

Book Review

Hallmark, T., Ardoin, S., & Means, D. R. (Eds.). (2023). *Race and rurality: Considerations for advancing higher education equity*. Routledge.

Review by Rachele Kuehl
Virginia Tech

Citation: Kuehl, R. (2024). Book review of “Race and rurality: Considerations for advancing higher education equity.” *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 40(2). <https://doi.org/10.26209/JRRE4002>

Edited by Tyler Hallmark, Sonia Ardoin, and Darris R. Means, *Race and Rurality: Considerations for Advancing Higher Education Equity* brings together higher education scholars from across the United States to discuss the specific needs of rural Students of Color and the many innovative ways institutions have sought to address them. The book is divided into four sections, the first of which sets the stage for readers’ understanding of rurality and the unique challenges rural Students of Color face with regard to accessing higher education. The second section concerns attempts to ameliorate these access issues, in part by reframing the discussion from one focused on what rural Students of Color and their communities lack to one that highlights their cultural wealth (Crumb et al., 2021; Yosso, 2005). In the third section, authors explore the experiences rural Students of Color have while transitioning to college, and the fourth and final section picks up this discussion by describing mentoring and other structural supports that have led to successful outcomes for students from various racial, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. Interspersed among longer, research-focused pieces are shorter chapters (Chapters 4–5, 10–13, 18–19, and 24–25) the editors refer to as “Notes from the Field.” With the exception of Chapter 5, these chapters highlight programs and practices that serve rural Students of Color as they prepare for, and later attend, college. (In Chapter 5, Koricich reports on data gleaned from a larger quantitative study that introduced a metric to designate institutions as rural-serving institutions [RSIs], finding a great degree of overlap among RSIs and institutions designated as minority-serving. The larger study was referenced frequently by other chapter authors.)

All correspondence should be directed to Rachele Kuehl, Research Scientist, Center for Rural Education & School of Education, Virginia Tech (rkuehl@vt.edu).

JRRE is associated with the Center on Rural Education and Communities at Penn State and is a publication of Penn State Libraries Open Publishing.

As a critical scholar interested in describing the influence of whiteness¹ on U.S. education, my research concerns context, or the ways in which students’ experiences in school are differently affected by the ideology of whiteness in different places. My explorations have taken place in K–12 schools, where I have sought ways to provide equitable learning experiences for talented rural learners (Kuehl et al., 2022; Kuehl & Snyder, 2023) and examined rural teachers’ use of literature to launch discussions of issues surrounding race (Kuehl, 2023). Because much of my work is aimed at situating young rural learners to be equitably-positioned to achieve success in future postsecondary endeavors, I was very interested in reading *Race and Rurality*, especially because studies have shown that rural Students of Color have even fewer opportunities for advanced learning than their white rural peers (Floyd et al., 2011; Hemmler et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2018). I had hoped this book would provide insight into what happens when the talented rural students for whom I have advocated as elementary and middle school students attend college, and it did not disappoint.

A strength of this book is the way in which each author describes their own positionality in relation to race and rurality. In that spirit, I want to share that, like a few of the authors, I did not grow up, and have not lived, in rural places, and, as a white person, I do not have the personal experience that would allow me to fully relate to the ways in which the intersectional identities of rural Students of Color complicate their college trajectories. Many of the chapters emphasize that intersectionality has a multiplicative effect (Atewologun et al., 2016) on students’ experiences. An example shared by Cain and colleagues (Chapter 20) is the way rural Students of Color can feel exceptional pressure to succeed in college because they can be seen to represent

¹ In this review, I chose not to capitalize “white” and “whiteness” to mirror the editors’ chosen usage for the book (see Hallmark et al., pp. 10–11).

both their race/ethnicity and their rural communities. Having been, perhaps, one of the relatively few students and/or Students of Color in their home communities to “make it” to college, they do not want to be seen as a disappointment, a sentiment expressed by rural teen characters in a set of young adult novels analyzed by Parton and Kuehl (2023) and reflected in research focused on rural students’ decisions about staying in or leaving their hometowns (e.g., Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Farmer et al., 2006; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Additionally, as Puente discusses in Chapter 7, rural Students of Color from immigrant backgrounds (in this case, those whose families are migrant farm laborers) might feel especially motivated to attend and succeed in college after having witnessed the sacrifices their parents made to ensure these opportunities were possible for them. In this way, Puente takes care to frame rural agricultural communities in the Southwest not as “education deserts” but as “places of desire” where rural multilingual Students of Color can and do dream and thrive.

