

## PREFACE

“THE BEAUTIFUL THING ABOUT LEARNING is nobody can take it away from you.”<sup>1</sup> For generations, Black parents have impressed upon their children the belief that education is the great equalizer. Internalizing this message of Black empowerment and social mobility, Black students have long sought access to postsecondary education. Up until the 1960s, most Black students were enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities. By the 1970s, enrollment patterns began to shift, and with the onset of federal grant programs primarily aimed at low-income students, the presence and impact of Black students on predominantly White college campuses became more significant. The doors of opportunity in White colleges opened for Black populations and many others. Growing numbers of students from previously marginalized groups entered college and their attendance contributed to the diversity we now see in our higher education institutions.

Over the past two decades there has been an increase in college enrollment rates among eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds who are Black, Latinx, and White. This news is encouraging for Black college students in general. However, the numbers of Black women in college today are not that different statistically than they looked twenty years ago.<sup>2</sup>

Black women who are represented in college enrollment data include traditional-age Black female college students and, increasingly non-traditional-age Black women, often called *adult learners*. Many of these women are newly attending college, while others are returning to college to finish their degree.<sup>3</sup> Together, these students bring to campus

a wide range of academic aspirations, challenges, and life experiences that are discussed in this book.

Race and economics are important factors in determining where students attend college. More specifically, the percentage of undergraduate students at private for-profit four-year institutions who are Black is more than double the percentages of Black students at private non-profit and public four-year institutions. For-profit institutions often aggressively market themselves to potential students as more accessible, offering flexible degree programs (often online) that purportedly address the needs of working students. Such advertisements are alluring to disproportionately non-traditional-college-aged Black women with children.<sup>4</sup> These schools tend to be more expensive, and research shows that students leave with higher debt obligations, fewer transferable credits, and less earning potential following graduation.<sup>5</sup> The recent 2020 pandemic and the deregulation of for-profit institutions has created a resurgence in this sector of higher education. Given their intensive recruitment practices, there is no doubt many more Black students will continue to enroll.<sup>6</sup> Although there could be overlaps, we suspect that the mentoring of Black students in these for-profit schools may look different than mentoring in two- and four-year public and private institutions, which is the primary focus of our book.

Significant differences in social class, ethnic background, language, national origin, sexuality, geographic location, and religious orientation exist among Black women in college. Such diversity contributes to a wide range of experiences for students studying in person, as well as for those learning remotely. Research examining the experiences of Black students in higher education is extensive, but one primary consensus appears to emerge in these studies. Black students confront a host of discriminatory attitudes, practices, and behaviors in college settings. How students respond to these stressors can promote or disrupt successful degree completion. This book provides a way of understanding the specific challenges faced by Black women as their experiences sit at the intersection of racial and gender bias. By bringing their unique experiences to light, we highlight the supports that we feel these women need to successfully negotiate the inequities they face.

We adopt a developmental approach to understanding the needs of Black college women. Years earlier, when in high school, some young

Black women had access to the guidance they needed to prepare for life after secondary school. But unfortunately, many Black students did not. Depending on where students attended high school, teachers, school nurses, and counselors may have been there to answer questions and offer advice. Making the transition from high school to college life is disorienting. School support staff know that college can be a completely alien context to master. Once students arrive at college, the availability of resources may seem overwhelming. Some students may not have the skills to adequately assess their needs, yet colleges often expect otherwise. We assume that they will engage in complex problem-solving and will make mature decisions on their own. We anticipate that young people will coalesce all of the lessons learned in childhood and adolescence to build healthy, sustainable lives for themselves and subsequently for their offspring. This is the traditional path to independence. For some, the roadway is and has always been clear. For other students, potholes and pitfalls litter the walkway, and their successful passage is far less certain.

In general, Black women in the US have fewer supports to turn to outside of family and friends. At the same time, the vulnerabilities associated with managing the responsibilities of adulthood loom large. Unfortunately for these women, the consequences of missteps are at their highest during this period. Poor choices have long-term consequences with respect to health, safety, income maintenance, and, of course, college completion.

This book translates what we have learned about promoting college retention and applying this knowledge specifically to Black female students. A number of books have been written about this population and, like ours, they focus on the impact of bias and discrimination on students' racial and gender identities and its bearing on college success.<sup>7</sup> And there are several books that look at mentoring practices and students of color.<sup>8</sup>

Our analysis goes a step further. In these pages, we explore the many ways in which biased attitudes and discriminatory behaviors surface in the daily lives of Black women in college. We identify circumstances that call for resistance responses, and we analyze what that resistance could or should look like and why. Finally, we center this work in our model of cross-racial mentoring in higher education, a practice that calls for

a very intentional focus on developing resistance skills in both Black mentees and the adult mentors (who are often White women) working with them.

