LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE

An Interview with

Sylvia Hurtado
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ABOUT THE INTERVIEW SERIES

In March 2019, ACE held a plenary session at its 101st Annual Meeting called "Talking About Race." During the panel discussion, Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" and Other Questions About Race*, and Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, candidly discussed the role of race in America and on college campuses. Moderated by Lorelle L. Espinosa, ACE's vice president for research, and generously sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the panel emphasized the importance of college leaders engaging on issues of race and racism with their campus communities.

Continuing the discussion started by the panel, the Let's Talk About Race interview series captures the voices of prominent higher education scholars and leaders as they share their perspectives and experiences on race and ethnicity in higher education.

This series supplements ACE's *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*, which examines over 200 indicators, looking at who gains access to educational environments and experiences, and how trajectories differ by race and ethnicity. Additional detail about *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education* can be found at **equityinhighered.org**. To watch the panel discussion that inspired this series, please visit **acenet.edu/ACE2019Race**.

ABOUT SYLVIA HURTADO

Sylvia Hurtado is professor, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the Division of Higher Education and Organizational Change. She served as director of the Higher Education Research Institute for over a decade. Her numerous publications focus on undergraduate education, student development in college, and diversity in higher education. She is past president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and served on the boards of the Higher Learning Commission and initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Recent national projects include research on the pathways of underrepresented students in scientific research and professional careers (National Institutes of Health/National Science Foundation), and student and institutional outcomes of diverse and broad access institutions in higher education (Ford Foundation). She obtained her degrees from UCLA (PhD), Harvard Graduate School of Education (MEd), and Princeton University (AB).

Q: What do you think the role of higher education is in breaking down barriers, across race in particular?

There are a few ways to think about higher education. One is that it is an institution that reflects society. And another component of that is higher education's role in promoting social progress in that it reflects the society we aspire to become.

That is probably the distinction that we need to make: is [the role of higher education] to reify the racial and economic stratifications that exist or is it to create greater equity and a more diverse democracy? I think it's the latter. There are a lot of people that have been writing and thinking about that deeply: what does that mean for training college students, for preparing them for what would be a diverse and equitable democracy? I think that higher education has always played a role in educating citizens and we expect [citizens] to be enlightened, but we are also aware that they come from very segregated high schools. So this becomes an important opportunity to push the restart button and rethink the way the world works. That's why we hope we are producing great thinkers in higher education: to rethink what we have done in the past, and build on our successes to achieve a vision that is greater than all of us.

Q: When you think about your own life experiences and professional preparation, how did you obtain a knowledge base in these issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice?

Well, I think it came directly from my own background and identities as they developed in college. For the most part, I grew up in a segregated town, [and went to] a predominantly Latino high school. And then went to higher education, which was [at a] predominantly White institution. When I got to college, the inequalities hit me right in the face. It was not just coming from a different racial or ethnic background—they thought that Mexican Americans were something like Native Americans and that we were exotic. It was just very strange to me as a freshman thinking the world that I knew and grew up with was foreign to others. So that was the immediate big difference. Particularly at the East Coast schools, I used to think, "Well, they don't know anything about what happens west of the Mississippi. And maybe don't even care to a certain extent."

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[It was like] no one understood my identity. People had developed and lived in the Southwest and had been there for years before the Pilgrims arrived. [Not knowing that is] ignoring the larger part of the whole North and South American hemisphere. So it immediately hit me that people who went to school at the most elite colleges really didn't understand what it was like to live in a different part of the United States—and particularly to live in a predominantly Latino community and a low-income community. They didn't understand any of that.

The inequality also hit me when I realized how poorly my high school was resourced. All the students in my intro bio class [at college] had had the text in their academies, and I was learning the material for the first time. The inequalities became very, very present. I was fortunate to have some very good roommates, from Puerto Rico and from Brookline, Massachusetts, and they were more counterculture kind of people and really questioning. So that was a really wonderful experience in itself. Encountering people from different areas, learning from each other. That was the joy of college.

The downside was that there were large groups [for whom] this world was foreign to them. These different and multiple realities are being lived in the United States on a daily basis. Then we encounter each other in college. There are any number of stories I can tell about what happened in the classroom

regarding some of these issues. Even the instructor didn't understand what my experience was, and how that played into some of the articles we were reading at the time.

