

AFTERWORD

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Returning to my rural Alabama birth home after being away more than 40 years, when I was asked to write this Afterword, I thought how fortuitous. On the one hand, my heart and spirit leapt for joy that rural African Americans and their educational plight were finally getting attention from this much needed research and book. However, on the other hand, I was awash with sadness that only now has there begun attention to rural African Americans' economic and education condition.

It was from the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the north and west from 1916 to 1970 that created African American urban spaces (Wilkerson, 2010). Yet, the research and programmatic focus shifted to African Americans in urban areas, as though they were nonexistent and completely forgotten in rural areas. As Genovese (2019) indicated, African Americans living in rural spaces face constant erasure. With "10.3 million people, one-fifth of rural America, people of color" (p. 1), it is almost unimaginable that this book would be so late in coming and highly necessary even more so now. Within these numbers, over 10 million people in rural America, one-fifth people of color, there is geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic diversity. By no means, is rural America a monolith (Chinni & Pinkus, 2019). It is the diversity of rural America that makes disaggregating the economic and education outcomes by ethnicity even more important. Captured more precisely, Chinni and Pinkus, stated,

...diversity also means more attention needs to be paid to the racial and ethnic differences that can define rural communities. There is a tendency to think of 'rural' as meaning small and homogenous ((p. 7).)

Therefore, just as the authors in this highly necessary and often as an afterthought research and book demonstrate, rural populations have important roles to play in better understanding and developing workable economically and educationally outcomes of overall citizenry in counties, states, and countries, certainly including the United States but beyond. Only researching and developing solutions for African Americans in urban settings leaves a gaping hole in understanding the totality of African Americans'

outcomes. Consequently, any economic and education solutions would only partially address the plight of African Americans as a whole community.

When pathways and experiences to postsecondary education for African American rural populations are limited or hampered, there are implications for the lack of upward mobility and generational benefits, not just for rural African Americans but for all African Americans, states, and the nation. In support of this position, Ajilore (2019) stated, “addressing issues facing rural African Americans can provide benefits to other rural residents as well as residents throughout the country” (p.3).

This book has made an important beginning in defining educational pathway issues related to rural African Americans, including such issues as gender differences, teacher preparation and experiences, and classroom experiences. However, there is more to go. There are more questions to be asked and issues to be defined. For example, is the definition of rural African Americans used consistently across chapters in this book and in research in general? If so, how is rural African Americans defined? Is the definition limited to geography, i.e., southern states? How have rural African American voices or narratives been captured to ensure they have a say in their own problems and certainly programmatic solutions? What is the economic and education overview of the status of rural African Americans? It is important to begin with these basic questions because, as often is the case, researchers and policymakers begin with assumptions without definitions and, especially, often without historical or cultural context, thereby leaving programmatic solutions and policymaking with limited chance of success.

Where Rural African Americans Are Situated Economically and Educationally

Understanding rural African Americans’ pathways to education necessitates at least a basic review of their economic condition as only focusing on the education status and pathway without the underlying economic condition leaves bare the development of any long-term programmatic solutions. Education pathways are linked to economic possibilities and vice versa.

When rural community economic data are disaggregated by ethnicity, rural African Americans in the south tend to lag far behind (Chinni & Pinkus, 2019). Chinni and Pinkus stated, as an example, in a rural county in the south they visited, “the median household for African Americans was \$28,300 while the figure was more than \$10,000 higher at \$39,500 for Whites” (p. 12). The economic condition between rural African Americans and Whites is stark, and no one can doubt, that economics play a huge role in America’s economic divide, in urban and rural settings. It is these economic indicators and divisions that necessitate a historical and cultural context for any research on rural African American economic or educational situations. As Ajilore (2019) stated, “a long and brutal history of racist policies has kept

African Americans in urban and rural settings from experiencing economic mobility through both legal and extralegal means” (p. 2). Such context is crucial in outlining the current state of educational outcomes.

Yet, when rural African Americans economic and education outcomes are examined, rarely is a historical and cultural context provided. Where should the context begin, at the point of African descendants’ dispersal to the United States in the 1600s or some other arbitrary point? How is the cultural or social context defined differently between urban and rural African American experiences?

Even with what is known about rural African Americans’ economic outcomes, findings suggest that rural African Americans students hold similar educational aspirations as all rural students, even though they attend schools with high poverty rates (Irvin, Byun, Meece, Reed, & Farmer, 2016). Irvin and collaborators further state that, unfortunately, African Americans in rural high schools have school experiences that hamper them from being successful in attaining their aspiration – pathway challenges associated with lower academic expectations (p. 194), as also pointed out in the chapters in this book.

However, it is these linkages between economic and education outcomes that have to be made much clearer to better understand rural African American students’ pathway challenges while creating new possibilities and opportunities. Economic and education conditions and outcomes coexist in defining the future direction of rural African American educational possibilities.

Political, Social, and Cultural Necessary Actions

Any necessary actions to improve the economic and education conditions of rural African Americans must begin with a cultural context and include their voices. By cultural context, I mean African Americans’ have a long and storied history and heritage in rural communities, and those stories must be captured, not just from the ones who migrated during the Great Migration but those whose families who have resided in rural communities for generation. As an example, Hauslohner and Guskin (2017) capture the differences in Black and White rural Americans’ views in a southern town in Louisiana. They stated findings that indicated vastly different views between African Americans and rural White living the same town:

Black rural Americans were far less likely to feel positive about their communities...sixty percent of Blacks say their area is excellent or good place to raise their children, compared with 80 percent Whites ((p. 2).)

Rural African Americans' voices must be included in decision-making for policymakers, economist, social scientists, and educators. While including the voices of rural African Americans is the first and most important necessary steps, the authors have indicated other important beginnings. Given that rural African Americans continue to have stated high educational aspirations as indicated earlier, building on and better understanding those aspirations in the midst of economic and social justice struggles is crucial.

However, as we are now in a global and digital age, there are new pathway challenges that have to be addressed along with the ongoing, typical pathway challenges of subject mastery, educational leadership, and teacher shortages and preparation. How will the digital preparation and divide be addressed? How will rural African Americans be better prepared for a globalized world and understand their place in it? Is there a way to research and capture rural and urban African American economic and education linkages, challenges, and opportunities collectively? However, these questions, no doubt, would not be raised without the important research in this book. We needed this beginning and kudos for the authors for making rural African American education a specific focus.

From Here Where to...

The authors in this book have made a compelling case for the importance to better understand and address rural African American pathways' challenges and opportunities to education. From here, though, there are many steps to go.

As my 40-year return and the chapters in this book point out, where rural African Americans are economically and educationally situated is not a place for them to be. Considering the advent of a globalized world and digital divide that tends to be currently leaving African Americans behind, whether urban or rural. Here is hoping that 40 years hence rural African American economic condition and education pathway experiences will be in a different place.

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