Authors of the longer research chapters employed various methodologies. In Chapter 2, Sowl and colleagues reported on an extensive literature review of published articles relating to college access for rural Students of Color, which they noted had increased substantially since the racial reckoning of 2020. Chapters 3 and 22 present studies that used quantitative methods to explore differences in college access and completion between rural Students of Color and Students of Color from urban/suburban communities (Jenks, Chapter 3) and differences in sense of belonging among rural Students of Color who did and did not report receiving mentoring support in college (Soria & White, Chapter 22). Chapter 9 is a critical policy analysis by Collins and Rockey that investigated the extent to which postsecondary educational equity policy initiatives in three Illinois communities address the needs of rural Students of Color. They found that statewide efforts aimed at advancing equity for Students of Color were not employed outside the Chicago metro area, garnering invisible (and underserved) the state’s many rural Students of Color. In Chapter 17, Vanesse and John-Shields introduce a model for rural Alaskan schools to use in assessing their approaches to preparing Native Alaskan students for college, which the authors assert should center on framing cultural identity as an advantage, maintaining high academic expectations accompanied by strong supports, and encouraging families to participate in navigating the college application process in ways that reflect the interdependence valued in Native communities.

Qualitative studies that relied on participant interviews were especially common and primarily involved researchers asking rural Students of Color to describe their experiences leading up to, and while attending, college (Chapters 6, 7, 14, 15, 16, 20, and 23). One study (Cain et al., Chapter

20) also asked students to identify mentors who were then interviewed about their perceptions of students’ experiences. Two additional studies (Vaughn & Renbarger, Chapter 8; Eddy et al., Chapter 21) interviewed directors of federal TRIO programs at RSIs and rural community college administrators, respectively; the study presented in Chapter 8 also included a survey.

One of the primary challenges expressed across the book in various interview studies with rural Students of Color was that students felt less prepared for the academic rigor of college as compared with their urban and suburban peers. To be sure, the limited access to advanced high school courses in rural schools is a pervasive inequality that rural scholars have long decried (e.g., Byun et al., 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Additionally, while some rural Students of Color (those from predominantly white rural areas) expressed a sense of relief and excitement at being part of a more racially diverse population than they were used to, they often felt out of place among urban and suburban Students of Color because of their rural backgrounds (e.g., Black rural students were concerned about sounding “country”; Flowers, Chapter 15). I found Chapter 14 by Stone and Serrata especially compelling because of its exploration of the ways in which the mixed feelings many rural students have about their home communities are complicated and exacerbated by race. In it, rural Latina students in Texas described having to reckon with the bigotry they now realized (after leaving) was present in their conservative-minded rural hometowns, where some people accepted them only as “exceptions” to their racist perceptions of immigrants. The students interviewed felt a sense of “survivor’s pride,” a term attributed to coauthor Serrata and used to describe having avoided outcomes such as substance use disorders and teen pregnancy that were all too common among their peers. Still, having been raised in primarily ideologically conservative places, these young women “perceive[d] their peers’ choices as outcomes of individual decisions and not outcomes of socially constructed expectations based on class, gender and race” (Liou et al., 2021, as cited in Stone & Serrata, 2023, p. 166). Conversely, students from predominantly Black rural areas battled feeling out of place at the predominantly white University of Mississippi, especially considering its notably racist past (Pfrenger et al., Chapter 16). This sentiment mirrors those described by rural African American students from another Southeastern state (Means et al., 2016) who did not consider applying to the state’s flagship university or its highly selective land grant university because they had visited both and deemed them uncomfortable given the few Black people they encountered on campus.

In their introduction, the editors describe an exhortation from Carrillo and colleagues (2021), who found a vast underrepresentation of Communities of Color in their

meta-analysis of empirical articles appearing in *Rural Sociology* between 1971 and 2020. Carrillo and colleagues called on the field to understand that “the meaning of race and practices of racism vary and are embedded within contextually specific and historically nested ecologies of local social logic” (pp. 431–434, as cited in Hallmark et al., 2023, p. 8). With that call in mind, this book does a wonderful job of highlighting different rural Communities of Color across all U.S. regions (the Northeast is the only region lacking specific representation; see Table 1, in which authors’ preferred terminology is retained). The editors express regret about the lack of representation of Asian and Middle Eastern rural students within the book and suggest that more research focused on students from these backgrounds is needed.

