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Reclaiming the Past and Transforming Our Future: Introduction to the Special Issue on Foundational Contributions of Black Scholars in Psychology

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The contributions of Black scholars to psychology have been erased or marginalized within mainstream, U.S.-centered psychology. As such, psychologists and trainees have little exposure to strengths-based theories and schools of thought that center and humanize the experiences of people of African descent. This special issue intervenes on anti-Black racism at the epistemic level by curating a review of foundational contributions by diverse Black scholars in psychology and related fields. The special issue is organized around five integrative and overlapping themes: (a) Black scholars who have written on topics related to race, racism, and racial identity; (b) schools of thought that embody decolonial, liberation, and African psychologies and the scholars writing within these traditions; (c) scholars who have created new theories and approaches to conceptualizing the mental health of Black children, youth, and families; (d) Black scholars adopting an intersectional lens to research and practice; and (e) Black scholars creating spaces within existing organizations to theorize about and research the experiences of people of African descent.

Public Significance Statement

This special issue intervenes on anti-Black racism at the epistemic level by honoring the past and present contributions of Black scholars to psychology.

Keywords: Black psychologists, racism, racial identity, Black children and families, intersectionality

It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you have forgotten.
—Akan proverb

We begin this article by evoking the concept of Sankofa as reflected in the proverb and represented in the Adinkra symbol of a mythical bird with an egg in its beak, looking back. In this

special issue, we look back and honor the past and present contributions of Black scholars to psychology to illuminate or retrieve the foundational scholarship that has been marginalized or erased by Western psychology and to inform future culturally syntonic theory, research, and practice by and/or with people of African descent. The Akan proverb, associated

Editor's Note. This is an introduction to the special issue "Foundational Contributions of Black Scholars in Psychology." Please see the Table of Contents here: <https://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/78/4>.—HC

Fanita A. Tyrell played a lead role in conceptualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Helen A. Neville played a supporting role in conceptualization and writing—review and editing and an equal role in writing—original draft. José M. Causadias played a supporting role in conceptualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Kevin O. Cokley played a supporting role in conceptualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Karlyn R. Adams-Wiggins played a supporting role in conceptualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

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with the Adinkra Sankofa symbol, also reminds us that in order for us to move forward and progress toward a brighter and better future, we need to reclaim the past.

Following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, many psychology departments in the United States issued statements affirming their commitments to fight against anti-Black racism. Staff, students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty also issued demands for concrete actions to address anti-Black racism in their departments. Despite these important steps, much work is needed to overcome the history of anti-Black racism in psychology and the lack of recognition and representation of Black (e.g., African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, African) scholars and scholarship in mainstream psychology (Roberts et al., 2020). It was these convictions that led a group of mostly Black psychologists to meet in the Summer of 2020 to discuss how we could challenge and help transform a field that was responsible for the epistemic exclusion and erasure of scholarship by Black psychologists and social scientists.

Several years after Dr. Martin Luther King's (1968) speech to the American Psychological Association (APA) was published and the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) was formed, Dr. Robert V. Guthrie (1976) wrote his landmark book *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology*. Guthrie, a founding member of ABPsi, documented the pervasive exclusion of Black scholars and scholarship from mainstream psychology. Influenced by the emergence of the formal articulation of Black psychology in the United States, he denounced a long history of racist research in psychology aimed at legitimizing White supremacy, spreading the idea of Black inferiority, and supporting the oppression of Black people (e.g., eugenics research in psychology and standardized tests). Guthrie (1976) also cataloged the neglected contributions

and successes of early Black psychologists and social scientists in research on Black culture. This includes the preponderance of deficit models in psychology to explain Black family and youth development and pathology as opposed to ecological and theoretical models that ascribe these outcomes to structural and social inequities (Dr. R. Clark et al., 1999, biopsychosocial model; Dr. Spencer et al., 1997, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory). More recently, scholars have also discussed this problem as a matter of epistemic violence, suppression, and a manifestation of histories of colonialist influences in psychology as a field (e.g., Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Teo, 2005; Woodyard & Gadson, 2018). The erasure of strengths-based approaches that center Black humanity, joy, and cultural expression is also part of this process of whitewashing psychology.

