



# A Paradise to Regain: Post-Obama Insights from Women Educators of the Black Diaspora

reviewed by [Joanne Dowdy](#) - June 29, 2020

**Title:** A Paradise to Regain: Post-Obama Insights from Women Educators of the Black Diaspora

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A compelling reason to read this collection of essays about surviving the impact of a racist and divisive culture that has threatened the prosperity of generations of black and non-white citizens for centuries is its clarion call to all who support and participate in the efforts to emancipate adults and children from mental slavery. Documenting the commitment and strenuous efforts of black authors to overcome the harsh reality of the *nuisance factor* (p. 21, Graves, 1998), this book is a must-read for those who wish to learn about the realities of life in the post-Obama era in these United States.

Confronting the old characters of racism, sexism, classism, colorism, and socio-economic status that have populated the lives of black and other non-white folk for centuries, these authors reflect on the meaning of their experiences during the eight years of President Obama's term and the first two years of the next president of the United States. Their stories remind us that one can graduate from as many prestigious and famous universities as it is possible to do in a lifetime, but one can never graduate from being black. Therein lies the dilemma of being black, educated, and upwardly mobile in the crucible that is the reality of living in the United States as a native-born, immigrant, naturalized citizen, or international scholar employed at a predominantly white university.

Divided into six sections, the authors come from backgrounds as diverse as the United States, the Caribbean, South Africa, and Burundi. The sections include *The Burden of Leading While Black*, *Gender, Equality, and Women Empowerment*, *How Brave Are African Women Immigrants?*, *Black Self-Affirmation*, *Can a Black Child Dream Big in a Melanin-Phobic World?*, and *Paradise to Regain: Change Must Come Again*. Each of these sections brings the reader a view of the world from the non-white scholar, and particularly women from the African diaspora. A chapter from each section is listed here as a representative of the telling presentation that is captured in the stories that unfold.

Dr. Janice B. Fournillier shows us the intensity of efforts on behalf of students who take on the power structure that orders and facilitates/frustrates their progress through a doctoral program. Next, Professor Gladys Mokwena exposes the role of gender inequality in higher education and the level of strength demanded of women making their way through the ranks of the system. Dr. Ester Milu, follows as she unpacks her efforts to ensure that her children do not leave their African language heritage behind as they make their way in an American school system and society. She ponders the many similarities that she uncovers as she shares a church

site with Mexican immigrants who work to ensure that their cultural legacy is left intact during their U.S. sojourn. The ethic of caring is clearly described in the work of Dr. Tracy Cook-Person, who ensures that she includes the voices of two of her students to document their strides in making a success of their educational journey. This professor shows how efforts on behalf of our dark-skinned and/or immigrant children can be realized. In Section Five, Dr. Faith Maturia tells of what she wants for her son as she describes how much President Barack Obama made possible for himself and for those who follow in his footsteps. As a personal letter to her kin, we realize the dreams that enliven and make possible the herculean efforts of parents on behalf of their children in an environment that can be indifferent and hostile to their success. By presenting Queen Mother Adelaide Sanford in the sixth section, Dr. Lindamichellebaron shares the history of an important female leader who blazed a trail from her classroom to the New York State Department as a regent. This passion allowed Queen Mother to represent the children who were the least well-served and deserving of the most ardent support that could be mustered on their behalf regardless of the negative stereotypes that were used as arsenal against their progress.

While it is true that the themes of oppression and discouragement in reaction to the change of the country's attitude toward black citizens (p. xiii) due to explicit racist behavior during President Barack Hussein Obama's tenure are repeated in almost every chapter, it is more important to note that each writer creates a hymn about overcoming obstacles in the face of tremendous psychological and institutional odds. The adaptation of a spiritual by folk singer Odetta (p. 251), best describes the attitude of forbearance and resilience that these authors document. Lindamichellebaron writes:

Glory, glory, hallelujah,  
Time to pick our burden up! . . .  
I'm gonna tell my sister and brothers  
Help me pick our burden up. . .

The passion of the writers in this volume is further captured in Dr. Harushimana's reminder to herself, as a teacher of language and literacy, that she must shoulder the crucial responsibility to ensure that Obama's message lives on and his audacity of hope is cultivated among young generations of black and brown children (p. 261).

The work of changing the society's racist attitudes to non-white citizens is not halfway done, as former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice pointed out when President Barak Obama was elected as the 44th president of the United States. The world has lived to see what many consider the wisdom of this warning as it echoes our daily challenges. The #BlackLivesMatter movement and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our global community remind us that black and brown people are still way behind on every level of well-being that can be counted. The ravages of the virus are more destructive among non-white communities than any other in the country (Wingfield, 2020).

Earl Graves points out the senseless denial of economic empowerment to 12% of the citizens of the United State (Graves, 1998). Wisdom and the practical application of the country's resources would serve all citizens far better than the present standoff, or the outright dismissal of any claims of the benefits of securing equality and fraternity for all. It is in this context that we must recognize and embrace the songs of freedom that this collection of personal experiences represents. To put it in the words of the internationally acclaimed musician and singer the Honorable Robert Nesta Marley in *Redemption Song*:

But my hand was made strong

By the hand of the Almighty  
We forward in this generation  
Triumphantly

Won't you help to sing  
These songs of freedom?  
'Cause all I ever have  
Redemption songs  
Redemption songs

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