

THE NECESSITY OF REP SCHOLARS AND SCHOLARSHIP

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DOI: 10.1017/S1049096519001094

So much of academia is shrouded in a thin layer of secrecy. How do we navigate coursework, successfully pass comprehensive exams, create a dissertation proposal, select a committee, cultivate letter writers, apply for outside fellowships, prepare cover letters and applications for the job market, successfully defend the dissertation, and negotiate our first job offer? To my knowledge, there is no blueprint, codebook, or manual, especially for scholars of color who have to carve out unique spaces of resilience in historically white institutions, many of which are less than welcoming and “Ground Zero” when it comes to microaggressions and racially hostile environments—both intellectually and emotionally. For many young academics, the articles and books by race, ethnicity, and politics (REP) scholars serve as a balm for the cruel realities of the hollowed halls of academia. In addition, the networks of REP scholars serve as an additional safety net for some (and lifeline for others) as they attempt to survive and thrive in academic institutions.

The articles and books written by REP scholars are increasingly making their way into the cannon and on diverse syllabi in various types of institutions. My case may be the most extreme, but there was not a single scholar of color on any syllabus in my two years of coursework in graduate school. To say that the research of REP scholars assisted me in finding my intellectual voice is a gross understatement. The scholarship of the growing number of intellectually diverse REP scholars is further reinforcing C.S. Lewis’s assertion that “We read to know we are

will provide substantive feedback because the participants will be more interested in the intellectual contributions and less so enamored by the fact that a presenter is “so articulate.” Another positive byproduct is that the REP section often has been used as a “ghetto” for any scholarship that other conference sections deemed “not quite a good fit.” That is, for example, my papers on African Americans who have run for the US presidency have never been accepted to the Presidency section of any conference. As a social experiment, I would submit my paper to the Presidency section to see how quickly it was ushered to the REP section. I am proud to present in the REP section, but far too many scholars of color who write about American politics are politely removed from larger sections of the discipline and pushed to the margins to study the marginalized.

In an effort to center marginalized groups in the main discourse of political science, one of the greatest contributions to the future scholarship of the REP section has been created. The Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) is a dataset that provides post-election content from a multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual set of more than 10,000 respondents. This cooperative data source has provided a space for current (and future) REP scholars to contribute to a collective and to ask and share questions of interest to their particular research interests. The CMPS is bringing together scholars of all ranks from diverse institutions to collaborate and share data in ways that have never been done. Not only have scholars sought fiscal participation from their respective universities, the APSA also has recognized the value of the CMPS and supports the burgeoning collaborations. CMPS co-principal investigators contributed to this spotlight and describe the importance of the survey in more detail in their article.

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not alone.” The increasing number of scholars from across the country who are contributing to the REP foundation are steadily pushing REP from the margins of American political science into its own solidified genre of the discipline. We need only to attend a panel at one of the major conferences to see participants at all levels exchanging ideas and tips on how to succeed in a discipline that has been far too comfortable for far too long with REP as a minor addendum to the mainstream intellectual agenda of the discipline.

As “mainstream” American political science slowly diversifies, the REP field continues to do so in myriad ways. For many years, attending workshops, roundtables, and panels sponsored by the REP section felt like attending a family reunion within an unwelcoming and sometimes openly hostile conference. These sections were an opportunity to ask questions, present ideas, and be challenged by peers and potential mentors on the merits of the scholarship and nothing else. It was in these spaces where school rank, accent, and interest in marginalized groups were not treated as other, foreign, or unacceptable. It was in these spaces that true knowledge production and exchanges were possible. Many scholars know that presenting in the REP section of a conference

We need only read the front page of a newspaper to realize that we are no longer in a moment of politics of the past. The increase in overt racialized and racist behaviors at all levels of our government has exacerbated the necessity for a deeper understanding of racial and ethnic politics. REP scholarship explains complex and historical notions of white supremacy, white backlash, participation, coalitions, and assimilation. Therefore, how we study and try to understand the political world around us must take a more detailed and nuanced approach that brings a concrete understanding of race and ethnicity to the fore. It also is imperative that in our quest to better understand the increasingly diverse political world, we seek out harder-to-reach populations and utilize an array of diverse methodological tools to do so. The REP scholarship provides an intellectual roadmap and foundation for some; for others, it is a light guiding them through a discipline with few known rules. Those who contribute to laying the foundation for the future study of race and ethnicity have been diligently and tirelessly writing and mentoring scholars for decades. We are here, we are changing the ways race and ethnicity are discussed inside and outside of the academy, and we are no longer hiding in plain sight. ■