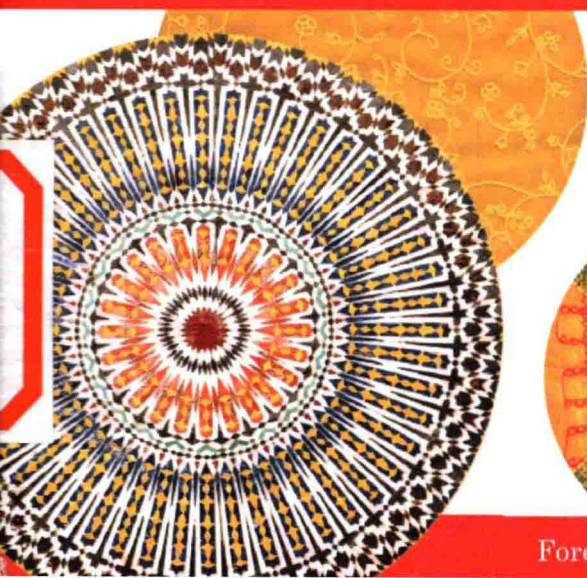




# CULTURE CENTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Perspectives on Identity, Theory, and Practice*

Edited by **LORI D. PATTON**



Foreword by **GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS**

"Why do students need cultural centers in the 21st century? Haven't we moved past dividing into separate racial and ethnic groups? Given what we know about the origins and history of student cultural centers it seems appropriate to have a volume that looks across a variety of perspectives at cultural centers and asks hard questions about their utility, viability, and sustainability in difficult economic times. This is a collection that should find a welcome home on the shelves of college and university administrators and higher education scholars alike." —**Gloria Ladson-Billings**, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"This book documents how these centers honor and validate cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and inspire academic excellence and achievement among students without their having to lose cultural identity or values. As our nation becomes increasingly diverse, these centers serve as models of social justice and thus this book is a must read for all who want to ensure that their institution provides environments that exude academic success and achieve graduation for all students with their soul and identity whole." —**Mildred García**, President, California State University, Dominguez Hills

"Dr. Lori Patton and colleagues put flesh on bones here as they make a strong case for campus-based culture centers in the lives of the racially underrepresented students they serve. Through theoretical, organizational, administrative, and programming models these authors survey the evolving landscape of cultural practices intent on celebrating and supporting the identities of multicultural students. A compelling and provocative front-line treatment of the topic, this is a resourceful compendium for anyone committed to the diversification of the 21st century campus." —**Carney Strange**, Professor, Bowling Green State University; Author of *Educating by Design: Creating Campus Learning Environments That Work*

"*Culture Centers in Higher Education* helps to fill a major void in higher education scholarship. It offers insight and evidence as to the importance of student culture centers as both sanctuaries and sites of resistance. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in better understanding the challenges of race and ethnicity on U.S. campuses and the importance culture centers play in the lives of students." —**Robert Rhoads**, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

This book fills a significant void in the research on ethnic minority cultural centers, offers the historic background to their establishment and development, considers the circumstances that led to their creation, examines the roles they play on campus, explores their impact on retention and campus climate, and provides guidelines for their management in the light of current issues and future directions.

**The Editor:** Lori D. Patton is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University.

**Stylus**  
PUBLISHING, LLC  
22883 Quicksilver Drive  
Sterling, VA 20166-2102  
www.Styluspub.com

ISBN 978-1-57922-232-1



9781579222321

# CULTURE CENTERS HIGHER EDUCATION

sty/cus

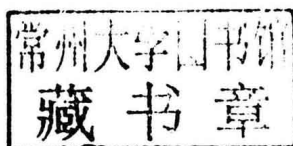
# CULTURE CENTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Perspectives on Identity, Theory, and Practice

---

*Edited by Lori D. Patton*

Foreword by Gloria Ladson-Billings



Stylus

STERLING, VIRGINIA



COPYRIGHT © 2010 BY STYLUS PUBLISHING, LLC.

Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC  
22883 Quicksilver Drive  
Sterling, Virginia 20166-2102

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, recording and information storage and retrieval, without permission in writing from the publisher.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication-Data**  
Culture centers in higher education : perspectives on  
identity, theory, and practice / edited by Lori Patton ;  
foreword by Gloria Ladson-Billings.  
1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-57922-231-4 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-57922-232-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Minority college students—United States—Social  
conditions. 2. Education, Higher—Social  
aspects—United States. 3. Multiculturalism—United  
States. 4. Group identity—United States. 5. United  
States—Race relations. 6. United States—Ethnic  
relations.