The impetus for this *Sister Resisters* book started over three decades ago. We began mapping the initial contours of our theory of resistance in a 1991 article, “‘A Belief in Self Far Greater than Anyone’s Disbelief.’”<sup>9</sup> This elegant axiom was originally written by the Black playwright August Wilson, and this distinctive wisdom became our touchstone. The forcefulness of its truth energized us. Over the years, we gave presentations on the role of resistance in the lives of Black girls and women, and our work was met with great interest at professional conferences, in schools, and at community-based organizations. Often, Black people and other people of color would share their own stories of personal and collective resistance at the end of our talks. They thanked us for drawing on the strengths of Black folks’ cultural knowledge. Black mothers, teachers, and clinicians, in particular, felt that the lessons of resistance to oppression that they had learned and passed on to their own children were finally validated by professionals in the field. White educators at these presentations shared stories with us too. They had seen the academic success of too many smart Black students interrupted by poor choices emanating from emotional distress. They personally knew Black students who were overcome by self-doubt and “racial battle fatigue.”<sup>10</sup> These White educators, lingering behind after the workshops, seemed to eavesdrop on the conversations we were having with the people of color. They wanted to learn more about what we meant by *resistance*—its history, relevance, and application for Black youth development. Most of all, they wanted to know how they, like the mothers and teachers they were listening to, could join with us in Black students’ resistance.

As the years went on, we continued to refine our ideas. We published books and multiple research articles that further defined and mapped resistance for Black women in adolescence and during adulthood. As university professors, our access to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women completing their undergraduate and graduate degrees afforded us opportunities to review and revise our notions of resistance, particularly as they operated within the uneven power dynamics of higher education institutions. The young women on our research teams, in our classes, and in our focus groups shared a

wealth of information about how they were interpreting their life challenges on and off campus. They expanded our understanding of the sociopolitical world from their native/indigenous perspectives as Black millennials and Gen Zers in ways that have been immeasurably valuable. In these meetings, we heard the connections young women were making across their social identities. We translated our notions of resistance and established their cultural relevance for Black girls and women and for other groups who also contend with multiple layers of societal oppression. The work of developing one's ability to *withstand* negative social influences while *taking a stand* for self-validation and group affirmation led us to the thesis of this book.

Resistance can be put in motion by an individual, and it can be activated by the collective. Traditionally, Black Americans have resisted their oppression largely alone, or at times with the help of other Black individuals or associations, but there is a long history in this nation of White allyship. White individuals, challenging the status quo, have stood up to racism and joined Black people in the struggle for social justice and civil rights.<sup>11</sup> We write this book in the spirit of all people across racial classifications who reject racism. We acknowledge the devastating toll racial discrimination has had on all of humanity, its destruction of Black families and communities, and its thwarting of Black social progress. The resistance we share is a fulfillment of our ancestors' struggles, a commitment to the present, and our promise to future generations.

There are countless Black college-age women who may need assistance from the caring adults in our colleges. They need help to push back against invalidating individuals and systems that misunderstand their needs or do not have their best interests at heart. These are the Sister Resisters on whom we call to enter the circle.

### *Uses of Language*

It is important to take a moment to speak to the language choices that we have made in this book as they relate to race and gender. Today, the terminology used to describe people of African descent is as varied as we are. *Black*, *African American*, *people of color*, and more recently *BIPOC* are undoubtedly familiar terms. Some authors use *Black* and *African American* interchangeably, and at times in this text we do as well. Although

we realize this practice is contested, we prefer to capitalize both Black and White when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms as it conveys a shared sense of identity and history. We see Black and White both as historically created racial identities, and “grammatical justice” would instruct that whatever rule applies to one should apply to the other.<sup>12</sup> We acknowledge and respect the strong feelings about self-identification held by many individuals. We hope that our racial (and gender) terminology is inclusive and representative of the ways people self-define, particularly those with marginalized identities.

When we reference people who are Black, we are referring to Blackness on multiple levels. First, the term Black serves as a phenotypic marker that has historically targeted certain bodies for discriminatory behavior in the US and in many other societies in the Western world. Blackness also speaks to a social and political identification with a group of people who share a sense of culture, who have knowledge of their histories of resistance to oppression across time and space, and who racially identify as Black. Blackness also includes a source and sense of belonging.