One structural note about the book is that while I enjoyed the Notes from the Field and found them to be valuable in providing glimpses at *critical hope*, which foreword writer Joy Gaston Gayles defines as “the ability and capacity to hold struggle and possibility together while taking action toward liberation from oppressive systems and structures” (p. xv), they were often difficult to spot while reading. That is, there is no designation in the Table of Contents or in the chapter headings to alert the reader to the fact that what they are reading is one of the Notes rather than a longer research chapter, so sometimes I found myself reading along and being surprised to see the chapter end so quickly. Readers can refer to Table 1 to see the breakdown of chapter types and note that the Notes from the Field are the last two to four chapters of each of the four sections. Within the

Table 1
Representation at a Glance

Chapter	Racial/Ethnic Group Represented	State
<i>Standard Chapters</i>		
2	Considered all major racial/ethnic groups	n/a
3	Considered all major racial/ethnic groups	n/a
6	Latina/o	Iowa
7	Latinx	California
8	Considered all major racial/ethnic groups	n/a
9	Black, Hispanic/Latin*	Illinois
14	Latina	Texas
15	African American	North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia
16	Black/African American	Mississippi
17	Alaska Native	Alaska
20	Hispanic, African American, biracial (White/Asian)	Georgia
21	Discussed BIPOC communities generally	North Carolina
22	Considered all major racial/ethnic groups	n/a
23	Multiracial	n/a
<i>Notes from the Field</i>		
4	Discussed BIPOC communities generally	n/a
5	Considered all major racial/ethnic groups	n/a
10	Discussed BIPOC communities generally	North Carolina
11	African American	Mississippi
12	Latinx, Indigenous	New Mexico
13	Latina/o/x	California
18	Pacific Islander	Utah
19	Latino, Indigenous	New Mexico
24	Indigenous	Oregon
25	Black, Hispanic	Georgia

Notes, some of the programs described that were specific to certain racial/ethnic groups and places included the Pasifika Scholars Institute at the University of Utah (Vaughn, Chapter 18), designed to frontload, and then maintain, mentoring support for rural Pacific Islander students as they transitioned to college; the Freedom Project Network in Mississippi (Creps & Harris, Chapter 11), a statewide network grounded in Civil Rights history providing year-round programming to rural African American students from middle school through college; and the Rural Student Project in New Mexico (Bott-Lyons & Levin, Chapter 12), where rural Latinx and Indigenous college students work with community members on agricultural projects and learn about important cultural and political figures like Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez.

By and large, the authors' recommendations for improving the experiences of rural Students of Color in higher education center around providing layered supports (Pfrenger et al., Chapter 16) that attend to the needs of rural Students of Color in multiple, overlapping ways. These supports include intentional mentoring from professors, university staff, community members, local professionals, and peers; providing spaces on campus for rural Students of Color to engage with others who share their rural identities *and* those who share their racial/ethnic identities (and spaces where they can express both identities at the same time; Flowers, Chapter 15); and opportunities for rural Students of Color to learn more about, and celebrate, their own cultural identities. They also recommend increasing recruiting efforts in rural communities as well as establishing opportunities for rural Students of Color to return to their home communities to support younger students through the college application process. They urge higher education professionals to think deeply about the unique challenges faced by rural Students of Color and to be more intentional about mitigating those challenges. All these suggestions and recommendations align with McDonough and colleagues' (2011) argument that "higher education needs to take responsibility for serving rural communities without expecting them to conform or assimilate to dominant cultural practices" (p. 192).

Overall, I felt this book was a meaningful, educative collection that gave a broad view of race and rurality in higher education as well as specific examples that helped personalize both the challenges rural Students of Color experience as well as the assets they reach for when meeting and overcoming those challenges. Yet, considering the dominant narrative of rural spaces in the United States as being overwhelmingly white, I would have liked to see contributors take up more substantially the issue of whiteness as an ideology and its pervasive impact on rural Students of Color. As such, a suggestion I might make for researchers is to engage more with critical race theory (CRT) and critical

