

Dear Higher Education

LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

From Lonely Only to Legacy: A Black Feminist Love Letter to Higher Education on Behalf of Black Women Faculty

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Dear Higher Education,

As we reflect on our shared journey through the labyrinth of academia, I offer you this letter, a compass for the tenure track, shaped by experience, challenge, triumph, and truth.

First and foremost, let your anthem be, Tenure is a Marathon, Not a Sprint. Picture it as a journey, not a destination. Your task now is to earn tenure with balance, tapping into breaks and resting when needed. The echoes of those who came before us remind us of the importance of self-preservation and refusing to succumb to the relentless demands that have claimed far too many Black women. You will defy that fate.

You may find yourself in the space of the “Lonely Only,” the only Black woman in your department, the only one asked to serve, the only one whose brilliance is measured against metrics never designed for you. But hear me clearly. “Lonely Only” is not your identity. It is a temporary condition within an institution still learning how to value what it did not build. You are not an anomaly in the academy. You are part of a lineage. It is through that lineage, through joy, strategy, and collective care, that institutional change begins. What feels isolating today becomes legacy tomorrow.

As you tread this path, remember, It is Just the Beginning. The pre-tenure phase, though it may feel endless, is but a brief movement in the grand symphony of your career. Focus on the essentials that build sustainability. Lay the foundation now for a legacy that extends far beyond the six-year horizon.

Find your Truth Tellers, sister scholars who speak unvarnished truths in love. Seek guidance from those who will not simply encourage you but equip you for the long arc. Build these connections early, for knowledge shared before your first day on campus often determines the trajectory that follows.

Vent wisely. Build relationships within and beyond your department. Share the burden, clear the clutter, the foolery, the shenanigans, and let your circle be a sanctuary for authenticity and wholeness.

Stay connected in these academic streets. Conferences, networks, and kindred spirits will sustain you. Especially seek those who understand the journey of a Black woman in the academy. Let affinity groups and professional organizations become homeplaces of restoration and strategy.

Repeat after me, You are not an Imposter. The whispers of doubt will come. Remember, you deserve to be here. You were hired because you are capable. You remain because you are called.

Get you Some Business. Cultivate interests beyond the ivory tower. Life holds dimensions that academia cannot define.

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In these academic streets, You Should Only Be You. Authenticity is not rebellion, it is alignment. Let integrity guide your path. Allow your brilliance to unfold naturally, yes, even with all your Black Girl Magic.

Teaching and service matter but use discernment. If a task does not align with your scholarship or growth, use your scholarly voice and say kindly, “Get somebody else to do it.” Establish your “no committee,” a protective boundary against exhaustion. Seek counsel before you say yes. Your time is sacred.

And when you feel overwhelmed, pause. Rest is not weakness, it is resistance. Lastly, get involved intentionally. Explore opportunities that expand you, not just those that drain you. Let every endeavor move you toward sustainability, sovereignty, and joy.

From Lonely Only to Legacy is my offering to you, my dearest sister scholar, a testament to the brilliance that has always defined Black women faculty. You are not merely surviving in this institution. You are reshaping it. Transformation is not distant or abstract. It is happening in the syllabi you write, the students you mentor, the boundaries you enforce, and the joy you refuse to relinquish.

You are not the exception to the academy. You are evidence that it is already becoming something new.

*With love and in solidarity,
Your Sister Scholar,
Anglesia*

About the author

Dr. Anglesia Brown is a Black feminist scholar whose research centers Black women faculty, belonging, and institutional transformation in higher education. Grounded in Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, she examines how mentoring, collective care, and narrative inquiry cultivate joy, resistance, and intellectual sovereignty within academic spaces. Her dissertation, *Triumphantly Taking Tenure*, reframes post-tenure life as both survival and celebration. Dr. Brown’s scholarship introduces frameworks, such as Taxation Without Representation and Endarkened Feminist Sankofa, challenging traditional understandings of power, presence, and possibility in the academy.