Among people of African descent, specific references to nationality, geography, and ethnicity are sometimes preferred. In these cases, we will use such identifications as needed. We also recognize that many people on our college campuses identify as biracial and/or multiracial. Thus, a binary focus on racial identity can feel limiting for these individuals. Moreover, the suggestion of a racial binary is problematic. It is exclusionary and it is an inaccurate reflection of the reality of biracial and multiracial people’s intrapsychic realities and lived experiences. We hope that multiracial individuals, particularly those with African ancestry, will find their needs and concerns reflected in these pages, even when their complex racial identities are not specifically named.

Gender terminology too has exploded in recent years. We are aware that the field is fluid, and in these pages we have tried to stay informed of the additions and edits to gender language use, particularly as it pertains to Black college women. Biases exist across multiple identities and proffer that certain bodies are preferred over others. Through our analysis, writing, and case studies, we endeavor to make evident our opposition to gender as a fixed and uncomplicated binary.

*Cis-sexism*, the preferential treatment of cisgender persons (those whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity) is too often coupled with discrimination against transgender, third-gender, and genderqueer people.<sup>13</sup> We reject the implicit (and in some cases explicit) assumption that cisgender is the preferred or correct way of being.<sup>14</sup>

When we reference gender, we seek to be inclusive of the affectional orientation and gender identities that include diverse sexualities and genders, marginalized orientations, and intersex individuals.<sup>15</sup> At times, we specifically use the terms *queer* and *gender nonconforming* to recognize the particular histories, struggles, and commitments of people who challenge gender boundaries to fully reflect their identities.<sup>16</sup> We also adopt the nonbinary pronouns *they*, *them*, and *theirs* in our case studies as many people find pronouns to be an important affirmation of identity. We believe that respecting someone's sense of authentic identity, including using their pronouns and chosen name, is a basic human courtesy.

### *References to White Women*

Women who are “White” represent the majority of professionals in student affairs and related careers, particularly in predominantly White institutions. In the discussion that follows, we move away from the traditional association of people and their pigmentation as fixed and immutable categories. Hence, our use of the term *White* is mindful of how the concept refers to the multiple social advantages conferred on individuals of White European descent.

As race scholar Ibram Kendi writes, “Anti-racism demands that we identify racially in order to identify the privileges (and disadvantages) we possess.”<sup>17</sup> Here, we acknowledge the tension of noting that race is a social construct, even as it has an autonomous and pervasive life of its own in our society. White women are not a monolithic group. As members of this society, they, like everyone else, possess intersectional social identities across multiple domains. We invite mentors, who are most often White women, to explore their individual identity statuses that may overlap with stigmatized identities—for example, having a

disability, identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and/or queer (LGBTIQ), coming from a low-income earning class structure, and being a member of a religious minority. There is much to be learned by interrogating why these intersectional connections may matter across contexts. Knowledge can be gained from understanding how the advantages and disadvantages evoked from these different social identities affect relationships across social differences.

While we refer to White women as a group, it is not our intention to overgeneralize and essentialize White women. Moreover, we respect that historically, some White women have been interrogating their proximity to racism, inclusion, and privilege. Race dialogues, White affinity study groups, and experiential seminars represent an array of opportunities available to White people interested in understanding race, racism, and who they are as racial beings. The concepts, stories, and case studies presented in this book are intended to resonate with a diversity of college personnel across multiple identities. These stories may remind you of the students you have taught, situations you have faced, and race-based dilemmas you have navigated in your professional lives. And they may provide answers to questions you may have about race, identity, and education.

### *Reframing Resistance*

In the field of psychology, *resistance* generally invokes a negative connotation as it is a term often applied to a patient's lack of cooperation or refusal to comply with a treatment plan. The field of education often refers to *resistance* when describing a student's refusal to engage with school. Although resistance for educators can be subtle or overt, it is usually associated with oppositional, disruptive, and belligerent behavior, suggesting something that needs to be reduced or eliminated for positive outcomes to occur.

In this book, we assign a different meaning to *resistance*. First and foremost, we position individual and collective pushback against systems of domination that exist on multiple levels: psychological, social, political, and economic. Our understanding of resistance emerges from the knowledge acquired over the years by African American people living under conditions of racial inequality. Resistance reflects the enduring



power of a people whose liberatory strength has maintained and sustained survival and actively challenges dehumanization brought on by chronic oppression. When we speak here of Black people's power, we are not "drawing a false equivalence to the concept of racial superiority espoused by the white power movement."<sup>18</sup> We rebuke a power whose purpose is to thief, abuse, and destroy. Instead, we deliberately name and call forth *resistance*, as the power that has allowed Black people to rise up, transform, love, heal, and move forward. And it is this life force that can be harnessed for all people whose lives are constrained by the weight of oppression.

