

# Annual Report

## 2024-2025

The Lewis Walker Institute  
for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations





## From the Director's Desk:

### A Vision for the Lewis Walker Institute



Dr. Bianca Nightengale-Lee

As we reflect on another transformative year at the Lewis Walker Institute (LWI), I am reminded of our motto, inspired by the words of Kendrick Lamar: **"They not like us."** These words echo the reality that the systems in which we operate—be it education, public policy, or social structures—were never designed to serve marginalized communities. Yet, these communities continue to resist, thrive, and redefine the meaning of success in the face of oppressive systems. Lamar's words also serve as a call to action, a call to resist, to dream, and to create systems that reflect our shared

humanity, justice, and liberation. At LWI, this commitment to justice, equity, and transformation is at the heart of everything we do.

It is within this tension that I draw my vision for the Lewis Walker Institute. My leadership at LWI is not merely about responding to the issues of our time; it's also about creating spaces where young people, particularly those from marginalized communities, can forge their own paths to liberation. This vision is rooted in the belief that educational institutions, when purposefully engaged with communities and driven by justice-centered scholarship, can and should be forces for transformative change.

Since stepping into the role of Director in Fall 2024, I have been guided by a vision of the Institute as a beacon of intellectual and community-centered leadership. We have worked tirelessly to elevate the voices of marginalized communities, to build strong campus-community partnerships, and to foster transdisciplinary scholarship. Our mission, grounded in the principles of **PE.A.C.E.** (Promote, Enhance,

#### Multicultural Meet & Greet



WMU Students  
w/Dr. Cristobal Rodriguez

- **P**romote community amongst scholars and students working on race and ethnicity
- **E**nhance transdisciplinary research focused on race, social justice and equity
- **A**dvance programming and public knowledge on intersecting forms of discrimination
- **C**ultivate dynamic youth programming in partnerships with schools and communities
- **E**valuate equity based programs for effectiveness and cultural efficacy

Advance, Cultivate, and Evaluate), has provided a clear framework for our work, and it is this mission that continues to guide our growth.

This year has been marked by several notable accomplishments that reflect our deepening commitment to racial equity, youth empowerment, and inclusive pedagogy. Our flagship initiatives, community partnerships, and research efforts have positioned LWI as a leader in racial justice scholarship and action. Together, we have created spaces where our collective vision for liberation can take root and thrive.

I am proud of the strides we've made, but we are only just beginning. As we continue to build on the legacy of Dr. Lewis Walker, I invite all of you, partners, staff, students, and community members to join us in this journey of transformation. Together, we will ensure that justice is not just an aspiration but a reality.

WIRE Math and Science Camp

## Youth Engagement: Architects of Liberation

The future we envision must be shaped by the youth who will inherit it. The programs we've expanded, such as the WIRE Math & Science Summer Camp and the Youth Juvenile Justice Fellows (YJJF) Program, are designed to challenge and transform the dominant narratives about young people, particularly young men of color. These initiatives are grounded in the radical scholarship of thinkers like Robin D.G. Kelley and the speculative futures imagined through Afrofuturism. They offer young people not just the opportunity to challenge systems of oppression but also the agency to dream



2025 Symposium

WIRE Student Experiments



Youth Juvenile Justice Fellows



Pictured with Dr. Lewis Walker

beyond them. The YJJF program, in particular, has become a critical intervention, providing culturally responsive mentorship and restorative justice to youth who have been systematically excluded and



2025 YJJE Trip to Nashville, TN

criminalized. It is not just a program—it is a sanctuary for those who dare to imagine what liberation could look like for them.

## **Campus-Community Partnerships: Collective Power**

To create meaningful change, we must break down the silos that often separate academic work from community action. Under my leadership, the Institute has forged deep partnerships across both WMU and the greater Kalamazoo community. Collaborations with organizations like the Kalamazoo NAACP, Read and Write Kalamazoo (RAWK), The Douglass Center, and Communities in Schools have allowed us to craft programs that are not only responsive to community needs but also grounded in academic rigor. These partnerships are not transactional; they are reciprocal, built on trust, shared knowledge, and a collective commitment to justice. They are the blueprint for how institutions of higher education can and should operate: as integral parts of the social fabric, not as isolated entities detached from the lived realities of the communities they serve.

## **Research-Centered Scholarship: Bridging Knowledge and Action**

The Lewis Walker Institute has always been at the forefront of bridging the gap between research and lived experience. The Thought Leaders Program, which launched in Fall 2024, brings together an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars to address the most pressing issues of racial equity and justice. Through this program, we have cultivated a space for faculty to collaborate across departments, share research, and develop actionable initiatives. This model of research not confined to the ivory tower but engaged with real-world struggle exemplifies the kind of scholarship we need in the 21st century. This year, with support from the WMUx grant, we have sent five of our Faculty Thought Leaders to the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), providing them with opportunities for national visibility and engagement. This opportunity for professional development and national engagement will further enhance our visibility and strengthen our efforts to position WMU as a leader in racial equity



scholarship, fostering knowledge that is not only transformative in theory but also practical in its application.

