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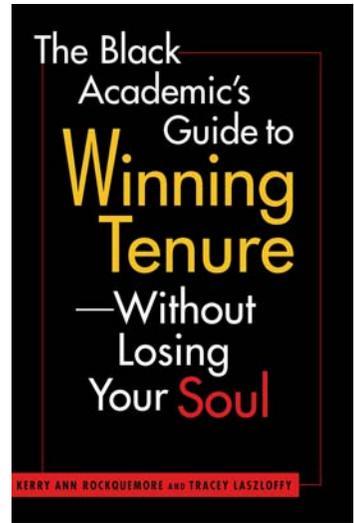
The Black Academic's Guide to
Winning Tenure—
Without Losing Your Soul

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How to Win Tenure— Without Losing Your Soul

COLLEGE and university officials regularly bemoan the lack of diversity among their faculty and the challenges in recruiting and retaining faculty of color. They have good reason for concern because an examination of the statistics on faculty diversity in higher education reveals a dismal state of affairs that has changed little since the passage of civil rights legislation. In fact, less than 5 percent of faculty at all US colleges and universities are black, and the largest percentage of black scholars is employed at historically black colleges and universities. Based on the lack of progress in diversifying the faculties at predominately white institutions, most observers agree that past diversity efforts have been insufficient and have largely failed to produce the desired outcome: a faculty that reflects the diverse racial and ethnic composition of our nation.

There are complex reasons why bright and motivated black students do not end up on the faculties of US colleges and universities. Scholarly attention has focused at various points of the academic pipeline, including the quality of public schooling; access to undergraduate education; the effects of “weeding courses” in the first year of the undergraduate experience; the lack of mentoring and role models; difficult transitions to graduate school; differential treatment during the graduate school experience; the lure of alternative market sectors; the structure of the academic job market; and institutional recruitment, promotion, and retention policies. Clearly, the unchanging statistics reflect structural problems in our educational system that span from primary schools to universities. Although there are numerous possible points of intervention for each of these structural problems, this book is directed toward individual faculty members seeking to succeed in institutions that are not designed for their

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success. While it is abundantly clear that structural solutions are needed for structural problems in US higher education, it is equally clear that abstract discussions of structural problems and policy solutions are rarely helpful to first-year faculty trying to make the transition from graduate student to professor. In other words, there has been precious little attention devoted to the daily struggles of individual black faculty and the concrete steps that they can take to succeed in spite of the forces that are pushing against them.

Life on the tenure track is a difficult experience for all junior faculty, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, or nationality. Six years of probation can feel like an eternity when faced with unclear and ever-rising expectations, lack of support, subjective evaluations, and limited external validation. All junior faculty members are in a vulnerable position because their institutional rank and position grant them less power in relation to senior colleagues who vote on their tenure. Because interactions between senior and junior faculty are defined by unequal power, all challenges, disagreements, and conflicts must be handled in calculated ways that reflect the utmost diplomacy.

While *institutional hierarchies* leave all junior faculty in a vulnerable position, the difficulty associated with the probationary period is intensified for faculty who occupy a disadvantaged position within one or more of the *social hierarchies* structured around race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality. For white male faculty, the one-down position associated with being a junior faculty member is a temporary status that is confined to the institutional hierarchy. For black faculty, their job-related one-down status does not end at the walls of the institution. Whatever insensitivities and indignities they suffer on campus because of their social location exist beyond the campus, and will continue to exist if or when they are promoted with tenure. So, we take as our most basic premise that there is a fundamental difference between the experiences of black and white faculty, and that difference is caused by the fact that we live in a social world organized by race. All faculty experience vulnerability, but that vulnerability is role specific and finite for some, while for others it exists within a broader context of societal racial inequalities.

The racial hierarchy in the United States not only dictates that black faculty are in a permanent one-down status across social contexts, but also infiltrates academic institutions, influencing how black and white faculty experience the very same departments. Who receives the benefit of the doubt, whose opinion is valued, who gets mentored, and who is invited into collaborative opportunities are subtly shaped by often un-

conscious racialized assumptions about who is an insider and who is an outsider, who does and does not belong in the academic club, and whose presence is welcomed and whose is tolerated. As a result, the reality of life on the tenure track for many black academics is one in which they struggle with racial subjugation both inside and outside of their respective campus.

Having survived graduate school and the academic job market, many new PhDs enter their first job with high expectations. They often imagine the colleges and universities that employ them will be bastions of progressive liberalism that will challenge the evils of classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia and practice equity and social justice. After all, most colleges' mission statements articulate a commitment to the production of knowledge, the transformation of the social world, and service in the pursuit of justice. Even having faced discriminatory treatment in graduate school, many black academics imagine that their experience will be fundamentally different because of their new and upwardly mobile status as professor, even if it is assistant professor.