Given that White people are in the majority as staff and faculty members on predominantly White campuses, we devote a great deal of attention to the development of White women as Sister Resisters. Increasingly, Black women, Indigenous women, and women of color are employed as faculty and staff in higher education institutions. These women may also function as mentors and bring their own cultural histories to the work of mentoring. Our template for Sister Resisters is embedded in Black women's ways of knowing, decision-making, and navigation of gendered racism. We acknowledge that other women of color, and some Black women, may be at varying levels of awareness regarding resistance. And not all forms of resistance help women to live their best lives. We believe there is much in this book for all Sister Resisters to explore for their own and for their mentees' empowerment.

In 1991, we first introduced our theory of resistance for Black girls and women. In the introduction, we discuss the history of that theory and our motivations for writing this provocative book, and we share the heuristic traditions that inform our ideas. In this preface we continue our discussion of resistance as laying the groundwork for our Sister Resister mentoring model. Our focus is on White women who represent the majority of staff and faculty at predominantly White colleges and universities and will most likely mentor Black female college students. We highlight the key features in this work: the intentionality of mentoring relationships, the role of power dynamics, the integration of life span developmental perspectives, and the importance of intersectionality. Moreover, the introduction addresses the reciprocal development of cross-racial pairings between Black mentees and White mentors.

In chapter 1, we expand upon our theory of resistance—namely, its meaning, intent, and purpose. We introduce our Sister Resister mentoring model and describe its relevance for mentoring Black female college students today. We review the research literature regarding Black students' college experiences, examining campus climates and especially microaggressions, gendered racial stereotypes, and the negotiation of race inside the classroom and across campus. We explore the dual forces of development, arguing that during this time of tremendous change and upheaval, identity is unfolding within an environment that is far too often invalidating and insensitive to the needs of Black female college students. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of optimal and suboptimal resistance—affect, action, and awareness, which sets the stage for the application of resistance theory relative to women's lives.

In chapter 2, we pivot from a discussion of Black students to the White women who may become their mentors. We discuss the potential barriers to the mentoring relationship by examining how the normativity of Whiteness can adversely impact relational connection. The relevance of resistance for White women is explored through our interrogation of patriarchy and of White supremacist beliefs that exert authority on Black and White women, separately and together. We identify what White women need to know in order to resist the consequences of women's gender oppression. Sociopolitical knowledge that informs White mentors' self-awareness, as well as the knowledge they need to understand Black women's experiences with the intersecting and compounding effects of racial and gender oppression, is examined. The complicated dynamics of developing relational trust within cross-racial relationships are explored.

Our third chapter turns to Sister Resisters and the work of meaningful mentoring. Sister Resisters refers to White female mentors working intentionally in deep and meaningful relationships with Black female students. Although BIPOC women can be and often are Sister Resisters for Black college women, this book focuses on White women who are in the majority at predominantly white institutions. There we discuss the meaning of *reciprocal development*, referring to the racialized knowledge about racial realities that the junior mentee introduces to the relationship, which may surpass that of her White mentor. Understanding the mentoring space within the Sister Resister model is also discussed. This

speaks to the skills and talents White mentors bring to the relationship that can become a dynamic catalyst for Black female students' personal and academic development, particularly when the mentor is culturally knowledgeable, engaged, and purposeful. The meaning and importance of calling out institutional racism is also covered, as is the application of resistance to both women's everyday lives.

Due to the centrality of relationships in the lives of Black women navigating predominantly White college spaces, our attention in chapter 4 is focused on what Black students say they need and desire when making strong relational connections. Black women's sisterhood is presented. On the other hand, sometimes Black women's relationships with other Black women can lead to conflict due to differences within race and across ethnicity and class. We discuss Black and White women's relationships and explicate the meaning of reconstituting cross-racial relationships that are in the service of healthy resistance. The significance of mentors' honest and validating conversations with mentees particularly about race and racism is a central theme discussed in this chapter and throughout the book. We acknowledge that such conversations can be difficult for women, yet we argue that strong, meaningful, and productive cross-racial mentoring relationships are dependent upon this commitment.

In chapter 5, we discuss the complexities of cultural mistrust within Black and White women's relationships. By understanding the historical roots of these relational disconnections, we explore how women's relationships (both inter- and intraracial) have been used to uphold patriarchy, racism, and other power inequities in the United States. Case studies in this chapter explore how oppressive forces shape institutional curriculum and policies. There is a need for Sister Resisters to respond to institutional practices that impede Black college women's progress, and sometimes this can be done with the support of adult peer mentors. Suboptimal resistance is defined, and the uses of power and privilege are examined as dynamic features that require attention in cross-racial mentoring relationships. Supporting the resistance responses of Black female students can be challenging for both mentors and mentees. Because mentors may be called upon to negotiate this work in less than favorable environments, we discuss the role of courage and perseverance as fundamental to the sustainability of healthy resistance relationships.

