

# PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Power, Policy, and the People: Building a Higher Ed Model Rooted in Credible Messengers

---

Jamila T. Davis  
Angelo Pinto  
Roseanne M. Mirabella

This article explores the emergence of a transformative higher education model—The Community Practitioner Certification Program (CPCP)—which places credible messengers, system-impacted leaders, and grassroots organizers at the center of public policy education, unique in its merging of lived experience with academic scholarship to redefine who holds expertise and how learning is delivered. What began as an experimental course in one university evolved into a multicity national initiative housed under the Institute for Research for Social Justice in Action (IRSJA) with programming now operating in several urban locations. This article traces the origin story of CPCP, the collaborative design of its curriculum, and its impact in reshaping the relationship between communities and institutions of higher learning. With a focus on healing, power-building, and liberation through education, this work offers a new blueprint for what higher education can become when the people are positioned as professors.

### Keywords

community-university partnerships; social justice; credible messengers; violence prevention; trauma recovery

The academy was never built with us—Black, Brown, working-class, and system-impacted individuals—in mind. Historically, institutions of higher learning have centered Western knowledge, privileged the perspectives of the elite, and gatekept access to education from those whose lived experiences are most valuable for social change. McNair and colleagues describe this as equity talk:

[A] representation of privilege and hierarchy because it implies there is a group who (i) has the power to control access to excellence by deciding who is included, (ii) has ownership of what defines excellence, and (iii) requires that others must be invited to be part of this group in order to achieve excellence (2020, 5)

But what happens when we flip the script to transform the university?

In 2020, amid a global pandemic and nationwide uprisings for racial justice, we found ourselves at the intersection of education, healing, and resistance. As a formerly

incarcerated woman turned scholar-activist and a nationally recognized civil rights attorney and strategist, we knew that real leadership wasn't confined to lecture halls—it was being cultivated in barbershops, courtrooms, protest lines, and community circles. We also knew that the very people who were often labeled as “unqualified” by academia were the ones transforming their neighborhoods every day. We were invited into Seton Hall University not as case studies—but as educators. In that moment, a seed was planted. What started as a single class, “Social Justice in Action,” taught by the two of us and codesigned with system-impacted leaders, credible messengers, and graduate students quickly grew into a movement. We began to ask deeper questions: What would it look like if the people teaching public administration were the same ones navigating public systems as survivors, organizers, and changemakers? What if higher education wasn't something communities had to access—but something they could co-create?

From Seton Hall to Yale University, from the streets of East Orange to the classrooms of Kean University, that vision came to life. The Community Practitioner Certification Program (CPCP) was born out of neces-

sity and nurtured through radical collaboration. Embracing what Nickels and Tinnin refer to as “radical hope,” that can serve as a catalyst for collective action, enabling communities to confront systemic oppression while imagining and constructing just alternatives” (2025, 320). Housed today, the Institute for Research for Social Justice in Action (IRSJA), CPCP—a first-of-its-kind model formally certifying community leaders—has certified credible messengers, violence interrupters, organizers, and frontline workers as practitioners of public policy, healing-centered leadership, and systemic transformation. The CPCP model is built on a simple but revolutionary belief: those closest to the problem are also closest to the solution—and therefore deserve access to education that affirms, equips, and compensates them for their knowledge (Mirabella, Nguyễn, and Feit 2022).

This article tells that story. It charts our evolution from program builders to institution creators. It unpacks the intentional design of a curriculum rooted in justice, healing, and lived experience, with intentional recognition of past policy practices that impeded the advancement of social equity (Clark et. al. 2024). We illustrate how our curriculum rooted in social justice can create more equitable communities. And it invites higher education institutions to imagine something bolder: a model where power is shared, community knowledge is centered, and policy is taught not just from textbooks—but from the truth.

This article proceeds as follows. In the first section, we explore the historic disconnect between the academy and the community, focusing on the ways in which universities have dismissed the expertise and knowledge of community practitioners. In the next section, we explore the evolution of a new course designed to provide a bridge between the community and the academy through social justice in action. In the following section, how recognition of this work led to an activist-in-residence movement bringing a practice-based lens of public health education is discussed. The evolution of the CPCP that formally certifies community leaders, credible messengers, and system-impacted individuals as public policy educators and social justice practitioners is elaborated after that. Next, an in-depth overview of curricular structure and facilitation methods is provided and the economic impact of this model is discussed. A discussion of future plans for program expansion is examined, including potential limitations

of this expansion as a result of the current political climate. The article concludes with a call for a new education future for higher education.

### **The Disconnect between the Academy and the Community: The Absence of Credible Messengers**

Higher education has long positioned itself as the epicenter of knowledge production. Yet, for many system-impacted individuals—those individuals directly impacted by the criminal justice system—credible messengers, and grassroots leaders, the academy has remained inaccessible—physically, culturally, and ideologically (Ahmed 2012; Baldwin 2021; Bradley 2018; Giroux 2010; Harris 2021; Mirabella and Nguyễn 2019). The language is unfamiliar. The systems are exclusionary. The knowledge deemed “credible” is often divorced from the lived realities of those most affected by injustice.

The credible messenger concept dates to 1979 when those who were incarcerated sought to apply their lived experiences within social movements as they were credible, that is, believable and trustworthy, to those they sought to empower and lift up (Lesnick et. al. 2023; Szkola and Blount-Hill 2025; Uphold et al. 2025). While there is as yet no universally agreed upon definition of the term, there is evidence regarding what makes these individuals “credible”:

Above credibility on all other messages (e.g., “change is good,” “alternative options are available”), those who embody (e.g., via shared lived experience, shared social network, or shared identity) the credibility of the message that *change*, for that specific “high-risk” individual, *is possible* (emphasis added) hold the most prized form of credibility in this work. (Szkola and Blount-Hill 2025, 308)

For years, communities have created solutions to violence, poverty, and systemic harm without formal degrees or institutional validation. Credible messengers have de-escalated violence on street corners, organized mutual aid during crises, and led campaigns that have changed laws. The social justice activities of these actors have increased social equity in their communities with equal access and opportunities for citizens. Despite this, their knowledge has rarely been invited into academic

spaces—except as case studies or guest speakers. Their wisdom is often extracted but not honored (Fine et. al. 2021; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2021; Museus & Wang 2023). Their leadership is acknowledged but not institutionalized.