whiteness scholarship. While some chapters did mention CRT (e.g., Chapter 16) and the work of noted whiteness scholars like Cheryl Matias (Chapter 2), Zeus Leonardo (Chapter 20), and Nolan Cabrera (Chapters 16 and 26) in some of their initial framing, I felt they could have delved more deeply into these theories to help readers understand how and why the systems in place—systems that are rooted in white supremacy—have led to the circumstances that currently disadvantage rural Students of Color in higher education, and to consider the necessity of dismantling these systems. I believe deeper examination of this field of scholarship would help contextualize and provide further insight into the ways in which race, *racism*, and rurality converge to shape rural students' experiences in academia; Cabrera's work focuses on whiteness in higher education and would be especially useful in this regard (see Cabrera, 2024). Additionally, while this book did an excellent job of unpacking the influence of the intersections of two primary identity markers (racial/ethnic and geospatial), with some attention paid to gender (e.g., Stone & Serrata, Chapter 14), it is important to note that many rural Students of Color experience further multiplicative effects from challenges related to additional identity markers such as queerness and disability that should also be explored.

I mentioned earlier that the authors of Chapter 2 had noted an increase in race-related scholarship in rural education journals following George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police officers in 2020. Like many people and organizations across the globe, rural education scholars were affected deeply by being made more aware of the blatant racism that led to Mr. Floyd's death—racism that many had not previously understood was systemic in nature, not merely individual attitudes towards people of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds. As part of this worldwide racial reckoning, the Rural Education Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association created a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee that then hosted a widely attended webinar series featuring panel discussions highlighting work being done with rural Communities of Color (Azano & Means, 2022). The *Journal of Research in Rural Education* published a special issue exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in relation to rural education (Joubert & Lensmire, 2021), as did *Theory and Practice in Rural Education* (Gallagher et al., 2021), who called theirs a "Special Issue on Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity in Rural Schools and Communities." In 2022, *The Rural Educator* also published a special issue about race and rurality in education (The Editors, 2022), meaning that all three major rural education journals recognized, and acted upon, the urgency to increase the attention paid to People and Communities of Color in rural education research. Further, the National Rural Education Association highlighted both "Spatial and Educational Equity" and

“College and Career Trajectory” as foci in its 2022–2027 Research Agenda (Hartman et al., 2022). Under Spatial and Educational Equity, the committee issuing the agenda highlighted “research from intersectional perspectives” and “dynamics of white supremacy/identity” as two lines of inquiry; under College and Career Trajectory, “identifying deficit ideology imposed by adults in college and career processes (e.g., racism/classism)” is highlighted. Finally, the 2023 Why Rural Matters report (Showalter et al., 2023) emphasized rural diversity, or the likelihood that two students from the same school district selected at random would identify differently in terms of race, as one of the key gauges for determining which states are considered “highest-priority”—those “where a convergence of factors impacting the schooling process result in extreme challenges to rural schooling, and therefore have the most comprehensive needs for policymakers’ attention” (p. 19).

All in all, this volume, *Race and Rurality: Considerations for Advancing Higher Education Equity* (Hallmark et al., 2023), is an informative text that takes up these calls from the field by addressing concerns related to race and rurality that have received far too little attention in previous scholarship, and I highly recommend it for rural scholars, higher education scholars, and scholars of race and ethnicity in education. In Chapter 6, Colvin and colleagues quote Pini and Bhopal (2017, p. 192), in reminding us that “one of the outcomes of the imagined whiteness of the rural is that it has licensed a view that race is not a concern for rural areas” (p. 65). This skillfully edited volume goes a long way in disabusing that notion and moving the field forward towards equity and social justice for and within rural communities.