In our sixth and final chapter, we present tools for resistance, including decision-making capacities and problem-solving techniques, emotional intelligence to handle race-based affect and resolve race-based conflicts, a strong self-concept, racial self-efficacy, sociopolitical awareness, cultural knowledge, and self-advocacy. We map these skills onto our four-dimensional model: see it, name it, oppose it, and replace it. The prowess of resistance to energize Black women mentees and their mentors echoes through this final chapter and has special relevance within the context of mental health. The economic, psychological, and social disruptions brought on by the worldwide pandemic and the structural inequalities that preceded and worsened during the coronavirus crisis have intensified Black students' mental health needs. We end the final chapter by shedding light on the importance of self-care and allyship in order to do the work of mentoring and resistance. We follow chapter 6 with a list of recommendations that summarize essential tools for staying true to the Sister Resister model.

Now, let's begin with reflections upon our own mentoring experiences.

### *Janie's Mentoring Experiences*

When I attended college in the mid-1970s, there was very little mention of mentoring programs designed for my age group. Mentoring was something that adults (usually men) did after they finished college and were navigating their professional climb up the corporate ladder. Few educators spoke of mentoring as a needed service that colleges had a responsibility to provide to all of their students.

Beginning in the late 1960s, Black and other non-White students entered predominantly White institutions in numbers greater than ever before. The descriptive term we use today, *first-generation students*, had not yet been coined, and from a student's perspective, I don't remember hearing much institutional chatter about what postsecondary education should be doing to meet our specific needs. I attended a tiny, race and economically diverse, progressive hippy high school, with a total population of seventy-two students when everyone bothered to show up. Except for a handful of full-pay families, the kids of color who attended were working class or low income. Many of my White

classmates, on the other hand, were the children of local university professors, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Some were even “legacy kids” whose families had college campus buildings named after them. Despite our economic differences, nearly all of my friends in the diverse group I hung out with were headed to college. Where I grew up in 1973, a postsecondary education after high school was a given. Colleges were expanding, financial aid was plentiful, and, across the nation, the rush was on to diversify college campuses.

I was eighteen years old when I began an accelerated program at Boston University (BU) as a commuter student to lessen the financial burden of that first academic degree. I had very few decisions to make in that program; the curriculum was predetermined, as was the timetable of when the courses were scheduled. I volunteered on weekends at the local public television station, and though I knew it was an unusual aspiration for a nineteen-year-old Black girl, I wanted to become a television director. I loved hanging out in the production control room, with its video switches, mixing consoles, and a director who was large and in charge. The work was tension filled, but creative nonetheless, and only a few people had the technical skills to do it well. I wanted to be one of those people, and after my sophomore year at BU, I decided to transfer to New York University’s film school and follow my dream.

My confidence began to crumble on day one, when for the first time I felt what it meant to be a “first-gen.” The university was huge and confusing, and as a transfer student I had to work my way through its systems largely alone. Lots of other things were unfamiliar too. Living in Manhattan is very different from living in Boston; courses in an art school curriculum are nothing like the prescribed humanities courses I had aced at BU, and professional preparation for a highly competitive, cutthroat career in the entertainment industry was nothing like anything I had known or experienced in my life to date. Although I didn’t know it then, I know now that having a mentor undoubtedly would have helped.

No one I grew up with knew the entertainment business, and I knew little about how my race and my gender would hold me back in the field. While volunteering in public TV, I met maybe one or two Black people in the industry: photographers, audio engineers, and cameramen. I can’t recall any women behind the camera or in the production

studio. Black women who looked like me were nowhere to be found. Many of my White college classmates, on the other hand, had relatives, family friends, or other contacts in the field. They formed their cliques, and I was not in them. The students in my classes showed no inclination to be inclusive, and they expressed no desire to introduce an outsider into what was then an expanding, albeit highly competitive, field. It was more of a quiet, unarticulated cutthroat competitiveness, one I was neither used to nor knew how to navigate. Unclear about the barriers before me, I didn't understand how to deal with being so Black and so female in a lily-white man's profession. Nothing had prepared me for making this leap in life, and rather than risk failure, I slowly abandoned my plans for a career in the industry. I regret to this day being so unschooled about structural racism and sexism and thus unprepared for the professional world. Would a mentor have kept me in the field? Could she have listened to my poorly articulated observations and complaints, and guided me through the unwritten rules in play? Where might I have been today had I received the specialized support and encouragement my unique journey had required? Facing those career decisions as an anxious Black undergraduate with little knowledge of what breaking into the industry would demand of me was frightening and frustrating, and enough to make me abandon my dream.

