twice-as-hard parable, Malcolm briefly paused to collect his thoughts, then he stated: “Being a Black person, a marginalized folk in this country, you are always doing more than everybody else.” Malcom goes on to say that “the labor arrangements for marginalized folk are not valued. Which makes you have to overwork yourself to receive a margin of the credit deserved.”

RUBY

Ruby is currently a second-year doctoral student at a university in the southwestern portion of the United States. When I asked Ruby about the parable “twice as hard,” she offered a pretty lengthy response. Ruby posited: “It means that you are coming in early and staying later. You are doing your best to dot your i’s and cross your t’s and not take any days off.” What Ruby

describes in her response is the culture of not resting in order to prove your worth, which directly conflicts with Hersey's stance on rest as resistance.²⁴ Ruby also states: "It means jumping at every opportunity and unfortunately burning out as a result."

BRUCE WAYNE

Bruce Wayne is a recent doctoral graduate, K-12 administrator, and part-time faculty member at two separate universities. Bruce Wayne had an interesting response to the twice-as-hard parable. Bruce Wayne takes the approach that "In order for me to advance in my career I have to be better, I have to be more organized." He acknowledges that this means that he has to double the work of his counterparts: "As an example, if their goal is to grow their [professional] network by 5 percent, then I need to grow my network by a minimum of 10 percent." Bruce Wayne indicates that he was raised with this mindset—taught to him since as early as he could recall. Referencing his private-school upbringing, he says: "As someone who is in white spaces, I'm going to always have to work twice as hard to get half as far."

E. BRADY

E. Brady serves in the role as Assistant Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging and is a faculty member in two programs. She teaches in a physician associate studies program and a public health doctoral program. I appreciated E. Brady's direct response when asked about the parable "twice as hard." She, in a very matter-of-fact way stated: "It sucks!" She then went on to further explain what she meant: "It means working twice as hard to only receive half of the acknowledgement." She explains what she dislikes the most about this expectation: "My administrators think that is a normal pace for me, and it's not, and it is exhausting." E. Brady mentions being intentional about prioritizing asking for breaks so that she can have an opportunity to reset her mental health and rest.

Each of these participants are on their own journey in their campus stakeholder role. Whether they are doctoral students, part-time faculty, practitioners, tenure-track, or tenured faculty, each of them has an intersecting relationship with the parable "twice as hard." One of the eight participants (Bruce Wayne) indicated that the requirement to be exceptional at all times

²⁴ Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance*.

is something that he was accustomed to, so he did not particularly look at it in ways that are harmful—simply expected. The other seven participants, on the other hand, were very clear that although they were aware via their upbringing or were introduced to the concept by white people (undergrad professors), they were not fans of it. The intersection of each of these participant experiences highlights the fact that the American Black lived experience, regardless of where it takes place, is intertwined or commingled.

REJECT WHITE EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS

This study for me provided affirmation for a perspective that I personally live my life by: Black people all need to renegotiate our relationships with white supremacy. In doing so, it forces us to re-evaluate our own journeys to and through anti-Blackness and participatory engagements in othering. We have no say-so over how white people perceive or respond to us, and that should never be our labor. Instead, what we should be teaching our children, our students, our colleagues, and ourselves is that the focus should be to do good work but not more than is required.

When Black people place unrealistic demands upon ourselves it brings about unnecessary health-related (physical and mental) challenges, causing many of us to leave this world before we otherwise would.²⁵ African Americans bring far more to this world than our suffering and forced subjugation. The way for Black people to see ourselves through that is by first learning that the “twice as hard” parable is absolutely a problem and we must unlearn it. Nothing good has ever come from proving to white people how good we are, and central to this belief is that ideology (“twice as hard”) is deadly, whether you admit it to yourself or not.

One of the things that I teach my doctoral students, particularly my Black students, is to stop performing for whiteness. The academy and higher education at large are places of high stress for Black folks, and as such cause us to perform as caricatures of ourselves, shrink ourselves, and believe that only one of us can or should occupy any given space at one time. Releasing ourselves from this performance and the ideology of needing to be twice as good allows us to focus first on ourselves in connection to these historical sites of

²⁵ Sidney H. Hankerson et al., “The Intergenerational Impact of Structural Racism and Cumulative Trauma on Depression,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2022): 434–40. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.21101000>.

anti-Black oppression, and second the work that we are capable of producing. This is the parable that we should be adopting and passing through the generations, not the parables that continue to hold us in bondage, especially when we are, in most cases, better.

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