References

- Atewologun, D., Sealy, R., & Vinnicombe, S. (2016). Revealing intersectional dynamics in organizations: Introducing “intersectional identity work.” *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(3), 223–247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12082>
- Azano, A. P., & Means, D. R. (2022). Rethinking equity and justice in rural organizations: Implications for policy and practice. *The Rural Educator*, 43(1), 110–114. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v43i1.1359>
- Byun, S. Y., Irvin, M. J., & Meece, J. L. (2015). Rural–nonrural differences in college attendance patterns. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 90(2), 263–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2015.1022384>
- Cabrera, N. (2024). *Whiteness in the ivory tower: Why don't we notice the White students sitting together in the quad?* Teachers College Press.
- Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009). *Hollowing out the middle: The rural brain drain and what it means for America*. Beacon Press.
- Carrillo, I., Quisumbing King, K., & Schafft, K. A. (2021). Race, ethnicity, and twenty-first century rural sociological imaginings: A special issue introduction. *Rural Sociology*, 86(3), 419–443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12402>
- Corbett, M. (2007). *Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community*. West Virginia University Press.
- Crumb, L., Chambers, C., Azano, A. P., Hands, A., Cuthrell, K., & Avent, M. (2023). Rural cultural wealth: Dismantling deficit ideologies of rurality. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 17(2), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-06-2022-0076>
- Farmer, T. W., Dadisman, K., Latendresse, S. J., Thompson, J., Irvin, M. J., & Zhang, L. (2006). Educating out and giving back: Adults’ conceptions of successful outcomes of African American high school students from impoverished rural communities. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 21(10), 1–12. <https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-08/21-10.pdf>
- Floyd, E. F., McGinnis, J. L., & Grantham, T. C. (2011). Gifted education in rural environments. In J. A. Castellano & A. D. Frazier (Eds.), *Special populations in gifted education* (pp. 27–46). Prufrock Press.
- Gagnon, P., & Mattingly, M. J. (2015). *Limited access to AP courses for students in smaller and more isolated rural school districts* (National Issue Brief No. 80). Carsey School of Public Policy, University of New Hampshire. <https://dx.doi.org/10.34051/p/2020.227>
- Gallagher, J., Blaisdell, B., Howard, C., & Harris, J. A. (2021). Navigating contentious times in rural education. *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*, 11(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3776/tpre.2021.v11n2p1-14>

- Hartman, S. L., Roberts, J. K., Schmitt-Wilson, S., McHenry-Sorber, E., Buffington, P. J., & Biddle, C. (2022). National Rural Education Association research agenda—2022–2027: A closer look at the research priorities. *The Rural Educator*, 43(3), 59–66. <https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1349>
- Hemmler, V., Azano, A. P., Dmitrieva, S., & Callahan, C. M. (2022). Representation of Black students in rural gifted education: Taking steps toward equity. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 38(2), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.26209/jrre3802>
- Joubert, E., III, & Lensmire, T. (2021). Introduction: Black Lives Matter and rural education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 37(7), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.26209/jrre3707-01>
- Kuehl, R. (2023, November 3). *Navigating an anti-CRT climate in rural places: How Appalachian teachers approach critical discussions about race in contentious times* [Conference presentation]. National Academy of Education/Spencer Fall Retreat and Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, United States.
- Kuehl, R., Callahan, C. M., & Azano, A. P. (2022). The forgotten many: Rural gifted learners (pp. 150–170). In J. Manzone & J. Nyberg (Eds.), *Creating equitable services for the gifted: Protocols for identification, implementation, and evaluation*. IGI Global. <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/112770>
- Kuehl, R., & Snyder, J. D. (2023, November). Partnering and place: Teaming up to build sustainable gifted programming in Appalachian schools. *Teaching for High Potential*, 18–21.
- Lewis, K. D., Novak, A. M., & Weber, C. L. (2018). Where are gifted students of color? Case studies outline strategies to increase diversity in gifted programs. *The Learning Professional*, 39(4), 50–53, 58.
- McDonough, P. M., Gildersleeve, R. E., & Jarsky, K. M. (2010). The golden cage of rural college access: How higher education can respond to the rural life. In K. A. Schafft & A. Y. Jackson (Eds.), *Rural education for the twenty-first century: Identity, place, and community in a globalizing world* (pp. 191–209). Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Means, D. R., Clayton, A., B., Conzelmann, J. G., Baynes, P., & Umbach, P. D. (2016). Bounded aspirations: Rural African American high school students and college access. *The Review of Higher Education*, 39(4), 543–569. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2016.0035>
- Pini, B., & Bhopal, K. (2017). Racializing rural education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 20(2), 192–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1115620>
- Sherman, J., & Sage, R. (2011). Sending off all your good treasures: Rural schools, brain-drain, and community survival in the wake of economic collapse. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26(11), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.18113/P8JRRE2611>
- Showalter, D., Hartman, S. L., Eppley, K., Johnson, J., & Klein, B. (2023). *Why rural matters 2023: Centering equity and opportunity*. National Rural Education Association. <https://www.nrea.net/why-rural-matters>
- The Editors. (2022). Introduction for the special issue: Race and rurality in education. *The Rural Educator*, 43(1), i–ii. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v43i1.1360>
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, 8(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>