Graduate school was a different adventure altogether. By then, mentoring had become popular outside of corporate America and I was surrounded by savvy students zealously scouring faculty lists in search of a perfect match. I knew enough to watch what my classmates were doing, but again, there were fewer candid conversations about our postgraduation plans than I expected and desperately needed. At least, that was the case with my White classmates.

My Black and Brown classmates, on the other hand, were eager to break the silences. We'd share what we knew with each other, including our past experiences and our future dreams. Among my Black friends, race and gender were central to nearly all of our conversations. We heatedly debated the invisibility of racial perspectives in the curriculum. We identified how structural racism upheld ideological frameworks within the disciplines we studied. Indeed, the anger we felt about our exclusion in social theory and the deficit framings of racialized minorities in practice was what drew us into graduate school in the first place. Those

conversations with my Black colleagues shaped me; they nurtured my research interests and strengthened my determination to become a change agent in the field of developmental science.

I would have been lost in the absence of the intellectual anchoring and culturally relevant peer mentoring offered by my BIPOC sisters and brothers in graduate school. But their contribution didn't meet all of my preprofessional needs. When it came time to job hunt, my professors offered encouragement, but with very little advice.

It was a tough job market for new academics in the late 1980s, and I was clueless about seeking out an institution best matched to my needs. Should I apply to work at a college or a university? Public or private? School of education or traditional psychology department? Most importantly, I had no idea how, during a job interview, to suss out the *truth* about an institution's racial climate—that is, how the college was really experienced by its Black students, faculty, and staff. Years later, and in the process of writing this book, I've thought a great deal about my professors' silence and the lack of direction they offered. To be blunt, you can't teach what you don't know. As I remember it, many of my nearly all White professors grew up in the upper and middle classes. They graduated from elite and highly selective colleges and universities, and those schools were the only types of institutions that they knew. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't remember any instructors during my graduate studies who had worked in a higher education institution that wasn't at Harvard's level. As a result, they had little to teach me about securing employment and navigating a career in a public university; a small, nonselective liberal arts college; or even a historically black college or university (HBCU). In other words, schools that were, from their perspective, lower tiered and with less status were largely invisible and unknown.

Despite the absence of racially focused faculty mentors, my strongest, most powerful, and most enduring mentoring relationship was with Tracy Lynn Robinson. We were young when we were in graduate school, with much to learn about race and human behavior. We spent countless hours reflecting on our experiences as Black girls frequently forced into acts of resistance (although we didn't have the words then to describe what we were doing). We shared how we learned to push back when necessary and to stand up for our beliefs and identities as

Black women. In the beginning, we focused on racial identity and the character strengths passed on to Black daughters from their mothers. We discovered that resistance as a concept is deep and multifaceted and that not all resistance Black folks participate in serves us well in the long run. We collected and analyzed more data about resistance. We taught each other how to successfully write for scholarly publications, and we kept refining our ideas. Our partnership continued after graduate school. I conducted multigenerational research on Black teens and parents of Black teens, investigating messages they had received about race when growing up. Tracy eventually created multiple quantitative surveys to assess and measure optimal and suboptimal resistance. Most of all, we learned to return to the wealth of our cultural heritage, allowing the wisdom and strength of our sisters, mothers, and other mothers to guide our paths with open eyes and loving hearts.

In writing a book about mentoring Black female students, Tracy and I have necessarily returned to our younger selves. During my undergraduate years, I was the type of student who almost never reached out and asked for help. Although this strategy was somewhat unsuccessful, my personality and temperament led me to repeat these behaviors in graduate school. Representing myself as competent and always together was a life lesson taught to me by a mother who knew little of the professional White world her Black daughter was entering. So perhaps my professors never perceived me as wanting or needing their assistance. Such a performance was, I now realize, a resistance strategy I had developed—one that I thought would assure my survival in the elite educational institutions I had entered. But that adopted strategy was focused on my short-term needs, and over time, it made it harder for me to develop the tools that I might have used to admit my shortcomings and ask for help. Years later, I understand now that I truly needed a mentor.

Strong mentors consider what a mentee could or should be doing to advance her education and professional goals (whether the mentee has considered these possibilities or not). Mentoring across social differences asks that the mentor willingly share her social capital and that she do so with an awareness of the social position she occupies. This relationship has the potential to make visible the inner workings of class consciousness; mentors can exchange with their mentees the valuable knowledge derived from associations with those who have



privilege and wealth. An effective mentor wouldn't leave the task of acquiring such information up to a mentee, especially not one who grew up with fewer economic resources and exposure to far fewer race- and class-based opportunities. In graduate school, I was fortunate to receive research experience with professors I deeply respected, along with recommendations and endorsements, publication opportunities, and public exposure of my work at a time when there were few other Black scholars studying Black girls. And for all that, I am enormously grateful. Yet as had been the case for me in the past, mentoring relationship gaps continue to persist for young Black women today. This book is written for college and university faculty who are willing to be *moral mentors*: individuals who will share their social capital by offering support, suggestions, and recommendations for professional advancement that are race and gender relevant, socially conscious, equitable, and fair.