In addition to the impact of these dynamics on psychological science (see Buchanan et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2020; Winston, 2020), this problem has also come with adverse effects to teaching and learning. To this day, many graduate and undergraduate programs in psychology routinely neglect these innovative and foundational contributions in their syllabi, limiting students' training and exposure to these topics, and restricting trainees from gaining a comprehensive understanding of psychology. For example, restricting the inclusion of these contributions in training in psychology, such as the work of Drs. Elizabeth Cole and Lisa Bowleg on intersectionality, limits how students understand, engage, and study the interactive impact of multiple systems on individual psychological functioning. Ultimately, the systematic disregard of Black scholars and scholarship reinforces a view of psychology dominated by the experience and perspectives of White scholars and, by implication, the idea of Black inferiority.

To humanize the psychosocial lived realities of people of African descent and to counteract these entrenched and often pseudoscience-based narratives of Black inferiority as well as the epistemic exclusion of Black scholarship, Black psychologists created organizations such as the Association of Black Psychologists and journals such as the *Journal of Black Psychology* to promote and elevate the scholarship of individuals of African descent. The *Journal of Black Psychology* provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of Black people despite ongoing efforts by mainstream psychology to devalue and designate this scholarship as lacking theoretical and methodological rigor (Auguste, Bowdring, et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2020). Recent scholarship has brought attention to this epistemic violence and exclusion (Buchanan et al., 2021; Woodyard & Gadson, 2018); however, efforts to highlight and address historic and systemic inequities in psychology must accompany opportunities for corrective action such as showcasing scholars and their writings that have been marginalized within traditional Western scholarship.



Helen A. Neville

The purpose of this special issue is to catalog and enhance the visibility of the contributions of scholars of African descent to several important areas of psychology. The special issue intervenes on anti-Black racism at the epistemic level by pushing back against the invisibility, underrecognition, and underrepresentation of Black scholarship in psychology; it also pulls in strength-based culturally resonant scholarship. Specifically, the aim of this special issue is to curate, review, and integrate innovative and foundational contributions by Black psychologists who study and conduct research on race, ethnicity, culture, and racism that center the experiences of people of African descent. These works either incorporate a strengths-based approach to understanding the lived experiences of Black people and/or provide a critical analysis of race, racism, ethnicity, or culture to understand people or society.

In our recognition that the broad coverage of Black psychologists in multiple disciplines would be untenable, we limited the scope of the special issue to scholarship on these topics with hopes that this publication would serve as a springboard for different areas in psychology (e.g., neuroscience, cognitive psychology) to devote resources and time to highlight the vast contribution of Black scholars and scientists in their areas. It is our hope that this special issue will help all scholars envision their work to be more inclusive of research by Black psychologists; help all psychologists better grasp the ways anti-Black racism plays a role in the phenomena they study; and help psychology departments embrace antiracist ideals by providing readings that might be included in the curriculum and syllabi for undergraduate, master, and doctoral courses in psychology.

The special issue is organized along five integrative and overlapping themes: (a) race, racism, and racial identity; (b) decolonial, liberation, and African psychologies; (c) Black

children, youth, and families; (d) intersectional perspectives; and (e) organization and places.

Race, Racism, and Racial Identity

Early Black American psychologists in the 1930s and beyond named the problems of race and shined a light on racism in psychology and society more broadly. Dr. Herman Canady who investigated racial bias in testing and proposed a new racial psychology exemplified this approach. Black American psychologists earning degrees after the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965—which increased access to higher education to people of color—have continued this tradition. The current special issue highlights the contributions of these psychologists who entered the field at the height of the Black Power movement and beyond and thus were not included in Guthrie's (1976) foundational text. The first and largest section in the special issue consists of six articles describing the contributions of individual scholars to conceptualizing and investigating topics related to race with an emphasis on racism and racial identity.