The disconnect between the academy and the community has long been recognized as a significant deterrent to addressing social issues. Freire refers to this as an anti-dialogue imposing a vertical relationship between individuals that is “acritical . . . and hopelessly arrogant” (Freire 2005, 41). For example, Ginwright maintains the research discourse around urban youth has long been centered on problem behavior, reinforcing the views of the “penal state” (Ginwright 2007, 405), thereby missing new forms of social capital emerging from youth activity. This missing component is characterized by Freire as a horizontal relationship between persons and between the academy and the community, based on dialogue (Freire 2005).

When Jamila T. Davis was first invited into Seton Hall University, it wasn't to study communities—it was to represent one. She brought with her a lived history: a Black woman who served nearly a decade in federal prison for bank fraud, rebuilt her life through education and spiritual transformation, and then used her second chance to become a national voice for justice. Her work in cities in the Northeast had already proven that system-impacted women and youth could lead, heal, and thrive—if given the right tools and support.

But entering the university was jarring. Jamil Davis was not handed a syllabus—she was handed resistance. There was an unspoken expectation that she would assimilate into the institution's way of teaching, rather than the institution adapting to what she and her community knew worked (Stanlick et. al. 2023). It was clear that while the university valued equity rhetorically, it struggled to operationalize it structurally (Butcher et. al. 2025; Newkirk-Turner and Morris 2021; Tangwe and Benyin 2025).

That disconnect became a catalyst. At the same time, Angelo Pinto, a seasoned civil rights attorney and co-founder of Until Freedom, was using law and media to hold systems accountable. Having worked on campaigns like Justice for Breonna Taylor, Raise the Age, and Free Meek Mill, he knew firsthand the power of organizing and storytelling. But like Jamila Davis, he also recognized the barriers between movements and the academic world. Activists were often called in for

panels but not invited to shape curricula (Carey et. al. 2021; Sbaiti et. al. 2021). Protest was studied—but rarely credited as pedagogy.

Together, they began to ask: What if community leaders weren't guests in academic spaces, but architects? What if classrooms were redesigned to reflect real-life struggles and strengths? What if the same people who were leading protests, building nonprofits, and surviving violence were certified as public policy educators?

The disconnect between the academy and the community wasn't just about credentials—it was about credibility. It was about whose knowledge counts and whose voice is heard. That disconnection is what fueled the creation of something new.

Their answer wasn't just another class. It was a movement.

### **Building a Bridge through Social Justice in Action**

When the opportunity arose to develop a new course at Seton Hall University, we knew it couldn't look like business as usual. We weren't interested in simply bringing community members into a university space to observe how academia functioned—we wanted to co-create a learning model that would challenge, stretch, and transform both the institution and the individuals inside of it. A course in social justice to lead to more equitable communities.

Together with Dr. Juan Rios, Director of the Social Work Department at Seton Hall University and the Center for Community Research and Engagement, led by Dr. Roseanne Mirabella, we launched a course titled “Social Justice in Action.” The goal was clear: build a shared classroom between traditional graduate students and community leaders who were actively doing the work on the ground. Credible messengers, formerly incarcerated individuals, nonprofit leaders, and youth organizers sat side-by-side with MPA students, sharing knowledge, co-developing solutions, and creating a model of mutual exchange. We knew that our focus on social justice was fundamentally connected to creating a more equitable community, as “social justice is instrumental for achieving . . . social equity” (Guy and Williams 2023, 15).

From the beginning, the room felt different. There was no hierarchy—only shared wisdom. Lived experience was treated as expertise. Policy wasn't abstract—it

was personal. Students who had studied the impacts of mass incarceration now learned directly from those who had survived it. Facilitators who had earned doctoral degrees collaborated with those who had earned their credibility in housing projects, prison yards, and community centers. We had clearly fostered a new academic space where relationships could be forged between community leaders and students and new social structures envisioned (Nickels and Tinnin 2025).

It was more than a class—it was a laboratory for liberation. Every week, the course explored systems of oppression and justice from a dual lens: academic theory and lived reality. We analyzed policies and programs but also interrogated their consequences. What happens when reentry programs are designed without formerly incarcerated people at the table? What does it mean for youth to be policed in schools but excluded from conversations about school safety?

These weren't rhetorical questions. They were personal. And the answers demanded action. Out of this experience, we saw something powerful unfold. Graduate students began to challenge their own assumptions and deepen their commitment to equity. Community members saw their voices amplified and their leadership legitimized. And faculty members realized the institution had more to learn than it had to teach.

The success of the course caught the attention of leaders outside of Seton Hall University. Dr. Ijeoma Opara, an assistant professor at the Yale School of Public Health, sat in on one of our classes and was deeply moved by the energy and brilliance in the room. It was through her that Angelo Pinto was invited to serve as the inaugural Activist in Residence at Yale University, signaling that the work we were doing wasn't just radical, it was replicable.

Social Justice in Action became the blueprint. It proved that community-based, healing-centered education was not only possible in higher ed—it was necessary. It disrupted the traditional student-teacher binary and offered a new model: one where everyone was both a learner and a leader.

That course was the spark. What followed was a wildfire.

### Change Talks and the Activist in Residence Movement

In 2022, Angelo Pinto's appointment as the inaugural Activist in Residence at the Yale School of Public Health

(YSPH) marked a historic shift in how elite academic institutions engage with social justice. But the foundation of this appointment was laid years earlier—in classrooms like Social Justice in Action at Seton Hall, where Pinto and Dr. Davis had already demonstrated what co-creating knowledge with community leaders could look like (Home et. al. 2021; Mirabella, Nguyễn, and Feit 2022).

Yale's U.S. Health Justice Concentration, which was pioneering new ways to address structural inequities in public health, understood the assignment: if systems of harm are learned and upheld, then they must also be unlearned through exposure to truth-tellers, frontline organizers, and those directly impacted by the very policies the academy analyzes (Ahmed 2012; Giroux 2010, 2015; McNair et. al. 2020).

Angelo's role was more than symbolic. As Activist in Residence, he introduced a practice-based lens to public health education. He held open office hours, mentored graduate students, and invited community experts into the classroom—not just as guests, but as educators. It was a continuation of the model he and Dr. Davis had developed: an environment where lived experience and institutional knowledge weren't in competition but in collaboration.

