

What is the Cost of Doing Nothing? Redistributing Power



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What is the Cost of Doing Nothing? Redistributing Power

Dr. Gianina Baker: Hello. I'm your host, Gianina Baker. And I'd like to welcome you to our conversation titled "What is the Cost of Doing Nothing? Redistributing Power." I'm joined today by three of our REACH Collaborative Equity Champion Consultants. We have Dr. Denise Henning, who's the director of the UNCW/3C Collaborative and professor in higher education leadership at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. We have Dr. Ereca Williams, who serves as the vice president for impact education for the Dogwood Health Trust Foundation. And we have also Dr. Ed Bush, who currently serves as the president of Cosumnes River College. I think I said that right. If not, I'm sure you'll correct me.

I'd like to thank each of the panelists for lending their perspectives to this important topic today. And so, we'll just jump right in with the first question. And this first question is a three-parter as we were trying to figure out what was the best question to ask, and in fact you know there will be responses toward all three. And so I'll ask the three of them as each of our panelists will reflect on them together: What is the absence of racial equity work in higher education if it were halted? And what would higher education look like if we stopped all DEI work today? And this last part, when reflecting on the title of this this particular podcast, "What is the Cost of Doing Nothing? Redistributing power"? in relationship to racial equity work. What comes to mind? And so who would like to jump in and get us started?

Dr. Ed Bush: I'll go with some thoughts. I mean, one of the things I think is important to note is that the conversation and work around diversity, equity, and inclusion is not the thing that has racialized postsecondary education. Like, prior to equity work, we have to understand that institutions were developed out of West's racialized notions. And so, what has happened over time is that we have believed that the institutions are race-neutral. And so, when we bring up concepts of race, diversity, equity, and inclusion is introduced as if institutions have not already been developed around the success of one particular group. So our institutions have been designed for white students, primarily wealthy white students, to be successful. And everything that has been constructed within postsecondary institutions has been built with that racial group in mind.

So DEI work is actually being infused to disrupt whiteness and racialized work that has already been in existence. So I think when we have these conversations that that foundation must be set first, is that the mechanics of the institution is reflective of whiteness in every aspect of what it is that happens within that college. But

because it just happens so much over a period of time that we don't even recognize the whiteness in it. But for folks of color, we just know that this is something different that it is foreign, but we are so immersed and so used to it that we don't recognize it as being a manifestation of racialized notions and racialized institutions and thoughts. And so I think I just want to offer that as we continue this conversation. That's what I think is foundational to our understanding of how institutions are constructed and the racialized notions that are embedded in the foundation are the crux of what we call our colleges.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Way to start us off. Absolutely. I think that what you just said, I mean, is very much at the impetus of many of these conversations, right? And thinking about the creation of our higher education institutions. And so with that, Erica, would you like to jump in?

Dr. Erika Williams: Yeah, you know, a powerful intro indeed, Dr. Bush. You know, I thought about this two ways. You know, what would it look like? Should it stop? And unfortunately, on some campuses, much wouldn't change.

Dr. Ed Bush: (Laughs) Right.

Dr. Erika Williams: Let me repeat: On some campuses it would be a typical day of, a day in the life of student XYZ at institution ABC. Which is the saddest of outcomes here should everything stop on a dime at midnight tonight, right? Why? Because those are the spaces where, more often than not, if there is any discussion of justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, it's a single person and a single office with no budget-line item and therefore no strategic alignment and student-services curriculum, academic spaces, any space that matters on that campus. Or it's two people. And when you bring up those titles, or you bring up those concepts, you bring up those practices it's go to their office and they'll help you figure that out because it's not living and breathing in those spaces. *That's* the saddest piece of this is, unfortunately, I think we have spaces where it's never germinated.