The conceptualization of racism in U.S. psychology would not be where it is today without the scholarly contributions of Dr. James M. Jones. As part of their systematic review of 21 of Jones' most important works, Boisvert and Barned (2023) describe the three types of racism Jones' popularized: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism. They also identified and provide an analysis of six themes running through Jones' work, including (a) racism is cultural, prejudice is individual, (b) culture and context matter in expressions of racism, (c) methodological limitations of psychological examinations of race in social psychology, (d) centering people/perspectives that have been silenced, (e) accepting divergent social realities, and (f) worldview and coping with oppression. The latter theme incorporates Jones' early African-centered, strengths-based cultural model he proposed describing psychological and cultural expressions related to time, rhythm, improvisation, orality, and spirituality. Boisvert and Barned also document the immeasurable ways in which Jones contributed to the development of psychologists of color in his work sustaining the APA Minority Fellowship Program.

Born and raised in Chicago, Dr. William E. Cross, Jr., spent over 5 decades conceptualizing Black racial identity. Worrell et al. (2023) chart out the development of Cross' (1971) scholarship from his publication in the *Black World* introducing the Nigrescence or the Negro-to-Black racial identity model to his 2021 publication of his most recent text, *Black Identity Viewed From a Barber's Chair*. The authors contextualize the ways in which Cross' scholarship transformed racial and social identity research. They outline the evolution of his theorizing and the development of measures to assess Black and other racial and ethnic identity formation, including the Cross Racial Identity Scale and the Cross Ethnic-Racial



José M. Causadias

Identity Scale. Worrell and colleagues present the mounting empirical support for the Cross scales and corresponding theories, and they conclude the article with a discussion of the ways in which Cross' theories increased psychology's understanding of social and cultural identities.

Adames et al. (2023) describe the path-breaking research contributions of Dr. Janet E. Helms. Helms was the first to introduce process models of racial identity and social interactions that could be used in counseling, interpersonal, and larger organizational settings. Drawing on her theories and empirical research on Black, people of color, and White racial identity, Helms described the ways in which individual- and system-level racial identity beliefs influence social interactions. Adames and colleagues outline each of Helms' racial identity theories, noting that she is one of the first psychologists to present a comprehensive model of White racial identity. Helms' research adopts an antiracist lens and has implications for research and practice. As a renaissance woman, Adames and colleagues also describe Helms' (a) womanist identity research including her intersectional framework describing the identity development of woman of color and her (b) research on racial bias in cognitive ability tests and measurement.

Chatters et al. (2023) review the foundational contributions of Dr. James Jackson to psychology and the social sciences. As the founder and director of the Program for Research on Black Americans, Jackson was the principal investigator of major national surveys of Black Americans that resulted in nationally representative data sets on the mental and physical health and social well-being of the United States Black population. These data sets were made publicly available to students and scholars across the country. Jackson's work is instrumental in providing a nuanced understanding of Black American life by recognizing demographic

variability, challenging stereotypical depictions, and centering strengths-based perspectives. Among his many accomplishments contributing to his legacy, the authors note that Jackson's most enduring legacies include the extensive network of scientists, researchers, and academics who were trained under his direction and leadership.

Boykin et al. (2023) review the influential scholarship of Dr. A. Wade Boykin, an experimental psychologist whose program of research empirically tested whether Black cultural values of expressive movement, verve, and communalism could be leveraged to improve the learning of Black students. Informed by his own personal lived experiences as well as insights from his empirical research, Boykin created the influential triple quandary framework that described how Black Americans have to navigate the conflicting values of mainstream culture, the values of Black communities, and the challenges of being racial minorities. Boykin's research was later used as the foundation to create the talent quest model, an intervention that focuses on educating the whole child and increasing the cultural continuity between home and school contexts for improved student outcomes. The authors note how Boykin's work influenced the work of several other notable psychologists and education scholars and has been applied to advance knowledge of other minoritized experiences.

Williams et al. (2023) commemorate Dr. Robert Sellers' legacy by outlining his extensive theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature on racial identity and socialization. The authors provide an intimate prelude to Sellers' formative experiences and personal background and discuss how these experiences shaped his groundbreaking scholarship and approach to collaboration, teaching, and mentorship. Motivated by his desires and ambitions to conduct research that capture the rich and complex lives of African American individuals living in the United States, Sellers and his colleagues constructed the multidimensional model of racial identity to examine how Black individuals ascribe significance and meaning to their racial group. The authors review how this model transformed research on racial identity and propelled scholarship linking racial identity to discrimination, academic, psychological, and health outcomes. The authors also describe how this work has been extended to other ethnic-racial groups and led to advancements in research on racial socialization. The authors concluded by highlighting how Sellers' quest to pay homage to his mentors and historical roots influence his broader impact on the field, advocacy for change in psychology, collaborations, mentorship, and training of scholars of color in academia.