One of the key initiatives Angelo led at Yale was the Change Talk Series—a dynamic speaker series that brought grassroots voices into academic space to engage in critical conversations about justice, health, and power (Bird et al. 2025; Erby et. al. 2021; Lau and Body 2021). These weren't sanitized discussions. They were raw, vulnerable, and deeply rooted in community struggle.

In one of the most powerful Change Talks, Yale hosted leaders from Jackson, Mississippi, to unpack the racialized water crisis that left thousands without clean drinking water. Another featured civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who spoke on the public health implications of state-sanctioned violence, drawing direct connections between police brutality, mental health, and community trauma.

The most transformative of these experiences wasn't confined to a lecture hall. Angelo led students on what became known as the Change Trip—a deep, immersive experience where students traveled to frontline communities to meet with organizers, understand local struggles, and engage in direct dialogue with movement leaders (Yamamura and Koth 2023). Students returned

changed, reporting that the experience shifted not only how they thought about health and justice—but what they now felt responsible for.

While Angelo was breaking barriers at Yale, Jamila continued anchoring grassroots work across cities, launching healing-centered empowerment programs like *I Love Me More*, *We Got Us*, and *Boss Up*. Though operating in different spaces, both remained deeply aligned in their mission: to elevate grassroots wisdom to its rightful place in systems of education and power.

What Yale proved was that this model wasn't just needed in community-based universities—it belonged at the highest levels of academia. *Change Talks*, the *Activist in Residence* model, and the collaborative spirit of the *Health Justice Concentration* revealed that institutions could, when willing, create spaces that honor movement work as scholarship.

But even with these breakthroughs, barriers remained. Access was still limited. The ivory tower still felt gated. That's when the next question emerged: What if we didn't just enter the institutions—what if we built one of our own?

### The Evolution into a Model—Launching the CPCP at Kean University

The vision to build something new wasn't born out of theory; it was born out of necessity. While the success of courses like *Social Justice in Action* and initiatives like *Change Talks* proved that community-led education could work inside traditional institutions, it also revealed the structural limitations. Community practitioners could be invited into the academy—but too often, they weren't the ones designing the syllabus, setting the budget, or shaping the agenda. This new program was designed to give legitimacy to citizen participants as full partners with faculty and students in the academy (Clark et. al. 2021). We were determined to “move beyond the traditional narrative of ‘seat at the table’ and work toward creating a new table large enough to give all individuals equitable say in co-creating solutions” (Wright 2023, 20).

If, as argued by Irizarry et. al., “[s]ocial justice is the ongoing process of insuring fair treatment, equitable resource distribution, and full participation in civic and political life for all individuals” (2025, 312), we knew that our approach needed to transcend community-university partnerships. We realized that higher

education needed more than collaboration. It needed transformation.

That realization led to the founding of an Institute—a national think tank, training hub, and education model created by Jamila T. Davis and Angelo Pinto. The IRSJA is more than an institution. It's a movement-space built to challenge the status quo in how we prepare leaders for systems change.

At the heart of the Institute's academic framework is the *Community Practitioner Certification Program (CPCP)*—a first-of-its-kind model that formally certifies community leaders, credible messengers, and system-impacted individuals as public policy educators and social justice practitioners.

The CPCP officially launched in 2024 in partnership with Kean University—a midsized urban public university and one of the most diverse universities in the nation—with the full support of Dr. Roseanne Mirabella, former Executive Director of the Center for Community Research and Engagement at Seton Hall University, and now a key academic partner at Kean. It was Dr. Mirabella, who, after witnessing the impact of Dr. Davis's work, became an internal advocate for integrating community-based scholarship into higher education. Her transition to Kean helped open the doors for CPCP to live and grow inside a public university committed to innovation and equity. She knew, as Guy and Williams had so powerfully stated, “[i]t is incumbent on the practice community, the research community and educational institutions to continuously poke and prod to find where inequities lurk and to modify institutions, processes, and practices that perpetuate it” (2023, 17). Together with Dr. Davis and Mr. Pinto, this is what they set out to do.

As emphasized by Clark et. al. (2021), establishing environments that address social equity requires three conditions: equitable participation among all members, understanding of past racial injustices, and trust among participants. The CPCP model to advance social equity was specifically designed to create such favorable conditions. The CPCP model is built on a simple but revolutionary belief: those closest to the problem are also closest to the solution—and therefore deserve access to education that affirms, equips, and compensates them for their knowledge (Mirabella, Nguyễn and Feit, 2022). To establish equitable participation, the formal syllabus was discarded, replaced with an outline forged collaboratively by the partners in effect decolonizing the

syllabus (Jackson 2021; Jules and Ford 2023; Zidani 2021) While traditional graduate students were concerned about the lack of structure—perhaps translated as concerns about their final course grade—most eventually came to understand the importance of organic course unfolding and decentering the expertise of the academics in the room. An understanding of past racial injustices was incorporated into all weekly required readings and discussions, drawing heavily on the text written by Davis and Pinto, centering understanding systemic challenges through exploration of the roots of injustice through mass incarceration and systemic racial inequities. Building trust among all participants was perhaps the most crucial and most difficult condition to achieve. Given the trust established between the authors over the years, a firm foundation of trust had been established among them. Through weekly meetings and group discussions, we worked tirelessly to build trust not only among students and practitioners, but also building trust between students and practitioners with each other.