On the other side, I would say it would speak to what Dr. Bush just mentioned there. It would be a return to what was, you know, we're talking academic spaces that were designed for the ruling class. And so when I look across the screen and I see melanated people, our spaces on those campuses during that era, before there was evidence of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion trying to take hold and root in those spaces. You know, if I were there, I was there to cook, to clean, to landscape. I was not there to have a seat in the back of the room, nor the front of

the room. And so, you know, how it was in you can't be neutral on a moving train; there are no spaces of neutrality here. We're either moving forward with practices, beliefs, curricula, approaches, outcomes that lend themselves well and show up well for women, women of color, racially minoritized populations, etcetera. Or they work against those that aren't a part of the ruling class. It scares me to think about the spaces where that exists now, and it frightens me to think that we may be attempting to stop some of these things at midnight tonight.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Go ahead, Dr. Henning.

Dr. Denise Henning: You know, I cannot really add too much more to the despair that I would feel if we came to a complete halt at midnight. And so Dr. Williams and Dr. Bush are speaking truth to so many issues, but the issue that really was profoundly of interest to me is the cost. So what is the cost? You know, slavery and indigenous people being taken to boarding schools and all of the issues that we've dealt with in this country, all of that evolved around the economics of this country. So, you know, I really hone in on what brings to mind to the lack of knowledge that politicians and higher education leaders who are wanting to go to this neutrality. I love that phrase, you know, you can't be on a train and be neutral because you're going to fall on your arse right at the end of it. So when I think about that in relation to the economy, here's some things that I think people need to really, really think about. There's a new report that came out on the future of work, which is a guide for state policymakers who are the policymakers that are the elected officials that are wanting to now put all of these limitations, including in North Carolina, on what we can talk about and what we can say in regard to diversity, equity, inclusion. You know, we're going to find a way around whatever policies they put in place, but the lack of knowledge that these politicians and people that are making these decisions, and really just understanding the basis of economic growth in this country and in each of these states profounds me. I'm profoundly impressed with the illiteracy that these individuals have in regards to the economy.

So in this report it talked about that direct tie of education to the economic growth in this country in each and every state. And in this reward it talked about the future of work, of increasing student achievement will add \$70 trillion to the gross domestic product through the development of new jobs and annual earnings, annual spending, federal income tax. You know, these studies just continue to move on from economists that really know what they're talking about. And so these

people that are supposed to be so profoundly educated that our politicians and leaders and decision makers that are making these totally asinine decisions are disregarding the research of just basic economic gains. The basic economic gains of postsecondary education are not limited to just students. They also include people that have bachelor's degrees, who contribute \$278,000; and those with associate's degrees, which is specifically what we're working on, the REACH collaborative and the skills training, they contribute \$81,000 to their local economies and communities over a lifetime. Just over one lifetime. I mean, doesn't that make sense that the contributions and if we look at it in the state of North Carolina, where Erika and I are, that, you know, the population of North Carolina continues to grow and now that they have disaggregated the multiracial individuals who are people of color that we actually have exceeded 50%.

So when we think about 50% of that population not having equal access to education and increasing the average wealth of African American, Native American, of all of these individuals that are now not yet at a parity with their other counterparts, it just doesn't make sense to me that they are not paying attention to this. And it just really brings home the sense of fear of whiteness, of people with white skin that somehow people of color are taking away from the economy and all of these negativity and stereotypes that they continue to carry today, in 2023, when, you know, it just blows me away because what is the cost of doing nothing? It's going to devastate our country. It's going to devastate our country economically. Yet that's how these politicians get into office. And you know what? Educators are some of the worst at putting these people in office. So what are we rewarding here? What are we rewarding? And who is benefiting? Because, you know, I think that there's some real disconnects here in just common sense.

