

University of Minnesota Libraries Publishes 'Dear Higher Education: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain'

New Book Captures the Powerful Voices on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within the Educational Sector

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, UNITED STATES, September 17, 2024 /

EINPresswire.com/ -- In recognition of the rapidly shifting sociopolitical, legal, and cultural environment impacting social justice and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education in the United States, and the growing antagonism toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues in the national conscious, particularly within the educational sector, the editors of DEAR HIGHER EDUCATION: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain, [Dr. Menah Pratt](#), [Dr. Mercedes Ramirez Fernandez](#), and [Dr. Michele Deramo](#) felt a call to capture the voices of those engaged in social justice work.



Contributing editor, Dr. Menah Pratt is a Sierra Leonean-American, is the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity and Professor Education at Virginia Tech.

Published by the University of Minnesota Libraries, DEAR HIGHER EDUCATION: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain stands out with its innovative use of a fluid digital conversation space and open access platform. This approach is designed to amplify the voices of those tirelessly working to create more diverse, equitable, and just campus environments.

"This has been one of the most impactful and personally transformative projects I have worked on in my entire career in higher education. As an ongoing volume, I hope these letters bear witness to a refusal to be silent and silenced. I'm grateful for the courageous voices of all the contributors to this powerful volume, whose lives and work have been deeply affected by the

issues they address,” says contributing editor Dr. Menah Pratt. Dr. Pratt, Vice President and Professor of Education, envisioned this project as part of her year-long American Council on Education fellowship. She selected the University of Minnesota as her placement institution and began collaborating with Dr. Ramírez Fernández who serves as Vice President for Equity and Diversity, and Chief Diversity Officer and with Dr. Michele Deramo, Associate Vice Provost for Diversity Education and Engagement at Virginia Tech.

Dr. Pratt realized that one very profound result of the elimination of DEI offices, under state legislation, has been the elimination of websites and the content associated with reports, recommendations, and the history of DEI efforts at institutions. Another vital context for this series is the current Middle East crisis. Almost 100 protests across the nation and over 2,000 arrests have provoked questions about freedom of speech, academic freedom, the freedom to protest peacefully, and the role of civil disobedience in response to oppression and injustice are at the surface of college protests against the war. These protests were not limited to the United States, including Australia, Canada, France, Lebanon, Mexico, and the United Kingdom.

The global context led to the expansion of this project's vision, which incorporates both a United States and a global perspective. Considering the current context of erasure, silencing, and

invisibility, this project is a significant attempt to create visibility, awareness, and presence.

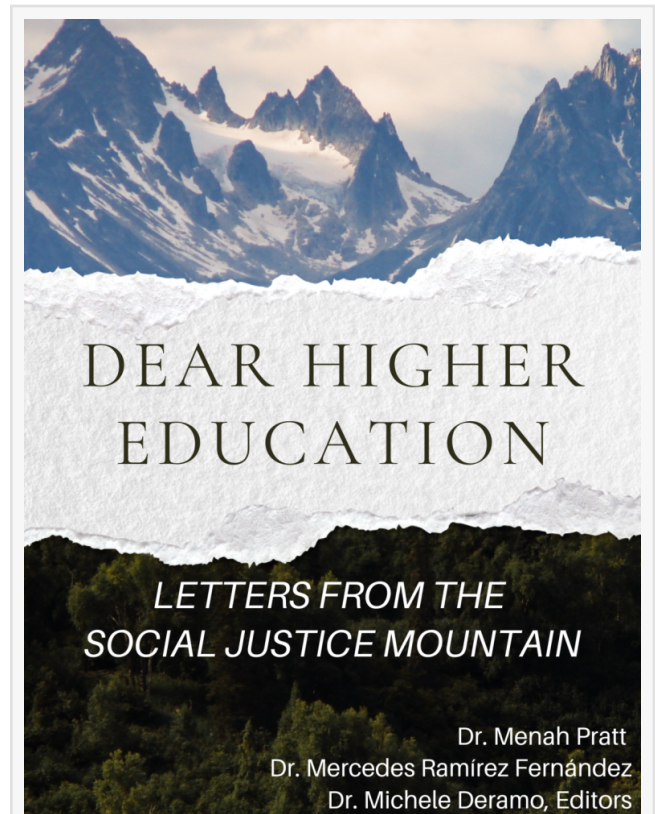
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One of the most impactful and personally transformative projects I have worked on in my entire career in higher education. I hope these letters bear witness to a refusal to be silent and silenced.”

Dr. Menah Pratt

The contributors, who represent a rich diversity of racial, gender, sexuality, and disability identities, resist erasure through personal letters, appealing to higher education to address head-on the challenges to institutional equity to fulfill its highest aspirations. They include university and association presidents, faculty members, students, and administrators.

Some of the titled letters in DEAR HIGHER EDUCATION



The Dear Higher Education series is motivated by a desire to fight back against the attempts to silence, minimize, marginalize, and render invisible the work of social justice in higher education.

include:

- Speak Your Truth or “They’ll Kill You and Say You Enjoyed It.” - Andrea N. Baldwin
- Fighting for Visibility for Disability - Ashley Shew
- An Alternative Curriculum - Menah Pratt
- Noticing: Caste, Class, and Gender in India -Vasundhara Bhojvaid
- Fighting Back from Systemic Erasure: Using Truth to Challenge Perceptions -Victoria Ferguson
- The Legacy of Enslavement on a University Campus - Kerri Moseley-Hobbs
- Ubuntu’s Space for White Allyship - Gerda van Dijk
- Walking on Sacred Ground: Honoring and Challenging the Past - Karen Driver
- White Allies for Transformational Leadership - Matthew T. Holt
- Decolonizing Education through Immersion: Increasing Intentional Study Abroad throughout Africa - Nicole Richards Diop
- and more.

This series is envisioned as an ongoing project and is the inaugural volume. Learn more and download the e-book on the UMN Libraries website.

Learn more about Dr. Pratt at www.menahpratt.com. This is the second book published by Dr. Pratt this year. BLACKWILDGIRL: A Writer’s Journey to Take Back Her Superpower and companion journal, FINDING YOUR SUPERPOWER, was published by She Writes Press earlier this year. Both titles are currently distributed by Simon and Schuster.

ABOUT THE EDITOR(S)

Dear Higher Education: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain is an edited volume by three women, including an Italian American senior diversity administrator and two women of color (Latina and African-American) chief diversity officers, each with almost 30 years of experience.

Dr. Menah Pratt, a Sierra Leonean-American, is the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity and Professor of Education at Virginia Tech.

Dr. Mercedes Ramírez Fernández is from Puerto Rico and serves as the Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Michele Deramo is the Associate Vice Provost for Diversity Education and Engagement at Virginia Tech and leads diversity education and inclusive pedagogy initiatives.

About the University of Minnesota Libraries The award-winning University of Minnesota Libraries is one of the University’s and the state’s greatest intellectual assets. Their outreach to the community includes the Mapping Prejudice Project, which documents the history of structural racism through racial covenants. It also includes the Umbra Search: African American History, the Tretter Transgender Oral History Project, and the work of our Friends of the University Libraries.

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