One powerful example of trust-building occurred when a disagreement arose between two community practitioners over the direction of their capstone project. Instead of allowing tension to derail the process, we paused the class and created a facilitated dialogue space using restorative practices. Each participant was invited to share their perspective, name the harm they felt, and articulate their hopes for the outcome. By modeling active listening and centering shared values, we transformed what could have been a divisive moment into a teachable one. Not only did the group resolve the disagreement, but they also emerged with a deeper sense of respect for each other's lived experiences and a stronger commitment to collective problem-solving. This process demonstrated that building trust is not about avoiding conflict, but about creating conditions for honest dialogue and shared ownership of the work. Each cohort of the CPCP brings together:

- Community leaders, including credible messengers, activists, nonprofit founders, grassroots organizers, and survivors of violence
- Graduate students in public administration, criminal justice, and social work
- University faculty and guest lecturers grounded in social justice, policy, and practice

The course is clearly designed to build community capacity by deep discussions of systemic inequities, centering the voices of those who have been marginalized, and exposing the power dynamics behind the inequities (Love and Daniel 2025). Participants learn together in a hybrid format (in-person and online), completing modules in:

- Racial equity and systemic oppression
- Trauma-informed practice
- Policy analysis and advocacy strategy
- Research, documentation, and storytelling
- Leadership and organizational development

What makes the CPCP unique is its dual classroom model. Traditional students aren't just learning about communities—they're learning with them. And community members aren't being studied—they're being certified. Together, they co-develop solutions, complete capstone projects, and present real-world policy proposals grounded in collective insight (Butcher et. al. 2025; Fine et. al. 2021; Yamamura and Koth 2023).

Graduates receive a Community Practitioner Certification from the university—a noncredit bearing certificate indicating completion of the course—and many go on to serve as trainers, facilitators, and even policy consultants in their own cities. For many community members, this is their first experience earning academic recognition. For university students, it is often their first time being led by a practitioner whose power doesn't come from degrees—but from the street-level truth of survival, resistance, and transformation.

By anchoring the CPCP at the second university in the Northeast, the Institute has proven that grassroots expertise can be institutionalized—without being diluted. It's not an alternative path to education. It's a new blueprint for what education must become.

### Structure and Pedagogy of the CPCP Model

The Community Practitioner Certification Program (CPCP) isn't a conventional classroom experience—it's a healing-centered, practice-based, justice-rooted learning model designed by and for the people it serves. At its core is a pedagogical framework that blends academic rigor with cultural humility, trauma-informed facilitation, and community wisdom.

The CPCP curriculum is built around five key pillars:

- **Healing-Centered Education:** We don't separate learning from lived experience. Every session integrates grounding practices, group reflections, and trauma-aware approaches. Participants are encouraged to bring their full selves to the table—pain, purpose, and all. Healing is not a bonus—it's foundational. For example, one of our participants—a community member seeking to form a nonprofit to incorporate mediation and healing in her community—began a few of the weekly classes with a meditation experience focused on deep breathing and relaxation to reduce stress and support healing.
- **Co-Learning Environment:** Community members and graduate students learn together in shared space, breaking down traditional hierarchies of expertise. Professors, practitioners, and students all contribute equally. Every voice matters. We work hard to dispel the traditional hierarchy of the university as expert and community practitioners as research subjects from the very first class. All individuals in the room are welcome as coequals, sitting side-by-side with all voices equally valued, and project development initiated by the community partners. This partnership extends to the course leaders with the professor assigned to teach the course more often than not relinquishing her leadership role to community partners.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Participants apply what they learn in real-time. Each cohort completes a capstone project that addresses a real issue in their community—whether designing a reentry program, crafting a local policy recommendation, or launching a community healing circle. The centerpiece of the course is the projects developed and implemented collaboratively between practitioners and students. By the third or fourth week of the class, students and community members form teams to begin their work with about half of the class period dedicated to project work.
- **Policy + Practice Integration:** Courses don't just teach about systems—they equip people to transform them. Participants explore the structures of government, justice, education, and health, while also learning how to intervene, influence,

and innovate. The course text provides an excellent overview of the policies and laws that have marginalized communities through systemic oppression. With this as a backdrop, we develop projects that recognize these systemic injustices and design approaches to develop innovative community-based solutions. One of the most compelling case studies we use in CPCP comes from the Returning Citizens Support Group (RCSG), co-founded by Edwin “Chino” Ortiz in Newark, NJ. After serving 30 years in prison, Chino launched RCSG to fill the gaps he experienced in reentry—barriers like access to legal identification documents, housing, employment, and mental health support. Together with a graduate student partner, he designed a holistic program that offers prerelease planning, peer mentorship, trauma-informed counseling, job-readiness workshops, and wraparound services to help participants transition successfully back into their communities. Chino joined our CPCP class not just to share his story but to scale his model. Over the course of the semester, he worked with graduate students to refine his program design, strengthen his data collection strategy, and develop a local policy proposal aimed at improving reentry outcomes in Newark. This collaboration exemplifies the power of CPCP's co-learning environment: grassroots leaders bring real-world solutions, students contribute research and policy analysis, and together they create actionable blueprints for systems change. Chino's project is now expanding through partnerships with city agencies and local nonprofits, demonstrating how CPCP serves as an incubator for community-driven innovations that directly address systemic racism in the criminal justice system.

- **Leadership Pipeline:** The program isn't an endpoint—it's a launchpad. Graduates are connected to paid opportunities, speaking engagements, consulting roles, and further education pathways. Oftentimes, students will volunteer to continue working with community partners long after the course has ended. Some also seek out internships with community partners. Many become facilitators and trainers within CPCP and other IRSJA programs. In addition, we end the course with a

presentation of projects to community members, university officials, and individuals from local and regional foundations. This has led to funding opportunities for the projects developed during the course.

The CPCP meets over a 6–8 week period, depending on the location, and blends online instruction with in-person intensives. Sessions include:

- Weekly 90-minute seminars led by program faculty and guest experts
- Reflection journals and group debriefs
- Readings from scholars like bell hooks, Dr. Shawn Ginwright, Mariame Kaba, and Dr. Joy DeGruy
- Hands-on workshops in public speaking, narrative justice, trauma stewardship, and campaign organizing

Each cohort concludes with a public capstone presentation where participants present their project work to local officials, school districts, community stakeholders, and university faculty. These aren't just academic exercises—they're actionable blueprints for change. Beyond the curriculum, the CPCP is rooted in relationships. Faculty and participants build bonds that last well beyond the program. Many graduates become part of the other IRSJA's ecosystem—leading trainings, mentoring youth, developing new curricula, or co-authoring publications.

This pedagogy is intentionally nontraditional. It draws from popular education, community organizing, restorative justice, and abolitionist teaching models. It's designed to validate experience, inspire action, and build a base of leaders who are both system-savvy and spiritually grounded. The following case study is illustrative of our approach to infusing real-world issues into the classroom.