Dr. Ed Bush: Yeah, I think what Denise said is so, so powerful in many ways. And actually lays out the logic. You will say, hey, it doesn't make sense, but many ways I'll follow her logic and it makes perfect sense as well, right? So we understand that I think along racial lines, folks are willing to lose it all if it means to maintain their power because they cannot and are not oblivious to the statistics and the arguments that Denise has laid out that is making the choice that maintaining power is more important than that. And then I think one of the things that they are tracking is that demographic shift. And with that demographic shift represents a different type of voting bloc. So as much as they can, it is necessary for them to suppress, not only suppress folks of color vote, but to suppress their educational

outcomes. Because knowing that at the same demographic shifts the browning of North Carolina and the browning of other parts of the country, those folks go through and become educated, then it increases the likelihood of them to lose out on power.

Dr. Gianina Baker: I hope that listeners will feel the passion behind these conversations. It's not just something that is, you know, academic in nature, right? It's in the writing. These are lived experiences and they affect our students, our families, people that we are closest to. And so these are real conversations that we have regularly, right, not just at work but at home. And the cost of doing nothing is - we feel it, every single day. And in some ways, Ereka, right, if you're not doing anything anyway, right? You don't necessarily even see who *is* rewarded. Who is benefiting from this? And these are real conversations to have.

Denise, you touched on it a little bit, but I'm wondering if a few of you and you can add on, Denise, you know, if you feel led, but there's some states that are even within our REACH Collaborative that cannot name equity, let alone racial equity. But we know this work has to be done, and it continues to be done by many of us in this space. I'm wondering, you know, how are you all handling this? Do you call it out each time you see it or is there more nuance to it, right? How do you continue doing this work in such constraints?

Dr. Ed Bush: I'm going to yield this for a moment. I mean, I think given that was the dynamics that is happening in North Carolina, I mean, I really would be eager to hear from Denise and Ereka around that, me being in California. There's of course always some constraints no matter where you are, but I think the weight in the urgency of what has been felt in states like Florida, Texas, and North Carolina would be really interesting, I think, for them to speak to that.

Dr. Ereka Williams: You know, I'll say this. There's even a wait with trying to answer this in a certain way. I'll be very honest. So I will be careful here and as honest as I can be. Just literally in bed last night breaking my own rules with social media and a cellphone in the bed, but trying to send a message out about a house matter; saw where a former colleague who's a native of Mississippi, has served in North Carolina public schools for probably 20-some years, had an impeccable history down there near you, Denise, in a certain county, leading that district before being called up to serve at the state's highest Department of Public Instruction as one of the top three leaders there. Saw last night that just started that position at end of 2022 but was released by the state of Mississippi a few days ago because of

comments. Now he's Mississippi's native son. He graduated from an institution there in Mississippi and has represented education well, has served students and families and teachers well. He was released from his contract because of comments that he made about what Edward just led us off with our racialized system. And a university system where he came out of. He was speaking to a group of black college students at that institution five years ago. And some of his comments were unearthed and used as a lever for removing him. And then it was said that they also went back and reevaluated his 12-plus years of leadership in this one district. And it wasn't as stellar as they thought. So with those two reasons, they let him go.

And so when you're surrounded with those types of examples every day. I was a member of the UNC system for 20-some years, I'm a native North Carolinian, born and raised, been working in this state since I was 14 and a half years old with a workers permit that my parents signed on their lunch break at the social services. No one loves North Carolina more than me, right? But it's hard when you've watched these institutions. That you found some success in here, there somehow really turn on its native daughters and sons. When you watch these systems remove leaders that they brought in like you know, Margaret Spellings, who served the Department of Education under the Bush administration. When you send President Spellings away because of a statue, when you watch these things occur, you know, it's very coordinated. It's very intense and it changes the dynamics in the way that you do the work.

So I say all that to say this: It's been a very challenging couple of years as someone who's worked in education since I was 21 with a teacher's license in this state. I've not left teaching. I've not left education and I leave the state to consult, but that's about it. So when you watch this temperature change up and down and you see what happens to those that speak up, you know, you're reminded of what Audre Lorde says that, yeah, we weren't intended to survive anyway. But you do need to be judicious, and that's what I find myself doing to your question, Gianina. I have to think about battle versus war, battle versus war. That's really the logic I've taken in the last couple of years to try to attempt to do things that I think will stick and stay. And maybe pollinate something for someone else to come behind and support, but try to be careful so that I or the work is not sacrificed because I couldn't think strategically well enough to try to be careful about the timing and the place and the audience. You know, how long is this game going to run? I don't know. It really is challenging.