It turns out my high school district was part of a law case in terms of school finance, and it was the poorest district in the state of Texas. An instructor said, "[The disadvantages] didn't really matter because you are here." And I'm thinking, "Yeah, but I was wondering if I would ever get here, into college and into this classroom."

I wanted to continue to highlight and understand and share with the rest of the world what these experiences were like for students transitioning into college, for students coming from low-income, first-generation backgrounds and students coming from the most underrepresented groups.

I think by living it, you begin to really develop that critical mind, and I think that college really helped me in that regard, as it did my peers. There were others that were much more politically oriented than I had been and they could name some of the things I had experienced but didn't realize. The good thing about social science research is that we have names for these experiences. They [researchers] have a really good literature base to understand everything from racial prejudice to issues of poverty and the consequences of that.

I realized as I was writing my first article from my dissertation on campus climate—I was really writing about my own experience, except I was using thousands of college students in a national survey to talk about it. The findings were so resonant with my own experience, but the phenomenon was so widespread. [The data said] the most selective colleges had the most hostile climate, according to Black and Chicano students. There it was. It wasn't just me. It was a broader phenomenon that was happening across many colleges.

I wanted to continue to highlight and understand and share with the rest of the world what these experiences were like for students transitioning into college, for students coming from low-income, first-generation backgrounds and students coming from the most underrepresented groups. Coming to these campuses was not an easy thing. And they have overcome a lot of adversity to get there and they continue to face adversity on college campuses. I think over time campuses have gotten much more responsive to students, but we have to think about what that means in terms of what happens in the classroom.

Q: What kind of training do you recommend for faculty, or how do we bring them up to speed on these issues?

I think part of what your question actually addresses is that a lot of faculty believe that if they treat everyone equally, then that's equity. And it's not. Students come to us with distinct social identities.

[A faculty member in science might say,] "Race is not part of science because science is objective and universal. None of this should matter. Therefore, I'm not racist because I don't think about it." No, it's a privilege not to think about it or to remain unaware. That's a privilege, because it doesn't impact your life. The students that you teach, that's not a privilege that they have. They have to live every day with the inequalities and with the racism that comes up.

Social identity and diversity is in every classroom. If faculty ignore that, then I think they have ignored an important component of what constitutes learning in college and what can enhance learning in the classroom. In terms of training, I think we have to help them understand that students don't remove identities like they take a robe off when they walk into the classroom. It's part of who they are.

Faculty perform their own identities in the classroom. I think that's what they don't realize. They

are performing their own White male identity in the classroom in ways that students pick up on, and assumptions are made coming from that identity. One of the [assumptions], of course, is that, "If I don't think about race, then I'm color-blind and I'm not racist." Well, that's not really the case because it's still present in the classroom. If you are doing some engaged or active pedagogies, you have to be aware of group dynamics. A lot of faculty talk about ways to get students to work together. For the kind of collaborative work we are asking for in active learning classrooms, we have to be aware of some of those dynamics that involve race, income, and all those other things that come into play in the middle of doing science.

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I'm really excited about a new project with the University of Wisconsin in terms of culturally aware mentor training for faculty. NIH will be sponsoring some research on mentoring and we're one of these sponsored projects. We'll be training science faculty about being culturally aware, in the lab context and the classroom context, and also in their mentoring processes with graduate and undergraduate students. Identity is a really important part of understanding how mentoring works in all of those interactions.

It's understanding how to develop someone, but also learning from that mentee in terms of thinking about the world. It's much more of an exchange than it is a one-way learning opportunity for faculty. We're going to be focusing on trying to promote good mentoring practices that are also culturally aware.

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Another thing that's happening which I'm excited about is another NIH project. I developed a model of inclusive science, based on the activities and practices that campuses are implementing now. It involves thinking about topics such as health disparities in populations and thinking about the curriculum in ways that are quite innovative, in order to attract diverse men and women into the sciences. Science can help a variety of communities, like new discoveries in terms of health for these different populations. That's why I think expanding both a curriculum and diversity in science can be very useful. Even in science, they are talking about campus climate now. They are talking about climates in the classroom. Some campuses are now training on implicit bias and also thinking about how, instead of ignoring race, you take it into account. You understand that there are going to be some racial difficulties. And you find ways to really figure out and learn through a process of working through the conflict how to resolve it.

Q: Do you see implicit bias training as a very effective way for campuses to train faculty and staff?