### Case Study: Million Dollar Blocks

#### Overview

In the early 2000s, the Justice Mapping Center (JMC) conducted groundbreaking research on incarceration in New York. Their findings revealed that incarceration was not evenly distributed across the state but instead concentrated in just a handful of neighborhoods in New York City—such as the South Bronx, South

Jamaica (Queens), Harlem, and Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn).

When researchers mapped prison admissions at the level of city blocks, they found that certain blocks had so many residents sent to prison that the state was spending more than \$1 million per year on incarceration costs from that single block. These became known as Million Dollar Blocks.

In New York City, there were more than 30 million-dollar blocks identified. Some of them accounted for as much as \$30 million annually—money spent on incarceration rather than being invested back into those very communities.

#### *Classroom Application: Bringing the Concept to Life*

When teaching this concept in a Community Practitioner class, Mr. Davis uses a highly interactive, community-based learning exercise to help participants not only understand the research but also feel its implications.

1. Step 1: Setting the Scene. Angelo begins by presenting the raw data and visuals from the Justice Mapping Center, showing maps of New York City where incarceration is concentrated. Participants immediately see how a few blocks generate staggering prison costs.
2. Step 2: Localizing the Data. He then guides students to reflect on their own neighborhoods. Participants are asked to name streets, housing projects, or blocks they know that have high levels of incarceration.
3. On a large board or map, these areas are marked out, allowing students to create their own “community incarceration map.”
4. Step 3: Calculating the Costs. Angelo then introduces a cost-per-incarcerated-person figure (e.g., \$60,000–\$80,000 annually in New York). Working in small groups, participants estimate how much money the state is spending to incarcerate people from their identified blocks. The totals are tallied, often reaching millions.
5. Step 4: Reimagining Investment. Once the “Million Dollar Block” numbers are revealed, Angelo flips the exercise. He asks: “If we took this same \$1 million and reinvested it directly into this block, what could we build? What resources could we fund? How would it transform the commu-

nity?” Participants brainstorm investments like schools, job programs, trauma-informed services, arts centers, or youth entrepreneurship hubs.

6. Step 5: Reflection and Action. The exercise closes with a discussion about the moral and policy implications: why states choose to invest in prisons rather than people, and how practitioners can use data, storytelling, and advocacy to push for reinvestment in their communities.

### ***Learning Outcomes***

Through this interactive case study, students: 1) Understand the Million Dollar Blocks research and its significance in shaping criminal justice policy; 2) Connect national data to their own lived experiences in specific neighborhoods; 3) Gain skills in translating data into powerful advocacy arguments; and 4) Reimagine incarceration costs as opportunities for reinvestment and healing in their communities.

The CPCP is not an academic detour—it is a new direction. One that centers community voice, upholds cultural relevance, and prepares leaders to not just navigate systems, but to reimagine them entirely.

### **From Certification to Career: The Economic Impact of CPCP**

While much of the conversation around justice reform and equity centers on social impact, the CPCP is also a powerful economic intervention. It operates as an earn-learn model, investing in community leaders not only through knowledge and networks, but through actual pathways to income, entrepreneurship, and sustainability.

For too long, community-based expertise has been extracted without compensation. Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and academic institutions often rely on the lived experience of credible messengers, formerly incarcerated individuals, and trauma survivors to design programs and policies—yet rarely offer them salaried roles or long-term opportunities. CPCP seeks to change that.

1. Paid Pathways: Many CPCP programs are structured to include stipends for community participants, especially in city-funded cohorts. In cities across the East Coast of the United States, the model includes not just certification—but compensation. Learning is labor. We pay it forward.
2. Professional Advancement: Graduates of CPCP

are connected to job pipelines within local government, public health departments, school districts, and nonprofits. Several have become consultants and facilitators for the Institute, leading trainings across the country. Others have launched grassroots organizations of their own.

3. Recognition as Workforce Development: The CPCP has received recognition from workforce boards and departments of labor as a viable form of professional development. For many participants, especially those previously justice-involved, this represents a radical shift in how their expertise is valued.
4. Building Community Capacity: The CPCP doesn't just benefit the individual. It seeds economic transformation in communities. When system-impacted people are paid to lead, teach, and build, they create ripple effects—jobs, mentorship, and new visions for what success can look like.
5. Trainers Who Train Others: Several graduates have advanced to become Senior Community Practitioners within IRSJA, helping facilitate new CPCP cohorts in cities nationwide. They don't just complete the program—they multiply its impact. They are living proof that community education is a career pathway.

CPCP is not a feel-good initiative. It's an economic justice strategy. It reframes the question from “How do we educate marginalized communities?” to “How do we fund, certify, and elevate the educators already among us?”

In a society where credibility is often tied to degrees and income, CPCP challenges that model. It asserts that lived experience is not a deficit. It's an asset. And when properly invested in, it's one of the most powerful tools for transformation—both personal and political.

Since its inception, the CPCP has trained and certified three full cohorts of participants—42 students in Cohort 1 and 47 students in Cohort 2 at Kean University and 34 students in Cohort 3 at Miles College, a private historically Black college in Fairfield, Alabama—totaling 124 graduates to date. Each cohort intentionally included credible messengers, graduate students, community organizers, and system-impacted leaders learning side by side. Collectively, these participants have developed more than 30 capstone projects that address systemic issues such as reentry, youth engagement,

community healing, and economic development. Projects have included Pull Up 4 Peace (a violence prevention and community convening campaign), VoteWise 205 (a civic engagement initiative in Birmingham), Truth Tellers Academy (youth leadership development through storytelling), Heal the Block (neighborhood revitalization and anti-violence work), and Bulletproof Voices (a youth-led documentary and community dialogue project).

A hallmark of the third cohort at Miles College was the City of Birmingham's decision to invest in the program by awarding \$2,000 in seed funding to each graduate group to launch or expand their projects. The infusion of resources not only accelerated implementation but also validated the program as an economic development tool for community-led solutions. Graduates have gone on to secure roles in city government, lead nonprofit organizations, and return as facilitators for new CPCP cohorts. Evaluations consistently show that participants report significant gains in policy literacy, public speaking confidence, and perceived ability to influence decision-making. City partners credit CPCP with strengthening violence prevention infrastructure and building a replicable, community-led workforce development pipeline. These outcomes demonstrate that CPCP is not simply a higher education access point, but a proven mechanism for advancing public safety, civic participation, and economic mobility in historically marginalized communities.

