

## **In Context: *Diversity, Transformative Knowledge, and Civic Education***

**by James A. Banks**

The unjustified and tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery by police are the most recent in a long list of Black lives that have been unjustly lost throughout American history and within recent years. I mourn their loss and share the pain and agony of their families, of all Black Americans, and of Black allies from many different racial and ethnic groups. These events are powerful indications of why educators need to support the idea that Black Lives Matter. Structural and institutionalized racism is the major reason why African Americans have been the victims of lynching, murder by police, and other forms of violence throughout American history. This chapter contains information that will help educators to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed *to know, to care, and to act* to reduce institutional and structural racism in the United States and to create a just society that epitomizes why Black Lives Matter.

This chapter describes how knowledge related to race was constructed from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1940s, how it contributed to the victimization and marginalization of African Americans, and how it perpetuated ideas that reinforced and supported institutionalized racism. I detail how the social, cultural, and political context into which scholars who invented conceptions of race were situated influenced the knowledge they constructed.

The final part of this chapter discusses the ways in which teachers can engage students when teaching about the construction of knowledge about race. Although most of

this article focuses on the construction of race about African Americans, the ways in which other groups of color were racially constructed by mainstream social scientists and historians mirrored the ways in which African Americans were constructed. Stereotyped and negative images of these groups were also created and perpetuated in textbooks and in the popular media. Consequently, I give teaching examples using content about Native Americans to illustrate the parallel ways in which they and African Americans were racially constructed. A major goal of teaching students about knowledge construction is to help them to understand the extent to which knowledge about race, like other social phenomena, is a social construction that reflects both the objective reality as well as the subjectivity of the knower.