I. Patton, Lori D.

LC3731.C845 2010

378.1'982—dc22

2009042237

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-231-4 (cloth)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-232-1 (paper)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid free paper  
that meets the American National Standards Institute  
Z39-48 Standard.

**Bulk Purchases**

Quantity discounts are available for use in workshops  
and for staff development.

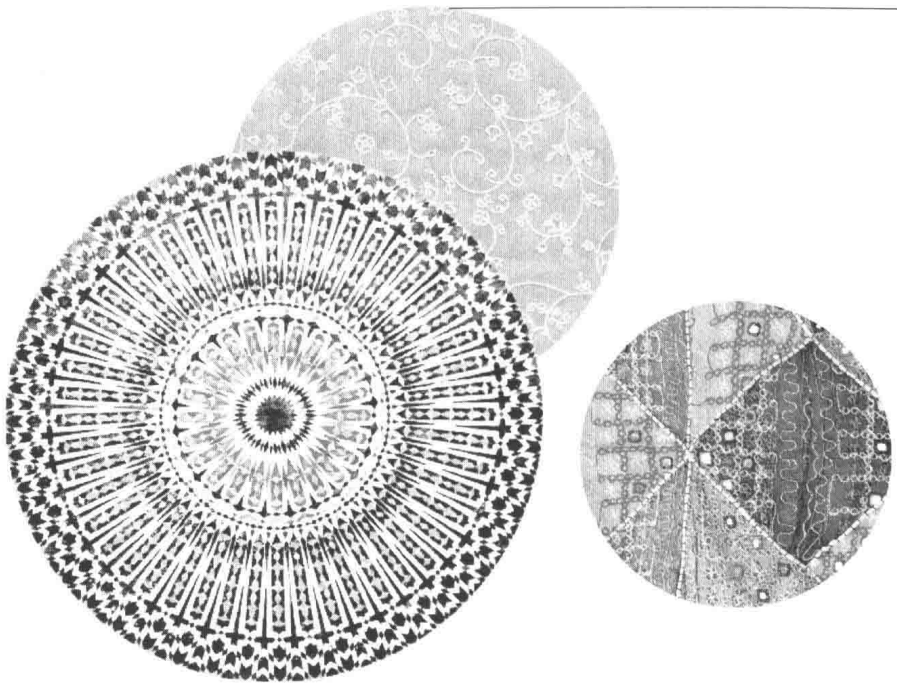
Call 1-800-232-0223

First Edition, 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CULTURE CENTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION





*To my parents,  
who, no matter what,  
consistently encourage me  
to pursue my dreams*





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of individuals made significant contributions to the completion of this book. I would like to thank my partner, Tobias Davis, for his continuous support, for listening when I needed to vent, and for providing the necessary time and space for me to work on this project. I am also thankful to Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton for serving as my dissertation chair and encouraging me to continue to write about culture centers as an aspect of my research agenda. I am also grateful to her for encouraging me to pursue this book project. I also acknowledge Dr. Shaun Harper, Dr. Michelle McClure, Dr. Ontario Wooden, and Chayla Haynes for their constant support as colleagues and dear friends. I would also like to thank my graduate assistant, Natasha Croom, for providing feedback, keeping materials organized, maintaining contact with the contributors, proofreading, and assisting me with pulling the book together in its final stages. Lastly, this book would not have been possible without the wonderful perspectives and insights shared by the contributors. I appreciate each of these individuals for remaining patient and dedicated for the duration of this project.



## FOREWORD

**M**y interest in campus culture centers stems from my own place in the historical unfolding of such centers. At the ripe old age of 17, I made the decision to attend a historically Black college. Having attended an integrated high school and grown up in a northern city where race was never far from the thoughts of most adults I encountered, I hoped for a college experience that might allow me to place race “on the shelf” for a few years. Of course, the idea of not dealing with race in the United States is a fiction. It is particularly unfeasible for an African American. However, my participation in protests and social change took place in the safety of an almost all-Black college community. We marched on city hall, we protested the war in Vietnam, and we stood in vigil over the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. However, we never had to worry about racism on campus. We did not need a separate place to congregate to talk about how race and culture were affecting our lives. We could have those conversations anywhere—in our dormitories, in the dining hall, on the quad, or in the student center.