And yet, I know that this work for me, it's spiritual. It's ancestral. It's not fly-by-night. Even if I am transitioned or removed, it will carry on. It will not die. And so I'm convinced that it will live on. I'm trying to stay around and do it in the ways I can, in service to these communities and these families and these generations that have been woefully underserved in my native state and other states like us. But I do have to be judicious and think about battle versus war and name it when I can if there's some greater good that will come.

Dr. Denise Henning: I wanted to add on to Dr. Williams' comments in regards to the work that I do with graduate students, and many of those students are community college leaders now in the state of North Carolina and are moving forward and growing in those positions. And they're asking this question, you know, of what do we do? How do we navigate through this? And I always reckon back to the ways in which it's really talked about now in black feminist theory of wayfinding, the process of wayfinding. But when you think about, regardless of poverty and indigeneity and African American and the ways in which our ancestors found a way, they found a way. If they threw out a bushel of peaches, they made cobbler to feed their families, right? Nothing was wasted. We find a way. And so I remind them of that. But I also remind them of the ways of finding ways in which you can ask those questions. You know we've evolved in the language that we use around this and diversity, equity, and inclusion is just a new iteration of intercultural, multicultural. If you go back in time. And I've been at it for a few years.

But for me, it's about belonging, and when students do not find a place where they belong in higher education, they will find a place where they will. They find a way. And I think as we're navigating through this pendulum, because that's what I'm hoping this is that historic pendulum, politically, that we've seen in the past where things kind of go this way and they go this way. But you know, as we're moving forward, I think that we will see a way of finding it. We will find our way. And we will navigate through this and we will continue to move forward. But I promise you this, as far as my life, I will not be, I will not be caught off guard again. Because I thought we were much farther along than what ultimately the experience has been since 2016.

Dr. Erika Williams: Agreed, agreed.

Dr. Gianina Baker: I appreciate this conversation so much. You know, we were wanting to have it during one of the state leads meetings to get a chance to get

some dialogue, you know, from the state leads in some of these different states and to hear that and it just so happened that we had two people from North Carolina in this conversation, and I'm grateful that you were vulnerable in trying to answer that question, because it's one that continues to arise, especially, you know, we sit here in Illinois and there's different conversations to be had. But we wonder often of our colleagues in some of these other states, you know. How can we help you? You know, how can we even amplify our own voices here to assist you in the work that you're doing. And so, you know, if we can think of some ways where we can work together in some of that, you know, we would absolutely be happy to do that, and I'm sure some other places would as well.

Dr. Ed Bush: That was in conversation with some colleagues just coming off attendance of an AACC [event], having conversations with colleagues from Florida and Texas and North Carolina and just, me, I found myself not being able to sleep one night thinking about, you know. I think what you just said, you know, around what can we do to amplify our voice and to support our colleagues, our brothers and sisters that's doing the good work in those areas and one of the things that came to mind, I had a conversation with a real known scholar around this effort, around this idea, right, that you don't find value in folks of color, culture, history, and traditions. But there is value assigned in our enrollment, there's value assigned in our athletes that you literally, in the states of North Carolina, Texas, and Florida make billions of dollars off of black athletes, for example. Let's make a call. Open letter to parents, current black athletes, potential black athletes, and say, 'Why would you make billions of dollars for a system or for a school where you can't even learn about your own history?' Those state politicians will have conversations about their policies immediately if that type of conversation gets any type of traction of losing that money and the competitive nature of their favorite football team that they like to support each and every Saturday or North Carolina, the basketball team, they're support. They lose those top recruits because black families say, 'Nope, you're not going to exploit me, but not appreciate me, not going to exploit me, but not find value my history, my tradition, and my culture.' I mean, I think those policies will begin to be interrogated and looked at differently in ways that none of us, as scholars or academic admissions would make an argument that would have the same impact if just several black athletes, prominent five-star athletes say, 'You know what, we're not going to do it.'