I think implicit bias training is becoming very popular. There is a lot of science on it. But I think we haven't really learned enough about what happens subsequently. Right now, we are using it for faculty search committees, right? So search committees go through a certification of implicit bias training and try to create a fair and broadly inclusive search. It's creating greater awareness, and also causing people to realize that their initial intention might be just to select someone who is like them. I think the implicit

bias training for faculty searches is extremely useful because it's right when they need it—right before they start the search. Having this training at key points can be extremely useful in decision-making.

There is also a "J curve" with any training with faculty. You get an initial high-interest cognition and awareness and then it drops because you need a second dose. You need to have another training that extends it further. For example, I did a diversity strategic planning assessment for a campus and found that they have an organizational learning officer. This person has faculty and staff go through the first stage of developing an awareness, and then has a second and third stage prepared for learning about equity, diversity and inclusion. So there were different points in time that people received information. Examining implicit biases is only the beginning of awareness and more research on practice is needed. There are other things that people need second and third doses of to become effective leaders and to manage diverse people. This is a very thoughtful way of thinking about higher education as a learning organization. Let's think about training as part of the learning that we all do.

The assumption is that we don't have identities. And that's actually wrong. It's a major shift in thinking about taking identities into account because all of us have them. It's great to teach students that every person—White, Black, Latino—we have multiple social identities. And some of them are salient in different contexts and different situations.

We have some science about this kind of training and how it needs to be done. We borrow some of that from what we know in terms of teaching and learning, training of pedagogy, and mentoring. It's not enough to just know the information that is the part of the learning conversation, but to know how to implement it and then help people to problem-solve those issues.

A lot of professions would do well in having this kind of training. It's great to see some higher education institutions really taking this very seriously. At UCLA, we are certified for four years, and we all go through another training in four years to participate in search committees. That's very useful because you are assuming all the committee is on the same page about these issues on bias and discrimination in hiring practices.

Q: If money was not a factor, how would you educate students differently that would help them to be more critically conscious and equity minded as they move into the world?

Some things require investment of resources. No question. But there are a lot of things that we do in our daily work in higher education and within our teaching, research, and service that can be much more broadly inclusive that also result in helping to train them as critical thinkers. I think it comes to the first point of really being student-centered and understanding that identities are part of everything that we do. It is how we make connections with the world and what we value with those identities.

The assumption is that we don't have identities. And that's actually wrong. It's a major shift in thinking about taking identities into account because all of us have them. It's great to teach students that every person—White, Black, Latino—we have multiple social identities. And some of them are salient in different contexts and different situations. That's what we teach in dialogue.

I always saw dialogue as a very progressive tool for really getting people to engage with each other. To expect conflict instead of avoid it, and train people to work through the conflict. To be able to build alliances about goals that are going to be much more equitable and social-justice-oriented. Having an action plan that results after the conversation is very

important. That's not what all dialogues have done, but it's part of the pedagogy we use to make sure there is an action plan. Once people create an awareness, that's the "woke" part. You have to go beyond "woke" to really get to action and change. And that's sometimes showing people how to do it, through opportunities like immersion experiences and dialogue. It is an opportunity to reflect on what they are learning in that process, because you certainly don't want them to walk away with a higher sense of themselves as being on the mid-level of Kohlberg's moral development theory like, "I'm a good person." That [level] doesn't get you to justice. That's not the point of it. The point is to be empathic, to create solutions, to develop action plans, and to be reflective of your own role in this process.

I think we are getting much better at it. We really need to think about moving towards actionable plans that will help us see how we can work differently, how we can work better and create the equitable and social-justice-oriented society that we want to live in. We have to move in a direction that's going to be unifying and a direction that's going to be inclusive. We've become extremely tolerant of bad behavior. And I think we have to kind of reclaim processes that make us better able to work with differences.

Our students are critical, and I'm lifted up every day by their optimism. When I hear them thinking differently, it gives me a lot of hope. I had a project called Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy. It was a really engaged project working with 10 universities. It was to think about asking these questions at the very start of their freshman year and engaging them with each other and using the best of what we have learned about what learning with diversity can produce. It was aspirational, but it's still a really important part of how I think. I like the collective aspect of working on these issues.

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Q: Let's shift gears to leaders. What do you think are the most immediate opportunities for that group, but specifically for presidents when it comes to cultivating inclusive campuses?