When I went to graduate school on the West Coast, I began to see how important these culture centers were (and are) to the intellectual and social growth of the students who access them. The establishment of the Black Community Services Center at my graduate school was a result of the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It, along with some theme houses, provided a place of refuge and a place of service for Black students. Today, that center provides services to 35 Black volunteer service organizations along with advising, training, and social networking. Its services extend beyond graduation in coordination with the Black alumni organization.

Why do students need culture centers in the 21st century? Haven’t we moved past the need to divide into separate racial and ethnic groups? With all that we know about the spurious nature of race as a category, why are we continuing to use the category as a basis for organizing into separate and distinct groups? The answer to this question lies in the reality of life in the United States and on our college campuses. Despite advertising themselves

as open and democratic spaces where the marketplace of ideas allows for different and divergent viewpoints, many college and university campuses remain difficult places for students of color to negotiate.

One of the organizations at the Student Associations Fair on a campus in the Southwest recently had a table with a sign proclaiming: "Catch an Illegal Immigrant—Get \$100K." Students from the organization wore bright orange T-shirts with the words "Illegal Immigrant" written across the back. One of these students would take off running, and the participant was prompted to chase and retrieve him or her. Upon returning the student to the table, the successful "border agent" received a 100 Grand candy bar. This occurred on a campus where 12.7% of the student population is Latina/o.

Perusing the newspapers, we can find numerous incidents of racial harassment and intimidation. These places that we believe should be safe havens often are not. Students of color often report feeling isolated and misunderstood on the campuses of predominately White institutions. They are less likely to use conventional university services like academic advisors, counseling centers, or mainstream student organizations to deal with their feelings and concerns. Thus the student culture center becomes a source of support and comfort.

In addition to providing social and psychological support for students of color, well-developed centers also serve as an important educational corrective. These centers support lectures, artistic exhibits, workshops, performing arts, and library collections beyond the typical campus offerings. They are places where members of the mainstream and members of a variety of cultural groups can learn about the history, culture, and experiences of others.

Given what we know about the origins and history of student culture centers, a volume that looks at a variety of perspectives regarding cultural centers and asks hard questions about their utility, viability, and sustainability in difficult economic times seems appropriate. As editor, Lori Patton has assembled an outstanding group of scholars who bring multiple lenses to the question of the place of racial/ethnic culture centers on the 21st-century campus. This is a collection that should find a warm welcome on the shelves of college and university administrators and higher education scholars alike.

Gloria Ladson-Billings  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

## A CALL TO ACTION

### Historical and Contemporary Reflections on the Relevance of Campus Culture Centers in Higher Education

*Lori D. Patton*

In hard times, it is especially important to create homeplaces: safe places among trusted friends to seek refuge and dress wounds of battle and places for hard conversations, where differences can be aired and strategy mapped, where we can struggle with and affirm one another.

—Charles R. Lawrence III, 2002

In 2004, I completed the first dissertation to focus on the significance of Black culture centers (BCCs) in higher education. As I endeavored to complete the study, it became abundantly clear that the information on culture centers was limited and that there was a need for more research on this particular topic. Much of what I found was historical and focused on the student protests of the 1960s and 1970s. As I read, I realized that the historical literature on BCCs consistently characterized administrators and higher education institutions in general as resistant to change. However, I would argue that another form of resistance was taking place on campuses across the country. Black students were resistant to the discrimination and isolation they felt at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). They were resistant to the lack of change and extremely active during this period of unrest. In order to practice resistance, they galvanized to form coalitions and identified spaces where they could continue resistance.

As I conceptualized this volume, I searched for a quote that encapsulated why I envision culture centers as spaces of resistance. The epigraph eloquently captures the sense of culture centers as counterspaces, a home away from home, and a haven in a hostile territory. The history of culture centers is rooted in a struggle for students to hold institutions of higher education accountable. They made a host of demands to ensure that their experiences were represented and supported in the cultural, academic, and social contexts of the university. BCCs have existed on college campuses dating back to the Black student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They served as the impetus for the establishment of multicultural centers and culture centers representing various racial/ethnic populations. Although they boast a 40-year history, much remains to be learned about their historical roots, current status, and future presence on college campuses. Moreover, the various culture center models and the role that such centers play in the experiences of students are minimally represented in the current literature.

The purpose of this book is to offer an in-depth understanding of culture centers and their role in higher education. This volume is designed to provide readers with multiple perspectives on campus culture centers at PWIs. The chapters in this book provide theoretical lenses through which readers can view culture centers, as well as scholarship that identifies the issues and challenges associated with culture centers.