Dr. Gianina Baker: I love that. It kind of gets to Denise's earlier point of finding a way, right? You're not going to catch us off guard the next time. Absolutely not.

This being very strategic, thinking about where we can and can't, I love that. It's an excellent example, and I'm sorry you didn't get sleep at night. We all find ourselves sleepless some nights trying to figure out and brainstorm and dream about what we can do. And so in that space, you know, what can we change, right? What levers need to be tapped to lead to change or this redistribution of power? What are you thinking?

Dr. Ed Bush: I mean, my thoughts may not be incredibly helpful to where we are because I believe that increasingly what is taking place is pointing us to one singular solution that we have known for a very long time, but for a lot of reasons I think the associated cost of that is a cost that we have been unwilling to make, and I think it really is building off of Denise's comments about finding a way, right? So when it was a time when it was illegal for black folks to know and learn how to read, we still taught. We were willing to literally lay our life on the line for this. You know, during segregation, those of us who have Ph.D.s taught in segregated black schools. So we had our brightest minds, right, teaching our children in schools that we control. And so when we have integration, when we look at how we can create what I call a better life on a plantation as opposed to talking about leaving the plantation all together, we're going to continuously find ourselves in this situation because there's a paternalistic relationship that exists with folks of color and white people. And any time that your survival relies on someone outside of your community, then when they choose to exercise control or pull your coattail then position you, and we're scrambling as we're doing now.

At some point, right, we have to begin to have just as much conversation as, in terms of changing the system, as we do in creating our own institutions. And there's simply much I grapple with, as much as I know that that upsets the space because we all of our conversations around reforming a system. You know, how we do guided pathways. All that is within reforming a system. But I know in the end that all that is on a faulty foundation. And so unless we could begin to have real conversations about building our own institutions, as we have done before, this is not new. And so in many ways, I think this is a great reminder of the precarious situation that black folks find themselves in to wake us up for being asleep by believing that there's progress that has been made in this country when it's just really smoke and mirror. And that we need to talk about how to develop our own schools K through 16 instead of allowing those who have interest in the press and us controlling the education of our children and our young people.

Dr. Denise Henning: I want to speak to the indigeneity aspect. So when I'm working with indigenous groups and tribal people across the United States and within my own nation, one of the things that is very, very interesting is seeing the economic prowess that's occurring on reservations that have taken land that was nominal land that they were moved forward on and put on because it was land that was not usable, and now they are building strong economies from it. And I'm going back to the concept and the understanding and awareness of the economy. When it begins to hit people in their pocketbooks, they pay attention. Because that has a direct, as Dr. Bush said, a direct connection to power and privilege.

So I'm working with two tribes recently in Colorado, one that is very economic, has great economic prowess. They actually are now being approached by the state on how can we now engage in economic discussions and be engaged in having investments and work within your economy and economic structure? And I'm finding that, you know, that economy of power and privilege when we have taken the scraps. And of the land that, you know, we've lost millions and millions of acres, as tribal people, that were taken from us. And many of those land-grant institutions have benefited and become wealthy because of it, right? We cannot put that aside. That was tribal land that was removed and stolen from us. So as a result of all of this, when it becomes economically important, I find how interesting the politicians and the decision makers change their attitudes and their tunes when it comes to that economic. And again, I'm going to come back to this time and time again: We have to learn, as people of color, how to hit them where they live. And that's economically. Hit them in their pocketbooks. And that's the people that we are dealing with right now that are in the decision-making structure.