### *Tracy's Mentoring Experiences*

At a presentation on mentoring at the Women of Color in the Academy Conference, I spoke about the roles of good mentors, identifying that they were tutors, deliverers of constructive feedback, companions along the journey, wisdom sharers, role models, danger-up-ahead whisperers, cocreators of knowledge, stargazers, and speakers to the burning question of, "Do I stay or do I go?" Writing a book about mentoring Black college women has allowed me to reflect upon my relationships with mentors when I was a college student. What I have come to realize is that I never had a declared mentor.

Throughout college and graduate school, I have relied on other young people, and often on their parents, who stood in the gap of my motherless life. I lost my mother the day before I graduated from high school. I entered college less than three months later with a dilemma that occupied my thoughts: "What is life going to look like without my mother? And how am I going to manage?" Prior to my mother's death, my plan had been to stay in my hometown, attend college locally, continue working, and care for my ailing mother. As with any trauma, my life changed. On my eighteenth birthday, I applied to a college eight hours away from my home and, at the same time, applied for financial aid. My mother always taught me that I had to have an ace in the hole,

and higher education was this ace. I felt her wind at my back as I had my gaze fixed on college.

In college, I was oblivious to the concept of mentors despite being in desperate need of a mentoring team. As a peer counselor during my junior year, I reported to a supervisor who was a graduate student. She listened actively and took interest in how I was doing in college in my role as a student leader. As peer counselors, each of us rotated the location of our monthly morning leadership meetings and were required to provide breakfast to the other student leaders in our individual apartments, which were subsidized by the college. I remember being convinced that I should be skipped; I was intimidated by the prospect of making breakfast for eight of my peers, two of whom were supervisors. My supervisor's insistence that I rise to the challenge was a watershed moment for me. I recall how she genuinely listened to my anxiety about cooking but offered no means of exit. Later, she raved over my scrambled eggs, which were not hard to make. After all, my mother had taught me how to make breakfast. The outcome was ultimately greater confidence and a sense of mastery. I learned to push past my preconceived notions of what I could and could not do.

Reflecting back on this memory, although I did not recognize it at the time, I had performance anxiety. I was on stage for all to see and felt scrutinized by my White peers as a Black girl at a Christian college that revered Whiteness, all in the name of Jesus. Race and racism were driving forces, but I lacked the skills to detect, name, and oppose this dynamic. I was the only Black person in that Peer Counselor Leadership group of eight, and one of a small handful of Black students on the entire campus. The silence surrounding the ubiquity of racism was profound. However, the position provided me with lodging and a stipend, critical for remaining in school and finishing my degree. The stakes were high.

The student development program at my undergraduate institution had close proximity to mentoring. As a peer counselor, I welcomed this opportunity for self-appraisal, outback wilderness experiences, leadership development, reflective prompts, and readings. I grew immensely, but my racial identity did not. The program was strangely silent about race, as was the entire curriculum. How did this silence happen during the 1970s era? After all, we were located in Southern California, just

thirty-five miles east of Los Angeles, where scholarly writing, poetry, and artistry flourished. Black, Asian, Latino, and feminist power voices were rising. People were writing, speaking, protesting, performing, marching, singing songs, and sharing stories of resistance. The literature on racial, ethnic, and sexual identity development grew significantly during these years. Yet on my small Christian college campus, this energy, vitality, and scholarship was woefully missing. To identify and interrogate my proximity to the drape of Whiteness required a politically active community that did not exist.

During my senior year of college, I became even more attuned to how overt and loud racial silence was on campus. I recall asking the college president why there were no Black and Chicano faculty on campus. He stated that the only applications for employment from Blacks and Mexicans were for maintenance positions. Despite the racial silence, my experiences as a student leader fortified my sense of confidence. I doubt if I would have applied to graduate school without the leadership experiences, interpersonal relationships, and physiological safety that my college provided.

After leaving college, I started graduate school at Harvard. My Black academic peers furnished me with the substantial racial community that I was missing. Learning from them about race and how they successfully navigated racism in their academic and personal lives was akin to receiving a new pair of glasses. This new way of seeing the world allowed me to envision more clearly my place in it as a young Black woman.