Decolonial, Liberation, and African Psychologies

Schools of thought in decolonial, liberation, and African psychologies are wide-ranging, with separate histories



Kevin O. Cokley

and philosophical approaches. The articles in this section reflect the breadth of this diversity and include writings on a discipline more broadly (i.e., African-centered psychology) and the contributions of individuals to specific fields of study including ethnopsychiatry (Louise Mars), sociopolitical development (Roderick Watts and colleagues), and African psychology (Kopano Ratele).

In their article on African-centered psychology, [Awosogba et al. \(2023\)](#) provide a brief overview of the core tenets of the discipline, outline the many contributions of this school of thought, and issue a call for inclusion of these approaches in APA-accredited health service programs. While acknowledging the uniqueness of African ethnocultural groups, African-centered or Africentric psychology embraces unifying concepts across these groups. These include principles, values, and traditions related to ways of knowing and being, such as interdependence, collectiveness, human–nature oneness, and the importance of the spirit. Awosogba et al. illustrate key concepts from this school of thought by discussing the scholarly contributions of Drs. Wade Nobles, Linda James Myers, Na'im Akbar, and Cheryl Tawede Grills. The authors conclude by providing several arguments for why incorporating African-centered psychology into the curriculum—including integrating the content into courses such as psychotherapy theories and history and systems—is a logical next step following [American Psychological Association's \(2021\)](#) apology for contributing to systemic inequities and scientific racism.

In their contribution to decolonial scholarship within psychology, [Auguste, Beauliere, et al. \(2023\)](#) draw attention to Haitian psychiatrist Dr. Louis Mars' underexamined contributions to psychology. Auguste and colleagues explore Mars' life, the sociohistorical and sociopolitical context of his work, and his contributions to ethnopsychiatry.

Importantly, Auguste and colleagues also discuss the political implications of Mars' scholarly agenda and the explicitly political work Mars himself pursued around his scholarship. This article offers insights into points of convergence, divergence, and influence between Mars' work and other theoretical perspectives focusing on the psychological processes of Black and African peoples.

[Hope et al. \(2023\)](#) explore the contributions of Dr. Roderick Watts and his colleagues' conceptualization of sociopolitical development (SPD) to the field of psychology and underscore the significance of SPD to the social, political, and cultural liberation of Black people and Black psychology. Throughout the article, the authors utilize the oral histories of the founding members to contextualize and frame the genesis and evolution of the SPD framework. The authors outline the distinctions between SPD and other related concepts; describe various models of SPD and their current utility; and discuss how SPD has been extended to understand sociocultural, psychological, and contextual components of youth development. Finally, the authors offer future recommendations on how to integrate and expand the use of SPD in psychological research and practice.

[Kiguwa's \(2023\)](#) article focuses on contemporary South African Psychologist Dr. Kopano Ratele and his African psychology framework as another contribution to decolonial scholarship within this special issue. Kiguwa elaborates on the major contributions of Ratele's line of scholarship and corresponding activism, such as his challenges to binary conceptions and his conceptualization of African psychology as an orientation that serves a larger project of producing knowledge relevant to the African people being theorized. [Kiguwa's \(2023\)](#) article frames this discussion through two themes in Ratele's scholarship: (a) culture and tradition and (b) Black interiority. This article offers insights into relationships between theory and possibilities for emancipatory social practices, including reflections on how Ratele's work informs our understanding of how to best respond to an anti-Black world.

Black Children, Youth, and Families

Traditional theories of child development that emphasized the importance of sociocultural context did not account for the intersecting identities, social positioning, and multidimensional experiences of Black children and their families. Economic, political, and social changes in recent decades were accompanied by a surge in theories and methodologies that were developed to recognize and contextualize the convergent and divergent experiences of Black families. Four articles in this special issue discuss the pioneering contributions and challenges of Black scholars in unpacking and offering novel approaches and ways to



Karlyn R. Adams-Wiggins

study and understand Black youth development, parenting, and family life.