I want to say there's so many allies that are there that are working with us and strongly side by side and walking and marching with Black Lives Matter and doing all of the things that need to be done. I do not ever want it to be diminished in any way of supporting us and supporting the work that we're doing together side by side. But it seems to be those privileged few that have created this sense of fear. And if we can make people afraid of it enough, that is how we stay in power. And so smarten up, people. Because economically, we're becoming strong. And that's where I'm putting a lot of energy right now.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Ereka, any follow-ups from you? I know!

So if you if you have a chance, I do recommend that you go and read the blog, sorry the brief, that both Ereka and Denise wrote for the REACH Collaborative.

And so if you go to our website, occrillinois.edu, and go to the REACH Collaborative web page, you can absolutely read as they reflect on investing in North Carolina's economy.

And so just a couple more follow up questions. One, you know, is there a metaphor or analogy that you'd like to use to help us illustrate the sense of urgency that racial equity demands in our educational systems? This was just thrown out to you to see if there was something that came to mind. Anyone want to respond to this maybe?

Dr. Denise Henning: I always have a response. What comes to mind for me is we are, we're in an earthquake. So the earth is shaking underneath our feet and we're beginning to see things that can create a crack. And we need to rally around the earthquake. You can call it a volcano if you want to because both coincide. You're going to create cracks from a volcano, but there is going to be an eruption, and when that eruption occurs, my hope is that we will continue to see the growth, the work from our predecessors, Martin Luther King, where we were able to move forward in a way that brings all of us up.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Ed or Ereka?

Dr. Ed Bush: Yeah, I mean, for me, it's like a patient that has a disease, and the only thing that the doctor is looking to treat is the symptoms. And so instead of finding the cure, what the actual disease is. And so I think what we often do in education is that we're trying to solve the issues by addressing programs when we know that the problem is systemic. And to some extent we are implementing programs and work with the misdiagnosis of what the problem actually is. And so we continue to fail. We continue not to close gaps in achievement because we're not focused on solving really what the core issue is. And a core issue is white supremacy and institutionalized racism in all the manifestations associated with that. And we're trying to somehow gain a level of comfort in operating underneath structural racism as opposed to destroying it or removing ourselves from it. And because the abuse hurts a little less or doesn't occur as often, we call that progress.

Dr. Gianina Baker: You just tied it back to some of those very early points that you made, and that is a great. I love how you described that and could be its own podcast in itself. Maybe. Who knows down the road. That's, wow, something to definitely reflect on.

Ereka?

Dr. Ereka Williams: Well, I've got quite a few. I was thinking about how I had a red eye two nights ago, that's why I'm still dragging a little bit. I don't think red eyes are meant for a certain age. And a captain at one point said, because he had taken the seat belt light off and then he threw it back on, and said that thing that we know they say, you know, had to throw the seat belt light back on, you all. Just ask for you to remain seated. We're hitting a little turbulence right now. When it's safer to move around the plane, you know, meal, beverage service will resume, etcetera, etcetera. But I need you to stay seated right now because we've got some currents. And, you know, most of the times, or at least every plane I've been on, even when it was violent, when the turbulence was violent, I've always managed to, we always landed. We always landed, and I had confidence that they were highly trained and skilled. They can get us through it.

So I'm thankful for a couple of things because we're clearly in this space that Dr. Bush just referenced with this notion of, you know, we could be anesthetized sometimes by these fake notions of things are working out. It's okay. But then we get these turbulent moments in our history and our timeline that remind us, to Dr. Henning's point earlier, that this is just, this is microwave stuff from another era that's being rolled out today. Different names, different whatevers. But we've seen these ties before. You know, the question becomes how do we move through these times now? How do we help those that are leading in these spaces, community colleges, four years, K12, whatever? And having to respond to this turbulence or react or be proactive, rather, in these spaces at a system that has a flaw design from the beginning, right. You know from what my colleagues mentioned earlier, how do we buckle up? How do we sustain and maintain? How do we see ourselves to that destination?