### National Replication and the Role of Communiversity

As the CPCP gained traction, a natural next step emerged: scale. The demand for community-rooted education was not isolated to one city or one classroom. Across the country, grassroots organizations, public officials, school districts, and justice reform advocates were searching for models that not only educated—but empowered. That's when CPCP evolved from a pilot program into a replicable national framework.

Today, the Community Practitioner Certification Program has launched or is in development in:

- East Orange, NJ
- Newark, NJ
- Atlantic City, NJ
- New York City, NY
- Birmingham, AL

. . . with over a dozen additional cities in discussion to join the IRSJA network by year's end.

The successful completion of three cohorts across two states has demonstrated the model's transferability across diverse institutional and geographic contexts. CPCP is now preparing to launch its next cohort at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, New York, in partnership with the City University of New York, bringing the model to one of the nation's most prominent urban centers. In addition, Communiversity—our digital learning platform—enables CPCP to scale nationally through a hybrid delivery model that combines online instruction, downloadable workbooks, and live cohort discussions. This approach allows new regions to adopt CPCP with fidelity to its core pedagogy while customizing capstone projects and partnerships to local needs. Active interest from universities, city governments, and grassroots organizations across the country signals that CPCP is positioned to grow into a national pathway for higher education access, leadership development, and systems change. We are also in discussion with university admission officials to create opportunities for community participants to receive college credit for prior work and life experience. By formalizing credit-bearing certificates and Prior Learning Assessment opportunities, the program is creating a sustainable infrastructure for community practitioners to advance academically and professionally, preparing a new generation of leaders to transform public systems from within.

But expansion required infrastructure. That's where Communiversity came in. Communiversity is the digital platform built by the Institute to deliver CPCP and other practitioner-led certifications in a hybrid and fully online format. Designed to mirror the same values as the in-person programs—relational learning, cultural relevance, and healing-centered engagement—it removes barriers to access while maintaining depth.

Key features of Communiversity include:

- Self-paced and live cohort models
- Video lessons, downloadable workbooks, and interactive reflections
- Courses in mental health peer support, youth entrepreneurship, violence interruption, financial literacy, and more
- Certification badges and portfolios that can be used for job placement and public presentations

Communiversity isn't just a tech tool. It's a peo-

ple's university—grounded in the belief that education should meet people where they are, not force them to navigate systems that were never built for them. It also creates a national hub for peer connection, storytelling, resource sharing, and collective learning.

As CPCP continues to grow, Community serves as its engine for scale—ensuring fidelity to the model while adapting to the needs of different geographies and demographics. Whether delivered in person or online, the mission remains the same: Equip everyday leaders with the skills, tools, and support to transform their communities—and to do so with credentials that count.

CPCP isn't just teaching change. It's creating a national pipeline of practitioners who are shaping the future of justice, policy, and healing.

While national replication and expansion of the CPCP is the long-term goal, obviously the current political climate will undoubtedly have an impact on our expansion into those areas of the country where diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are under attack. With the current turn toward authoritarianism and neoliberalism's war on democracy, the role of the university as a democratic public sphere" (Giroux 2014, 16) is "near-death." PEN America is tracking the number of institutional gag orders prohibiting educational institutions from discussing certain topics deemed divisive, particularly discussions related to ways in which race and racism played a significant role in discrimination and social injustice (Friedman and Tager 2021). While bills have been proposed nationwide, in many ways encouraged by the "anti-woke" policies of the Trump administration, most of the laws passed are in red states in the south and in other Republican dominated states, including the Dakotas, Utah, Indiana, and Iowa. These gag orders have had a chilling effect across the country and threaten programs such as CPCP as the incursion of politics into university curriculum increases. With the understanding that this initiative may not be possible at this time in some areas of the United States, we are working with community partners and academics across the country interested in this curriculum to develop partnerships to keep moving this work forward. We are reaching out to our network of scholars and community activists to assess their interest in developing a CPCP program in their community.

In addition to expansion activities, we are actively working to develop credit-based community practi-

tioner certificates in several universities in the Northeast. The development of these certificates will not only institutionalize the program by embedding it in the formal curriculum, but it will also provide a pathway toward degrees for those community partners desiring to continue their education. Toward this end, we are working with campus officials to develop a Prior Learning Assessment, potentially providing opportunities for our community partners to earn college credit for work and life experiences. Our success in developing these new certifications and degrees can also be replicated as we expand to other regions of the country.

### Toward a New Educational Future

What started as an experiment inside one university has grown into a movement that redefines what education can be. The CPCP is not just a curriculum—it's a call to action. It asks higher education to reckon with its exclusions, to reimagine its gatekeeping, and to embrace a model where learning is reciprocal, relational, and revolutionary (Butcher et. al. 2025; Fine et. al. 2021; McNair et. al. 2020; Mirabella, Nguyễn & Feit 2022; Stanlick et al. 2023), moving from inclusive excellence to expansive excellence (McNair et. al. 2020).

Our approach is particularly salient at this moment as higher education continues its march toward corporatization in its management and curricular content (Barrow 2024; Giroux 2003; Lieberwitz 2022; Westheimer 2010). Prior to the 1980s, the understanding of higher education as a public good was almost universally endorsed, operating within the public sphere, where universities were "a space where contest can take place outside the control of market interests and the state" (Pusser 2006, 20). Higher education had a public mission and was treated as a public good. "There is a long tradition extending from Horace Mann to C. Wright Mills that extols the importance of education as essential for a democratic public life. This legacy of public discourse appears to have faded as the American university reinvents itself by giving way to the demands of the marketplace" (Giroux 2003, 182). Neoliberalism and corporatization created a fundamental shift in society impacting all institutions, including colleges and universities, leading Barrow to conclude "that corporate and neoliberal structures were so deeply institutionalized in American universities that we [have] finally been imprisoned by Max Weber's 'iron cage' of bureaucracy"

(Barrow 2024, 12). The CPCP model was created, in part, as an acknowledgment of these detrimental trends with a call to action to reclaim universities as a public space.

We don't need more diversity statements—we need systems that value the lived experience of Black, Brown, poor, and system-impacted communities as essential knowledge. We don't need more community engagement departments—we need institutions to treat communities as co-educators, not beneficiaries. We need to move away from and outside of Weber's iron cage to create universities that work for the public.