## Our Partners

The work of the Lewis Walker Institute would not be possible without the strong partnerships we have built with local, regional, and national organizations. These collaborations have allowed us to extend our impact and ensure that our initiatives are not only responsive to community needs but also rooted in shared values of equity and justice. Some of our key community partners include:

- *Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety*
- *Douglass Community Association*
- *Urban Alliance*
- *Gryphon Place*
- *Greatness Unleashed*
- *Michigan Transformation Collective*
- *Kalamazoo NAACP*
- *Read and Write Kalamazoo (RAWK)*
- *WMU Public Safety Department*
- *Communities in Schools*
- *Kalamazoo Public Schools*
- *BLAC-Michigan Black Leadership Advisory Council*
- *W.K. Kellogg Foundation*

## Community Partners



Graphic Packaging Inc.  
W/Greatness Unleashed

Through these strategic partnerships, LWI has been able to design and implement community-based



Unity Breakfast 2024

programs that address structural inequity, promote restorative justice, and uplift marginalized youth. These collaborations are essential to our work, allowing us to leverage resources and expertise to create lasting change.

## Events & Symposia

At the heart of the Lewis Walker Institute's work is a commitment to creating spaces that amplify marginalized voices and promote inclusive educational practices. This year, we curated a dynamic calendar of events designed to engage the WMU community and the broader Kalamazoo area in conversations about race, justice, and education. Key highlights included:

- Inclusive Democracy Breakfast (Sept 2024)
- Youth Justice Summit with the Michigan Center for Youth Justice (Sept 2024)
- Walker Week (Oct 2024), honoring the legacy of Dr. Lewis Walker
- Youth Juvenile Justice Fellowship and WIRE STEM Camp (Jan–July 2025)
- Critical Rest Yoga and Sound Bowl Retreat (Jan 2025), in collaboration with Sigma Phi Zeta Sorority Inc.
- Humanizing Pedagogies Virtual Webinar w/ WMUx (Feb 2025)
- Realizing Education's Promise 4 All Michigan Virtual Town Hall (March 2025), in partnership with BLAC and the Kalamazoo NAACP
- Love & Liberation WMU Student Podcast (April 2025), with Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

These events serve as more than just informative sessions—they are transformative experiences that inspire action, foster community, and cultivate future leaders across all sectors.

### 35 Year Gala



Dr. Y. Sealey-Ruiz  
Keynote



Dr. Brianne Pitts  
Faculty Thought Leader



Ms. Fannie, Dr. Walker  
Coach Stephens

## Staff & Advisors

The success of the Lewis Walker Institute is a testament to the dedication and passion of our staff, faculty, and advisors. Their commitment to racial equity and social justice drives our work, and their expertise in research, pedagogy, and community engagement is invaluable. Together, we continue to build a strong and diverse team committed to the Institute's mission and vision.

## LWI Staff & Advisors

Shimonta Dickerson- Administrative Assistant, Sr.

Dr. Gus Calbert- Community Liaison

Asif Masum- Graduate Professional

Mariana Monteserat Bringas-Acevedo- Graduate Professional

Dr. Karika Parker- Post Doctoral Fellow

Dr. Cristobal Rodriguez- Associate Provost for Equity-Centered Initiatives

Dr. Lewis Walker- Founder and Professor Emeritus

Dr. Don Cooney- Associate Director and Professor of Social Work



David Anderson, Kalamazoo Mayor  
Dr. Bianca Nightengale-Lee

## Looking Ahead: A Vision for the Future

As we look to the future, the Lewis Walker Institute remains steadfast in its commitment to justice, equity, and transformative change. We will continue to expand our research initiatives, deepen our community partnerships, and elevate the voices of marginalized communities. Through our work, we aim to create a future where racial equity is not only a possibility but a reality for all.

The legacy of Dr. Lewis Walker, whose name the Institute bears, is one of resistance, resilience, and radical transformation. As we continue to build upon that legacy, we are reminded of the power in Lamar's refrain:

***“They not like us.”*** We are not like them.



We are not bound by their systems. Instead, we are building new ones—systems that center equity, justice, and the transformative potential of education.

In the spirit of this vision, we remain committed to pushing the boundaries of what is possible, and we invite all who share this commitment to join us in creating a future that reflects the full humanity and boundless potential of all people.



Activist Genesis Be, Dr. Lewis Walker  
Dr. Nightengale-Lee

**Dr. Bianca Nightengale-Lee**

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Western Michigan University