And in some ways, it very well may need to look exactly like what we'll put forward, systems that support melanated folk in ways and in patterns that honor their belonging and their cultural histories and lenses and indigenous ways. Maybe we show up at a destination that we didn't set out for because we realized that we were headed wasn't meant for us anyway. You know, I don't know. But I know that sometimes we're clearly in a space right now where there's some turbulence. And while we're going through that and we've got to stay seated to get through it, we didn't really think about where do we want to show up with this? What do we want this to look like at the end? I've got a teenager, and I think about his future because my ancestors thought about mine. They never got to see me or touch me, but they knew I was coming. And they planted some seeds. So I'm often thinking about, to

that earlier question, what happens if this stops? I, you know, we got seeds out here. We got seeds coming. And I won't be here for some of it, but I cannot imagine that they will not have a whirl that may be a little bit better because Grandma fought a little bit harder while she was here. I don't know.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Patience. Breeding symptoms. Earthquakes. Turbulence and airplanes. That's a lot to chew on, and I thank you, Erica. You're one of the best storytellers I know. You're an even better evidence-based storyteller. I appreciate your thoughts and inner reflections on this.

And so, to wrap up, you know, in this series and this season of podcasts, we've been asking each of the podcasters the following question. We know this work is tough. We've talked a little bit about that today. But there's a hope that we all feel, which is why we continue doing it. And so I ask, what do you see as the hope and something that we're terming even radical hope in doing racial equity work? And Ereka in some ways kind of answered it, right? Thinking about the seeds that we've planted, but if anyone like to respond to that, please do.

Dr. Ed Bush: My hope really comes out of much of what Denise and Ereka said several times upon the course of their responses to the question. I think our hope comes from seeing what our people have always done. And with the belief that we'll be able to do it again. I mean, really what it is is our resistance and our resilience and our ability to be able to find a way, out of no way, to do more with less.

But my hope is that we view that as a minimum, that that long no longer becomes the standard of what it is that we seek as folks of color and folks from marginalized communities. It's my hope that we see ourselves as deserving to thrive, deserving to be in all environments where we are affirmed culturally. That where our identities are not viewed as a threat, but as an asset. A place where we will be able to control our own destiny. I mean, Denise said a word that came to mind in talking about indigenous community. My hope comes from our belief in the pursuit to be sovereign people. To break the connection, the chain of being dependent on someone else. I've seen it, right? I mean, I think the world is flattening more when we think about black folks in America. I'm making stronger connections to the continent, for example. I mean, I find hope in that. That we see in ourselves bigger than just how we've been defined through the course of enslavement. So I see in an awakening of black people seeing their connection to black folks throughout the

diaspora. And seeing the economic and cultural promise that that brings. So that brings me hope as well.

Dr. Gianina Baker: I find myself often quoting Denise after any conversation, so I totally understand, but finding a way has been very powerful for me and has lasted throughout this conversation. So, thank you, Denise.

Dr. Denise Henning: My hope is that we have an uprising of people that take to heart what our elders taught us and that is that we have one hand that the Creator has given us to give. And we have one hand in which the creator gave us to receive. And in between those two arms and those two hands is a heart. And that we have an uprising in people that brings hope to the world by extending their hands to others, but also by receiving the help from others.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Thank you. Thank you all for the work that you do. You know, Dr. Bush, you're leading an institution, you're molding minds and people. And I'm grateful that you are in that space and to be as reflective as a scholar, as a practitioner is refreshing.

And I appreciate both of you, Denise and Ereka, in joining a conversation such as this in such tense times, but willing to be open and help us think through, you know, again, how we can be better colleagues. And how we can have some of these conversations out loud.

And so with that, we'd like to thank everyone for listening to this episode. If you'd like to read more about these three amazing people that you've heard today, please go to ocrl.illinois.edu to read their full biographies. And should you want to find out more about the REACH Collaborative and the work we're doing there to increase credential attainment of racially minoritized adult learners in six different states, please go to reachcollab.org. Thank you.