The cabinet has to be diverse. That process signals to the rest of the campus that we are going to be inclusive. And not just racially diverse. But also diverse in terms of being able to be critical—in other words, you don't want a bunch of "yes" people. You want people who are going to bring different perspectives who are going to be able to help make good decisions.

I see a number of presidents, now that I have done several case studies of institutions, who really articulate the values. They allow the ideas to come from the bottom up. They encourage the grassroots engagement. But they also support it in the way of funding and the articulation of expectations. So I think it really is a both/and approach. I think the presidents really do play an important role in helping to shape and change the culture of the campus. It's not an easy thing, but there have been some real naturals at this. They know it's about helping people in their daily work on the campus. They embody the values that are going to be so important to changing how we make decisions, who we teach, how we teach, and better serving students. For example, I have interviewed staff people on a campus and they, to a person, repeat the exact same phrase. "Expect respect," for example. Leadership has changed the language of people from top to the bottom, and that's really important to begin to change the culture.

Leaders do play an important role in not only just signaling externally but also internally. They do this by supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion. They provide the funding. They are doing some key things to say "now we are making a commitment" so that people say, "Oh, this is a signal." Another could be requiring mid-managers, deans, and department chairs to be able to communicate the same things, and have them trained to be able to sustain and increase equity, diversity and inclusion. That middle group is very important in making sure that there is accountability.

Presidents can help with some kind of accountability mechanism. [Maybe] that's at the end of the fiscal year, as we are planning the budget and asking the questions, "Where are we going in terms of diversity? What kinds of assistance do you need? What have you accomplished?" Both deans and department chairs begin to get the message of, not only, "We'd better do something" but "If we have some good ideas, it actually might get funded for as long as we need it." In other words, they won't be short-term things, but more sustainable kinds of change in the institution.

A lot of presidents have, for example, chancellor's scholars programs centered on students of color. UNC Chapel Hill has a Chancellor's Science Scholars program for students in STEM fields. It is a strong support program for these students. I think presidents like to have scholars programs because it signals that we are going to use this for recruitment of diverse students. We are going to use these programs to diversify STEM. We are going to use this and really show how it can be done. We can produce amazing scientists of color.

There are also post-doc programs that come with faculty lines. Those are very useful to diversifying the faculty, which has been the slowest to develop. A lot of campuses have made a lot of progress in other areas, but you look at their faculty members and there have just been very small changes. Providing funding to really make some substantial change is really important. Leaders are really key to redirecting funds. I think Nancy Cantor, who is now at Rutgers Newark, really rearranged her budgets to actually fund some really innovative things that came from the bottom up. This says, "Submit a proposal. These are the kind of great things we want to do." Of course, she is fairly unique. She says, "We are not just in Newark, we are of Newark. We are part of the fabric here."

To have that articulated just reinforces what people at the ground level working with students know and do every day. It's affirming to them that their work is affirmed because they believe in it. It's great to see that connection from the top and from the grassroots level.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add to the conversation around race and higher education or education or in America?

I want to say that a lot of campuses could do more. There is such unrealized potential there. We're finishing up the science of mentoring report for the National Academies of Sciences, but that was one of our major findings—this unrealized potential of what could happen. Something like mentoring happens every day, but it happens in more select groups. By really rethinking those things, we begin to realize how important it is more broadly and we are able to implement it more broadly. It really takes thought and it takes commitment. I think that there are some great institutional examples that are doing amazing things. [The University of] Michigan has always

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been one of them. We have just gone through their five-year plan—it was me, the provost of Northwestern, Jonathan Holloway, and Patrick Sims at University of Wisconsin, the CDO there. We went to do the external review and deliver the report and their program is just amazingly comprehensive.

I don't expect as many campuses to be able to implement that so broadly across all levels. But it was just an amazing thing to watch. It doesn't mean that it wasn't difficult, or not tiring or taxing, and there is a high accountability component built in. But the fact that they are doing it, I think reinvigorates and changes—it's going to change the campus. They are still going to have some of them in place that will continue. I think that's what more campuses can do. In this case, it was a new president who said, "We are going to do this. We are going to reinvigorate this." And they did it.

It has just changed expectations. It's so inclusive of staff, because staff is neglected on most campuses with some of these issues. They are so engaged and they have a place in all of this. There are some areas that are not hard lifts for institutions to do. But it could make a major difference by doing this with staff. They have actually improved the student experience by doing that.


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