I arrived at graduate school eager, excited, and exceptionally poor. It was a good day, and a rare one, when I had enough money to buy both a fifty-cent cup of coffee from Warburton's in Harvard Square and afford a fifty-cent token to ride the MBTA bus to my work-study job. More stressful than the academic work was the calculus of how to rub two pennies together. Along the way, there were kind souls—angels, I call them—who sensed my vulnerability and offered me advice on education, jobs, opportunities, even layering clothing for cold weather. My circle of school friends was vital to my comfort, retention, and success. There was no topic outside the scope of discussion.

Although none of us was rich, there were differences among us regarding financial and social capital. Some of us received formal mentoring

from faculty, and some of us did not. The haphazard approach to mentoring students who are all in need of the commodity and benefits of mentoring means that inequity is inevitable. Lack of mentoring has far-reaching economic, occupational, emotional, and social consequences. My group of sisters and brothers were fabulous and generous, freely sharing their knowledge with me. But what would it have meant to be mentored by a faculty member who intentionally prepared me for the professoriate or for a research career? Given that I was not formally mentored, I questioned, albeit privately, why I had not been chosen and taken under the wing of a faculty member. I assumed that my lower-tiered Christian college, as well as not being part of an esteemed faculty member's prestigious research lab, marked me as less worthy of investment and not promising enough. The elitism of higher education is real and it cares an awful lot about students' pedigree, position, and prestige.

What must the mentee do and who must the mentee be to have a mentor offer their time, treasure, and talent to the growth of a yearning young adult? These private queries were my own. For me to have arrived at graduate school was a feat in and of itself, and though I saw the power, pride, and promise in my journey, I still wondered: What did the mentored students possess that I did not? I neither knew how to nor did I dare to initiate such bold conversation to answer my questions.

At their best, mentoring programs identify, train, and support mentors who in turn cultivate a meaningful relationship with their mentees. A bond exists in this shared space. Investment in the mentee's success is nested within a tradition of apprenticeship, sharing wisdom and craft over time because the mentor has a belief in the mentee's potential and commits to shaping the next generation.

Although I have never had an identified mentor, I had people who functioned as mentors, looking out for potholes and land mines that I had no awareness of. During my first year in the doctoral program, I needed TMJ surgery that would result in my jaw being wired shut for six weeks. Because of a congenital overbite, not to mention years of anxiety-related teeth grinding, surgery was required to realign my bite and to relieve chronic pain. After surgery, I needed to take nutrients through a straw. At the time, I lived in a dorm with a kitchen down the hall and shared a refrigerator with over twenty women on my floor. A better

solution was needed. Janie Ward and her angel mother anticipated what I could not see and purchased a ton of green food, pureed it, and packed it in their freezer for me.

During the second year of my doctoral program, I was a graduate resident advisor. In this role I received housing and a stipend and did meaningful student development work. But my financial situation was still bleak. Having grown weary of my chronic whining about a lack of money, Janie told me, “Get a real job.” Well! I did not appreciate her words, and yet they lit a fire under me. I applied for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and this action introduced me to a career in counseling. For two years, I worked at a historically Black college in North Carolina as the director of counseling. In this environment, I blossomed professionally, personally, and academically. I was also able to collect data, free of charge, for my dissertation. After graduate school, my dissertation advisor helped me secure my postdoc, for which I was truly grateful.

Good mentors anticipate their mentees’ developmentally appropriate indecision, confusion, and ambivalence while growing their mentees’ competence and confidence. Had I known that intentional mentoring existed as a protected space for guidance, growth, and gentleness, I would have been bolder with risk-taking and mistake making. I would have been more compassionate about my naivete and recognized my vulnerability due to the concurrent stressors in my life.

My challenges were many, but my assets were greater. I had faith in God, a community of people who loved me, and the benefit of nearly eighteen years of exceptional mothering. My mother was the original Sister Resister, having taught me early that I would have to “run twice as fast to get half as far.” Her words clarified my path. Her edict was to run long and hard, not to win the accolades of a discriminatory society but to embrace the goodness in life and to expect greatness from myself. My father never missed a graduation. He showered me with his wisdom and introduced me to colleagues who were caring and helpful. My grandparents, siblings, aunties, stepmother, uncle, and precious cousin poured sweetness into my life and anchored me through adulthood.

Janie has had an indelible impact on my scholarship, resistance, identity, decision-making, and sense of family that is divinely inspired. I like to think that our mothers are close girlfriends in heaven. We dedicate this book to all the young Black women who rely on skilled and

competent mentors. Sister Resisters, across race, hue, ethnicity, and a host of differences, shine brightly your lamps to illuminate paths and commit to using your skills, truth, and conviction with your mentees. They need you in ways that they themselves can scarcely comprehend or voice.