By the time black faculty reach the end of their first year, many have become painfully aware that they have not escaped the indignities and frustrations with respect to racism and discrimination that they experienced as graduate students. In fact, many begrudgingly realize that, because they are one of few black faculty on campus, they face disproportionately higher service requests than their colleagues, are overwhelmed by black students seeking a role model, and are expected to "prove" themselves in ways that their white colleagues are not. Those who were naïve in the negotiation process also realize that they are being paid less, are teaching more, and are receiving fewer resources than their better-informed and better-mentored white colleagues. Very quickly, many new black faculty realize the hard facts about being black on the tenure track: that they face the same demands as their white counterparts *and* they also must negotiate both nuanced racial insensitivities and outright racial insults.

This painful realization is often followed by a typical trajectory in which a young black faculty member who was barely mentored in graduate school takes several years on the job to figure out (through trial and error) what it means to be a professor. While all new faculty struggle in the transition from graduate student to professor, faculty of color must learn how to simultaneously juggle the excessive and never-ending service demands that result from being the only black faculty member (or one of a few) in their department, college, or university in addition to the alienation and hostility they may experience on campus.

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As junior faculty, we both faced the dilemma of realizing that the institutions in which we were embedded were not set up for us to succeed and, yet, we had to succeed anyway. By virtue of our different racial locations (Kerry Ann is black and Tracey is white), we directly observed, experienced, and commiserated about the similar experiences we had as female faculty and the different experiences we had based on our race. While we made different decisions and our careers took different twists and turns along the way, we are clear today that no black faculty member should have to start from scratch, or go through the misery of learning from costly mistakes, humiliating incidents, or hindsight after getting passed over.

Although neither of us ever imagined writing a book on mentoring, we wrote this book because we see the same pattern of mistakes, conflicts, and tensions played out repeatedly in the lives of black faculty. Whether it is among faculty in Kerry Ann's mentoring program, Tracey's clients in private practice, or the hundreds of faculty we have met in the process of presenting our workshops, it is the same story over and over and over again: black faculty, by and large, are not being mentored and are experiencing institutional alienation, isolation, and hostility. Too much time and emotional energy are being wasted by individual faculty trying to figure out the basic elements of what it means to be a successful new professor: how to teach well and efficiently, how to manage time spent on service, and how to publish prolifically. Because black faculty must do this even as they negotiate subtle and overt racial slights and assaults, it can be a particularly difficult transition. In short, we want to help every reader develop the strategies and techniques that are necessary to win tenure, while acknowledging that this is especially challenging for black faculty. Our purpose in this book is to pass on to black academics those strategies and techniques that have worked for many black faculty who have succeeded in winning tenure.

While we are concerned with helping faculty to become productive and efficient, and to meet their institutional criteria for promotion (i.e., how to win tenure), we are even more deeply concerned about how to do so without losing your soul. We know far too many black faculty who have sacrificed everything—their relationships, their voice, their integrity—in the process of pursuing tenure and promotion. Inevitably, they win tenure, but have become so alienated from their self in the process that they can no longer connect to who they are and where they are going. They have so deeply internalized the expectations, attitudes, and judgments of those around them that they are unable to evaluate their own self-worth beyond their next grant, publication, or award. In

other words, they played the game to win so intensely that they sacrificed their core self in the process and internalized their institution's values as their own criteria for determining self-worth. Regrettably, we know many more black faculty who lost their soul in the process, and *still* did not win tenure. These are the most unfortunate cases because they require both a personal and professional resurrection.

Toward our secondary goal of learning to navigate the minefield of the tenure process without losing your voice and integrity, we spend considerable time clarifying how black faculty can better understand the system in which they are embedded, recognize the racialized dynamics of that system, understand what they bring to the equation, and learn how to locate their own sources of power to navigate their way to promotion with integrity. Spending six years in an institutionally vulnerable position does not mean that you are powerless as an individual. By understanding who you are and where you are located, you can avoid being passively controlled and devalued in your environment by developing a mental framework of independence, a personal definition of success, a clear plan for achieving it, and real support systems to lean on in difficult times. More concretely, we believe the best way for you to win tenure without losing your soul is to (1) learn the rules of the game, (2) master your technique, and (3) play to win on both the personal and professional levels.

Centering the Black Academic Experience

As the title of this book makes evident, our target audience is black academics who are on the road to tenure. On many occasions, we have been challenged about what makes the recommendations that we present in this book exclusive to black faculty. To clarify, most of the nuts-and-bolts suggestions we provide for how to win tenure are not exclusive to black faculty and can be used by faculty of any race. However, despite the fact that black and white faculty are the same in terms of their capabilities, their tenure journeys are made distinct by the intervening effects of racism. Throughout the book, we have taken great pains to contextualize generic concepts and strategies to take into account how racism shapes the experiences of black junior faculty.