My hope is that this book will fill a significant void in the literature on culture centers. Despite their significant history, there is only one book on the topic, and it focuses specifically on BCCs. Fred Hord's *Black Culture Centers: Politics of Survival and Identity* is a pioneering work, the first of its kind to address historical and contemporary perspectives regarding BCCs. There remains a need to examine the landscape of culture centers in higher education. As a result of the huge gap in the literature, very little is known about these facilities, which leaves room for erroneous assumptions and criticisms about their value in the absence of substantial evidence. *Culture Centers in Higher Education* sheds light on the genesis of culture centers at PWIs and their current contributions. Quite often, culture centers are viewed as promoting segregation and separatism from the larger campus body. The perspectives offered in this volume clarify the mission of the centers, explain their leadership role and programmatic initiatives, and describe the services they provide to students. Knowledge of these diverse perspectives is essential to recognizing the larger mission of culture centers; a mission rooted in



bringing voice, support, and celebration to college students, particularly those from racially underrepresented populations. This book is also designed to provide insight into students' experiences at PWIs, where culture centers are disproportionately represented.

This book can serve several purposes. For administrators and researchers who are unfamiliar with these facilities, we hope its insights will lead to increased support for ethnic minority student populations on campuses. This book can be beneficial in providing information that will help universities improve the experiences of their students—even those institutions with no culture center and no plans to establish one. For campuses that host culture centers, this book will reinforce their importance and role on campus.

## **Audiences**

This book is intended for several audiences, first and foremost those who serve as leaders of culture centers and similar facilities. As a result of the tightening of institutional budgets, administrators of culture centers are under increasing pressure to make a sound case for continued or additional funding. This book provides evidence justifying the continued existence of culture centers on campus. It is a valuable tool for assessing their viability, improving their functioning, and ensuring their future relevance. Moreover, it is a practical resource that can be utilized to inform decisions about sustaining a culture center.

This book is useful for institutions considering the creation of a culture center or similar facility on campus. The contributors provide recommendations and describe models from which other institutions might generate ideas. This book can also be used in the classroom. Faculty who teach student affairs courses will find this book to be a great resource for courses that focus on the campus environment, and courses concerned with diversity and multiculturalism in higher education. This book also contributes to the work of researchers who are interested in investigating the role of culture centers in higher education.

## **Organization of the Book**

This book is divided into three parts. Part One provides perspectives on culture centers from the point of view of various racial/ethnic identity groups.

In chapter 1, Adele Lozano discusses the role that campus environments play in the persistence and retention of Latina/o college students, as well as the ways in which Latina/o culture centers can be positioned to mediate campus environments that often devalue Latina/o culture. In chapter 2, William Ming Liu, Michael J. Cuyjet, and Sunny Lee discuss the impact of culture centers on Asian American college students. Specifically, they highlight the cultural needs of Asian American students and examine how culture center initiatives can foster supportive and safe environments for this population of students. The authors of chapter 3 envision American Indian culture centers as “islands of sanctuary” that can address many of the challenges that these students face while attending college. Heather J. Shotton, Star Yellowfish, and Rosa Cintrón situate their examination of American Indian student experiences within the context of the University of Oklahoma culture center and offer recommendations for supporting American Indian college students. In chapter 4, I move beyond the rhetoric regarding culture center “extinction” and describe the research-driven efforts of two Black culture centers to support and validate the experiences of African American students.

Part Two describes three theoretical perspectives that frame the role of culture centers. In chapter 5, Tara J. Yosso and Corina Benavides Lopez use critical race theory as a framework through which culture centers are viewed as counterspaces. They consider how culture centers operate as transformative sites of resistance for students of color. Mary F. Howard-Hamilton, Kandace G. Hinton, and Robin L. Hughes examine the impact of culture centers through a student development theoretical lens in chapter 6. They offer examples of how culture center programs and outreach can translate theory into practice. In chapter 7, Michael Benitez Jr. suggests that although culture centers have mainly served students of color, now is the time to broaden how culture centers are conceptualized. Using a social justice theoretical framework, he examines the role that culture centers can play in helping White students acknowledge White racism and privilege, while maintaining their mission of serving students of color.

Part Three focuses specifically on administrative and practice-oriented issues related to culture centers. In chapter 8, Toby S. Jenkins describes the tri-sector practitioners model as a framework guiding culture center practitioners in program development, organizational management, and student programming and advising. E. Michael Sutton and Phyllis McCluskey-Titus address the career typecasting of professionals who work in and lead culture