CPCP is a glimpse into that future. A future where credible messengers are not just mentors—they're professors. Where social justice is not an elective—it's a core requirement. Where policy is not studied in isolation—but co-authored by those impacted by its failures.

At its heart, this program is about reclamation. Reclaiming power. Reclaiming healing. Reclaiming the right to define what knowledge is and who gets to teach it. As we look ahead, our vision is clear:

- Expand CPCP into 20+ cities with regional centers for peer learning and policy development
- Formalize degree pathways that allow CPCP graduates to advance seamlessly into higher education
- Create a national fellowship for Community Practitioners to influence public systems from within
- Elevate the Communiversity platform to house ongoing research, storytelling, and curriculum development

The blueprint is built. The data is clear. The impact is undeniable. We are not waiting for the ivory tower to open its gates. We've built our own.

Welcome to the People's University.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395324>
- Baldwin, Davarian L. 2021. *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*. Bold Type Books.
- Barrow, Clyde W. 2024. "The Contradiction of the Corporate University: Academic Inefficiency and the Iron Cage of Bureaucracy." In *Research Handbook on Academic Labour Markets*, edited by Glenda Strachan, 14–35. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803926865>
- Bird, Karla, Suchitra V. Gururaj, Sara B. Moore, Andrea Robles, and Cindy Vincent Claar, eds. 2025. *Exploring Equitable Community-Campus Relationships*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003546122>
- Bradley, Stefan M. 2018. *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League*. New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479811458.003.0021>
- Butcher, Stephanie, Tanzil Shafique, Redento B. Recio, and Ishita Chatterjee. "Epistemic Justice and the University: Reclaiming the Academy for Emancipatory Urban Praxis." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 49 (2): 452–467. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13303>
- Carey, Roderick L., Thomas Akiva, Haya Abdellatif, and Kendell A. Daughtry. 2021. "And School Won't Teach Me That! Urban Youth Activism Programs as Transformative Sites for Critical Adolescent Learning." *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (7): 941–960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1784400>
- Clark, Jill, Kip Holley, Glennon Sweeney, Camryn Reitz, Alannah Glickman, Christina Allen, and Jason Reece. 2021. "And School Won't Teach Me That! Urban Youth Activism Programs as Transformative Sites for Critical Adolescent Learning." *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (7): 941–960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1784400>
- DeGruy, Joy. 2017. *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury*. Joy DeGruy Publications.
- Eatman, Timothy K. 2023. *Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices*. Campus Compact.
- Erby, Brandon M., Andrea Riley Mukavetz, Kimberly Wieser, and Ana Milena Ribero. 2021. "Community, Voice, Identity: The Principles of Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogies." *Constellations: A Cultural Rhetorics Publishing Space* 4: 1–23. <https://constell8cr.com/issue-4/community-voice-identity-principles-of-cultural-rhetorics-pedagogies/>.
- Fine, Michelle, María Elena Torre, Austin Gerhard Oswald, and Shéar Avory. 2021. "Critical Participatory Action Research: Methods and Praxis for Intersectional Knowledge Production." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 68 (3): 344–356. [10.1037/cou0000445](https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000445)
- Freire, Paulo. 2020. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." In *Toward a Sociology of Education*, edited by John Beck, Chris Jenks, Neil Keddie, and Michael F.D. Young, 374–386. Routledge.

- Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Continuum International Pub. Group.
- Friedman, Jonathan, and James Tager. 2021. "Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach." PEN America. November 8. <https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/>.
- Ginwright, Shawn. "The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma-Informed Care to Healing-Centered Engagement." *Occasional Paper* 25 (2018): 25–32. <https://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OP-Ginwright-S-2018-Future-of-healing-care.pdf>.
- Ginwright, Shawn A. 2007. "Black Youth Activism and the Role of Critical Social Capital in Black Community Organizations." *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (3): 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207306068>
- Giroux, Henry A. 2003. "Selling Out Higher Education." *Policy Futures in Education* 1 (1): 179–200. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/pfie.2003.1.1.6>
- Giroux, Henry A. 2014. *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Haymarket Books.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2015. *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631363>
- Giroux, Susan Searls. 2010. *Between Race and Reason: Violence, Intellectual Responsibility, and the University to Come*. Stanford University Press.
- Guy, Mary E., and Brian N. Williams. 2023. "A Journal Dedicated to Social Equity and Public Administration." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4824>
- Harris, Michael S. 2021. "The Soft Underbelly of Universities as Anchor Institutions: The Disconnect Between University and Community Research Priorities." *Higher Education Policy* 34 (3): 603–621. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-019-00156-y>
- Home, Alice, Laura A. Chubb, and Christa B. Fouché. 2021. "Facilitating Co-Creation of Knowledge in Two Community-University Research Partnerships." *Collaborations: A Journal of Community-Based Research and Practice* 4 (1): 2. <https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.68>
- Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. Routledge, 2014.
- Irizarry, José Luis, RaJade M. Berry-James, Duchess D. Humphrey, Rachel Emas, Bruce D. McDonald III, James Nordin, Michael Lee, Lindsey L. Evans, Anthony M. Starke Jr., and Jay M. Grosflam. 2023. "Threats to Democracy: A Danger to Social Justice for All." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 3, (2): 309–319. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v3i2.6796>
- IRSJA. (2024). Institute for Research for Social Justice in Action Programs Overview. <https://www.theirsja.org/>
- Jackson, Elizabeth. 2021. "Radical Syllabus Modification/Elimination: Reflecting Exigent Communicative Emergency" *American Communication Journal* 23 (1). [https://www.ac-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Jackson\\_Formatted\\_Final-copy-1.pdf](https://www.ac-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Jackson_Formatted_Final-copy-1.pdf)
- Joseph-Salisbury, Remi, and Laura Connelly. 2021. *Anti-Racist Scholar-Activism*. Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526157973>
- Kaba, Mariame. 2021. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. Vol. 1. Haymarket Books.
- Jules, Tavis D., and Donna Y. Ford. 2023. "Decolonizing Higher Education Syllabi: Beyond the Aesthetics of the Syllabus." *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* 40 (14): 8–12.
- Lau, Emily, and Alison Body. 2021. "Community Alliances and Participatory Action Research as a Mechanism for Re-Politicising Social Action for Students in Higher Education." *Educational Action Research* 29 (5): 738–754. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1772093>
- Lesnick, Julia, Laura S. Abrams, Cassandra Angel, and Elizabeth S. Barnert. 2023. "Credible Messenger Mentoring to Promote the Health of Youth Involved in the Juvenile Legal System: A Narrative Review." *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care* 53 (6): 101435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2023.101435>
- Lieberwitz, Risa L. 2022. "Corporatization of Higher Education: A Crisis of Labor and Democracy." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Labor and Democracy*, edited by Angela B. Cornell and Mark Barenberg, 318–333. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108885362>
- Love, Jeannine, and Jamie Levine Daniel. "Ungrading: Socially Just Assessment Practices for the PA Classroom." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 3 (1): 173–196. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v3i1.5891>
- McNair, Tia Brown, Estela Mara Bensimon, and Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux. 2020. *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mirabella, Roseanne M., and Khanh Nguyen. 2019. "Educating Nonprofit Students as Agents of Social Transformation: Critical Public Administration as a Way Forward." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 41 (4): 388–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2019.1643616>
- Mirabella, Roseanne, Khanh Nguyễn, and Maureen Emerson Feit. 2022. "Critical Pedagogy and Nonprofit Management Education: Refocusing Our Classrooms toward Transformation and Liberation." In *Preparing Leaders of Nonprofit Organizations*, edited by William A. Brown and Matthew Hale, 174–194, Routledge.
- Museus, Samuel D., and Amy C. Wang. "Refusing Neoliberal Logics in Research Design." In *Weaving an Otherwise*, edited by Amanda Tachine and Z Nicolazzo, 15–28. Routledge.