On a similar note, we also have been challenged at times about why we elected to focus so narrowly on racism as an intervening factor while excluding consideration of other forms of oppression that share much in common with racism. We agree that the dynamics of racism and other

manifestations of oppression share similarities. Therefore, although we specifically focus on racism and black academics, we acknowledge that much of the material we present can be applied to understanding and addressing how other forms of oppression shape the tenure process for members of oppressed groups who are underrepresented in higher education.

We wrote this book with black faculty in mind, but we recognize that other racial minorities also face racism and struggle with similar racial issues and dilemmas faced by black academics. Initially, we considered defining our target audience as *people of color*, but rejected this term because it fails to recognize the objective and subjective differences that exist between groups as well as the group-specific assumptions, negative stereotypes, and biases associated with blackness. Readers from other racial minority groups may find some issues we explore to be consistent with their own experience at the same time that others do not apply. Regrettably, the vast majority of professional development resources for new faculty are either silent on the issue of race or contain a single chapter to address *all* underrepresented groups and their concerns. This seems insufficient, centers on white male academics, and reinforces the notion that the concerns of everyone else are the same and can be summarized and addressed in a brief separate chapter. Ultimately, we wrote this book for black faculty as a way of moving the group from the margins to the center of discourse on professional development and faculty retention.

Organization of the Book

Our point of departure for winning tenure without losing your soul is an articulation of the “rules of the game.” We do this by providing an overview of how the realities of race manifest in academic contexts by identifying the specific ways that race and power converge to shape life in the academy for black faculty in “Race, Power, and the Academic System” (Chapter 2). Thus, for most black readers, Part 1, “Understanding the Game,” merely serves to make explicit that which is intuitively and experientially understood on a daily basis. In “The Politics of ‘Fit’” (Chapter 3), we explore the importance of “goodness-of-fit” between your personal system orientation and the dynamics of the academic system in which you are embedded. In addition to helping you identify your personal orientation and your system’s orientation, we discuss what you can do in situations where there is a poor fit.

Part 2, “Mastering Your Technique,” identifies the core set of skills and techniques that all junior faculty need to successfully make the tran-

sition from graduate student to professor. It is crucial for black faculty to master these skills and techniques because each mistake will be highly visible and any perceived lack of productivity is unlikely to be overlooked. This section begins with “Tenure and Time Management” (Chapter 4) and “The Academic Office” (Chapter 5), which address three core skills that form a necessary foundation for success: strategic planning, time management, and the development of an organizational system that works for you. The remaining two chapters in this section, “Healthy Pathways to Publication” (Chapter 6) and “The Art of Efficient Teaching and Service” (Chapter 7), provide in-depth considerations of the three factors that are most critical for tenure and promotion: publication, teaching, and service. We focus on how to develop a consistent writing routine and proactively create accountability mechanisms; how to teach efficiently; and how to participate in a reasonable amount of service to the department, college, and the university community without falling into the trap of service overload. Although the weight put on each of these components varies by the type and culture of institution you work in (community college, liberal arts college, or university), it is imperative to demonstrate competence in each of these areas early on and to move toward excellence over your probationary period.

Having established how race and power interact to shape the dynamics in your institution, how to assess and enhance the compatibility between your system orientation and your system, and how to master the core areas in which you will be evaluated, Part 3 is devoted to “Playing to Win.” This section focuses on the most critical and challenging component of life on the tenure track: your integrity and your relationships. Winning tenure without losing your soul requires self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-mastery. The first aspect of your self that we focus on is your response to oppression. In “Shifting from Habits of Survival to Strategies for Success” (Chapter 8), we discuss how individuals develop habitual ways of responding to situations and people who devalue us over the life course. These behavioral responses are grounded in unconscious mental frameworks and are accompanied by emotional reactions. We describe these as “habits of survival” and encourage you to identify your own automatic ways of being and to consider how your habits help and hinder you. This chapter culminates in a consideration of how to shift from habits of survival to strategies for success by making conscious choices about how to respond in different circumstances.

Because conflict is inevitable in all workplaces, but manifests in unique (and often horrifying) ways in the academic workplace, our

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chapter “Constructive Conflicts” (Chapter 9) addresses how you can engage in healthy conflict with people who have more power than you. Part 3 closes with “Building a Supportive Network” (Chapter 10). Here, we emphasize the importance of proactively establishing and nurturing relationships with people who can provide support and assistance as you begin to build a tenure case that is beyond reproach from the outset of your career.

Cornel West describes being an African American academic as a life of self-imposed marginality. To be black and become an academic requires, to some extent, a disconnection from the wider African American community while, at the same time, never fully being welcomed into the community of the professoriat. The pain, anger, and alienation that are connected to this marginality extract a high price on the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of black faculty. Though this book will not lay out systematic policy solutions to the persistent problem of faculty diversity, we do hope it helps you, as an individual black faculty member on the front lines, to win tenure without losing your soul in the process.