Elisha et al. (2023) review critical conceptual and empirical contributions of Black scholars to developmental science in the past century, advancing our understanding of how diverse contexts and situations shape psychological development. This article summarizes research on the impact of Blackness on emotional, cognitive, social, and identity development across the life span, emphasizing how Black developmentalists have charted new theoretical directions and introduced innovative methods. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the authors examine some foundational contributions of Black developmental scholars that have not only invigorated developmental science but were instrumental to the Civil Rights Movement in the past and in supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice today.

Cunningham et al. (2023) examine the history and academic impact of Dr. Margaret Beale Spencer, one of the most impactful Black scholars in developmental sciences. The authors discuss Spencer's pioneer contributions in replicating K. B. Clark and Clark's (1950) doll study and her work following the "Atlanta's missing and murdered children" between 1979 and 1981. They focus on the landmark theory she created with her colleagues, the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), and discuss some of its core concepts, such as "net vulnerability" and "emerging identities." The authors connect PVEST to other groundbreaking contributions, such as intersectionality, and critical issues in developmental sciences, such as puberty.

In response to the cultural shifts in the role of fathers and to counterbalance the negative portrayal of Black fathers in mainstream psychology, Cooper et al. (2023) highlight the impactful contributions of several prominent Black scholars

who dedicated their illustrious careers to contextualizing and destigmatizing the experiences of Black fathers and their influence on family life and child development. In their article, Cooper et al. (2023) review the numerous theoretical advancements and methodological approaches that were developed and adopted by these scholars to center and accurately represent the diversity and multidimensional experiences of Black fathers. The authors discuss the expansive literature on Black fathers' contribution to their children's development and well-being and reflect on the efforts of the scholars to collaborate with their colleagues in order to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to the discourse and scholarship on Black fathering. Finally, the authors offer recommendations for future research on Black fathers and their families.

Stewart et al. (2023) offer an in-depth examination of Dr. Brendesha Tynes' program of research using a narrative review approach. Stewart and colleagues highlight Tynes' role in advancing the study of adolescents' experiences with racism in online contexts by focusing on three kinds of contributions: conceptual contributions operationalizing phenomena relevant to racialized experiences in online environments, methodological contributions to improve the field's ability to study racism in online environments, and empirical contributions to our understanding of youths' experiences with race online. In this article, Stewart and colleagues illustrate how Tynes' work should inform our understanding of children and adolescents' development and learning in a time period where the internet is central to youths' social relationships.

Intersectional Perspectives

There has been a substantial increase in the publication of scholarly work on intersectionality in psychology and other fields since Crenshaw (1989) codified the concept over 3 decades ago. Intersectionality approaches at its core provide an analytic framework to consider the influence of multiple marginalized social and political identities on people's experiences. This section consists of three articles in which the authors adopt an intersectional framework; two pieces consider Black women's experiences, and one focuses on uncovering the contributions of Black sexual and gender diverse (SGD) scholars. This latter article adopts an intersectional lens in naming the nature of epistemic violence and capturing the scope of the research contributions.

Long before the #MeToo movement and before intersectionality theories were introduced in psychology, Dr. Gail Wyatt adopted an intersectional lens to explore Black girls' and women's experiences with sexual violence. In this article, Wyatt et al. (2023) describe the development of novel methodologies and measures of sexual trauma over the past 4 decades, including the Wyatt Sex History Questionnaire (WSHQ) and the UCLA Life Adversities Screener.

Unlike other measures at the time, the WSHQ adopted methods to ensure the cultural relevance and sensitivity to survivors including adopting an interview as opposed to survey format, recommending that interviewers represent the racial or ethnic background of participants, and containing questions to capture the experiences of people who were silenced in previous research such as domestic workers. Additionally, the WSHQ was one of the first measures to separate out child from adult sexual trauma and to adopt a multidimensional framework which included questions about the context and nature of multiple experiences. In addition to her research focusing on Black women (e.g., her book *Stolen Lives*), the article also discusses Wyatt's many other contributions. This includes her empirical work documenting the association between sexual trauma severity and HIV infection rates and her culturally congruent sexual health model for African American men and women designed to inform behavioral interventions.

