

# Dear Higher Education

LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

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## The Sherpa to the Mountain

TRUDY P. NADINE

*To My Dearest Higher Education Mountain,*

It's your faithful servant, the one and lonely Dr. Trudy P. Nadine. It gets lonely on this side of the mountain but trust I feel and see most everything. I hope this letter finds you well, enjoying the fresh air of which George Floyd couldn't get enough. Remember I'm lonely on this side of the mountain, but as a sherpa I must be tough.

You see I come from a long line of sherpas who've led precious cargo to the top. My grandmas' generation lost Emmet, Malcolm, and even a King, but as sherpas they never stopped. Sherpas are local experts who know the Mountain's perilous terrain. Their knowledge passed down generationally through mentoring--no degrees to be obtained. The passion to pursue the Mountain and to guide others up too is the legacy of slavery and the audacity to achieve what they claimed we'd never do. Climbing and shepherding Higher Ed Mountain is to overcome obstacles and barriers intentionally placed in the path. Sherpas lead excursions up the Mountain using altruism and never warranted wrath. Hypervigilant of the Mountain and the weather to be endured makes others feel safe in our guidance like with Harriet Tubman of pre'mancipation lore.

I suppose that's why I'm still a sherpa because their legacy courses strongly through my veins. My mother's generation ended segregation but endured great humiliation and great pain. My first sherpa was my mother. She made sure I knew multiple paths to the summit--no short cuts for folks like us--one false step and to basecamp we plummet! I take pride in being a sherpa despite knowing the Mountain will be unkind. There's no life for me off the Mountain so success in guiding others I will find.

When I feel most alone on this Mountain, I often write poems to pass the time, so indulge me Higher Ed Mountain: this little ditty to your soul from mine.

The White woman that I work for wonders where my secret lies.  
I stay cute, have a long commute, and with precision meet deadlines.  
But when I build momentum,  
She cuts me down to size.  
She says,  
"You're overreaching your role,"  
"You should have done it like this!"  
"Fall in line! Be more docile!"  
"Oh, on YOU, I'mma nitpick."  
I'm a Black woman  
in Higher Ed.  
Faithfully.  
Dr. Trudy P. Nadine.  
That's me.

I walk into a conference room,  
Head held high, an invited authority.  
My team? One mediocre White man,  
I just can't stand,  
Never has enough work  
Like they load on to me.  
He's always late,  
Leaves early! When remote—awfully hard to reach!  
He says,  
“I'm overworked and underpaid,  
I should be promoted,  
But I won't work late.”  
I'm an observant Black woman  
In Higher Ed.  
Dr. Trudy P. Nadine.  
That's me.  
I'm mountainside everyday I'm needed,  
Even though it should just be two.  
A sherpa to Mount Education  
My love? My commitment? It's true.  
This load I bear, ain't never been fair.  
And I'll send my daughter up the Mountain too.  
It's in the blood! And in the tears,  
Our lineage? Triumph despite the fear—  
For we are sherpas.  
Black women In Higher Ed.  
My name? Unimportant—but since you asked:  
Dr. Trudy P. Nadine.  
That's me.  
I lead my daughter to Higher Ed Mountain.  
It's our family legacy.  
She aspires so much!  
But this road is so tough!  
She can do it! She kin to me.  
Don't try to understand my loyalty to the Mountain.  
Why I simply refuse to leave. They say,  
“You don't need praise or even a raise.” I say,  
“Sistah, where is your dignity?”  
I'm a Black woman  
In Higher Ed.  
Dr. Trudy P. Nadine.  
That's me.

*Sincerely,  
Dr. Trudy P. Nadine*

### **About the author**

**Dr. Trudy P. Nadine** leads undergraduate and graduate students up Higher Ed Mountain at two mid-sized public institutions in Middle America. She also lends her expertise to consulting in instructional design, faculty development, and initiatives that advance equitable and accessible learning environments. Her career bridges classroom instruction, academic leadership, and consulting—roles that often require women of color to carry both the visible work of teaching and coaching and the unseen labor of serving as chief strategist for those in power within their institutions. She cares for the injured scattered along the Mountain by acknowledging their pain and affirming that the difficulties they encounter are not imagined but features of the trail itself. A committed sherpa in service to Higher Ed Mountain, Dr. Nadine moves deliberately, with both fear and awe.