- Newkirk-Turner, Brandi L., and Lekeitha R. Morris. 2021. "An Unequal Partnership: Communication Sciences and Disorders, Black Children, and the Black Speech Community." In *Critical Perspectives on Social Justice in Speech-Language Pathology*, edited by RaMonda Horton, 180–196. IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7134-7.ch009>
- Nickels, Ashley E., and Camille Tinnin. 2025. "Radical Hope as a Transformative Praxis in the Face of Hate and Intolerance." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 3 (2): 320–327. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v3i2.6774>
- Pusser, Brian. 2006. "Reconsidering Higher Education and the Public Good: The Role of Public Spheres." In *Governance and the Public Good*, edited by William G. Tierney, 11–28. State University of New York Press.
- Rios, Juan. 2023. *We Got Us: Youth Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Practitioner Guide*. IRSJA Publications, 2023.
- Sbaiti, Mariam, Mike J. Streule, Mervat Alhaffar, Victoria Pilkington, Melanie Leis, Shyam Sundar Budhathoki, Hala Mkhallalati, et al. 2021. "Whose Voices Should Shape Global Health Education? Curriculum Codesign and Codelivery by People with Direct Expertise and Lived Experience." *BMJ Global Health* 6 (9): e006262. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006262>
- Stanlick, Sarah E., George DeMartino, and Sharon D. Welch. 2023. "The Perils of Expert Privilege: Analyzing, Understanding, and Reimagining Expertise in University–Community–Societal Relations." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 27 (3): 123–141. <https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/2505>
- Szkola, Jason, and Kwan-Lamar Blount-Hill. "A Framework for Understanding *Credibility*: What Makes Credible Messengers 'Credible' in a New York City–Based Sample of Gun Violence Intervention Programs?" *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 52 (2): 294–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548241291032>
- Tangwe, Abraham Tamukum, and Patrick Kofi Benyin. 2025. "Reimagining Critical Interdisciplinarity: Shifting from the Traditional to the Transformative Paradigm in Higher Education Research and Learning." *International Journal of Scientific and Management Research* 8 (1): 65–98. <https://doi.org/10.37502/IJSMR.2025.8104>
- Uphold, Heatherlun, E. Yvonne Lewis, Amy Drahot, Blair Warren, Jennifer Edwards-Johnson, Mary Katherine Crawford, Richard Sadler et al. 2025. "Dissemination through Trusted Credible Messengers: 133 Weeks of the Flint Community Webinar on COVID-19." *Implementation Research and Practice* 6: 26334895241312404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26334895241312404>
- Westheimer, Joel. 2010. "Higher Education or Education for Hire? Corporatization and the Threat to Democratic Thinking." *Academic Matters*. <https://academicmatters.ca/higher-education-or-education-for-hire-corporatization-and-the-threat-to-democratic-thinking/>
- Wright II, James E. 2023. "Promoting Social Justice." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 19–22. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4933>
- Yamamura, Erica K., and Kent Koth. 2023. *Place-Based Community Engagement in Higher Education: A Strategy to Transform Universities and Communities*. Routledge.
- Zidani, Sulafa. 2021. "Whose Pedagogy Is It Anyway? Decolonizing the Syllabus through a Critical Embrace of Difference." *Media, Culture & Society* 43 (5): 970–978. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720980922>

---

**Dr. Jamila T. Davis** (she/her) ([jamiladavis06811@gmail.com](mailto:jamiladavis06811@gmail.com)) is Executive Director of the Institute of Research for Social Justice in Action dedicated to dismantling the trauma-to-prison pipeline and advancing community-led solutions to systemic inequities. After serving nine years in prison, she created the Voices of Consequences Enrichment Series, which was adopted by the Bureau of Prisons.

**Angelo Pinto** (he/him) ([angelopinto720@gmail.com](mailto:angelopinto720@gmail.com)) is a critical voice in the fight for social change and a leader who has created prolific impact, built movement institutions, and played a pivotal role in creating and elevating key movement issues. He co-founded Until Freedom, an intersectional social justice organization pivotal in the fight for Justice for Breonna Taylor.

**Roseanne M. Mirabella**, PhD, (she/her) ([rmirabel@kean.edu](mailto:rmirabel@kean.edu)) is an Associate Professor at Kean University, where she conducts research on education for managers of nonprofits and NGOs and also critical perspectives on nonprofit organizations. She is co-editor of the *Handbook of Critical Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizing and Voluntary Action*, a comprehensive survey of critical scholarship within the field. (Corresponding author)