Delineating the role of structural racism in exacerbating health inequities in Black communities, Lewis (2023) discusses the works of Black scholars who contributed to the conceptual understanding of racism and health. Lewis (2023) reviews the theoretical models produced by Dr. Rodney Clark and his colleagues and Dr. Shelly Harrell that illuminated the biological and psychological processes that mediate the link between racism and health and highlighted the sociocultural and structural factors that may influence this association. The author provides empirical evidence to support the theoretical frameworks while documenting the prevailing gaps in the literature on Black women's health. Lewis (2023) argues for the use of intersectionality frameworks proposed by Black feminists and psychologists to understand the interlocking systems of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Integrating the conceptual models of racism and health with intersectionality theory, Lewis (2023) proposed a biopsychosocial model of gendered racism and Black women's health to account for how sexism and racism interact to influence Black women's mental health and physical well-being. Finally, the author offers recommendations for future research, clinical practice, and social justice advocacy focused on Black women's health and well-being.

Lassiter et al. (2023) address the erasure of the contributions of Black SGD scholars in psychology. They review and analyze the work of 34 Black SGD psychologists who are open about their multiple identities and who study mental health and psychological phenomena. While the scholars' contributions are wide-ranging, the authors note that the psychologists' work analyzed in the article largely explore the identity development of people of African descent with multiple marginalized identities based on heterosexism, misogynoir, racism, and capitalism. They outline eight broad topic areas of scholarly contributions: mental health,

psychotherapy, and counseling; health psychology and social determinants of health; scale development and refinement; social psychological and forensic phenomena; resilience and strengths; identity development and conflict management; theory development; and research methods. Within these topics are critical theories in which the authors argue that all psychology trainees should be exposed to, including Black lesbian identity development, stigma concealment, and innovative therapies to work with Black and other people of color.

Organizations and Places

Cultural practices, beliefs, and ideals are embedded in organizations, institutions, and systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Jones, 2023). Recognizing the significant role of school and work settings in shaping the social relationships, economic advancement, and adaptation of Black children and adults, several scholars were pivotal in advancing theories and methodologies to improve the experiences and lives of Black learners and employees. Two articles in this special issue address the contribution of Black scholars who devoted their careers in disrupting systemic inequities and unearthing harmful economic and social practices in school and work environments.

Tettegah et al. (2023) highlight the lives and works of four prominent Black psychologists whose contributions to educational psychology have largely been excluded from popular psychological texts. Using an Afrocentric and critical race theory framework, the lives and contributions of Drs. Inez Prosser, A. Wade Boykin, Barbara Robinson Shade, and Asa Hilliard, III, are reviewed. The impact of these scholars' work is far-reaching, including the pursuit of innovative research topics, providing expert testimony in landmark civil rights legislation, and leading college and university initiatives that had a tremendous and long-term impact on Black learners and communities. The authors argue that their impact on American schools cannot be measured by publications and conclude by offering recommendations for advancing educational psychology toward eradicating anti-Black racism and uplifting and centering the voices of Black learners.

Ruggs et al. (2023) highlight the expansive careers and innovative contributions of five prominent Black psychologists who contributed to the discipline of industrial/organizational psychology. The authors underscore how instrumental these scholars' works were in advancing theory and evidence-based practices on diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and discrimination in and around workplaces. The authors reviewed the scholars' extensive contributions to evidence-based practices and literature on recruitment, selection, leadership, organizational climate, organizational justice, employee experiences, and job

performance in workplace settings. The authors also explore the relevance of this work to other subdisciplines of psychology and its implication for practices in higher education. Capitalizing on the rich theoretical and empirical contributions of these prominent scholars, Ruggs et al. (2023) offer recommendations on how to address ongoing challenges surrounding diversity and inclusion in higher education and illuminate ways to train the next generations of scholars to discuss topics of race and diversity in the classroom.

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