Race, Negative Acculturation, and The Black International Student: A Study of Afro-Caribbean and African-Born Students in U.S. Colleges

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Abstract

Black students originating from African and Caribbean nations are well represented in the ranks of international students attending U.S. colleges, at over 51,000 annually (Institute of International Education, 2021). In addition to contributing heavily to the overall economic impact of the universities they attend (NAFSA, 2021), Black foreign-born students play a critically important role in adding diversity of thought and perspective to these academic communities. However, because of the additional socio-political challenges they face in a racially polarized United States, these students must navigate a more difficult pathway to acculturation and desirable academic outcomes than their non-Black peers. This qualitative study examines the phenomenological experiences of 15 foreign-born Black students from the sub-Saharan African and Caribbean regions – lived experiences found at the intersection of immigration, race, and higher education. The findings suggest that the interpolations of race salience, racism, and racial microaggressions all contribute to negative acculturation postures whereby the students are more likely to reject rather than accept the host country's cultural norms. This aversive positionality leads to increased acculturative stressors and a higher likelihood of self-construed feelings of marginalization or separation.

Keywords: acculturation theory, Black international students, critical race theory, ethno-transnationalism, negative acculturation.

This study explores negative acculturative experiences of foreign-born Black international students who currently attend or previously attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) of higher education in the United States. The study explores the extent to which reported instances of racism encountered by these students, whether on campus or off campus, played a role in how they negatively acculturated to life in the U.S. Using Berry's Acculturation Model (1997) and critical race theory (CRT) as guiding frameworks, two approaches to acculturation that can be described as *negative acculturation* (i.e., marginalization and separation) were isolated and applied. *Marginalization* in this sample population happens when a student reports feelings of being distinctively left out from or not invited to be a part of the within-group social circles of their U.S. peers. Additionally, *separation* in this group occurs when students intentionally decide to disengage from or reject overtures to be a part of within-group social circles of their U.S. peers. Both marginalization and separation can adversely impact Black foreign-born students' acculturative experiences. This study explores the degree to which racism may play a part in these two acculturative strategies.

To address these issues, three distinct research questions were proposed. The research questions are:

1. What is the relationship (if any) between racism and perceived negative acculturation trends in students of Afro-Caribbean or sub-Saharan African backgrounds in higher education?
2. Are there any differences in negative acculturation trends between Black international students from sub-Saharan Africa versus Caribbean nations?
3. What might universities do to address any negative acculturation trends seen in the Black international student population?

Background

Much has been written about the Black student experience on college campuses in the United States to chronicle the negative racial experiences and mental trauma that these students have historically faced because of the color of their skin (Solorzano et al., 2000; Williams-Witherspoon, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). Historically, Black students attending college in the U.S. have faced challenges, unlike their peers of other races. This includes racial microaggressions, racial biases, and in many cases, overt racism.

This issue is compounded for Black immigrant students who, upon arrival, automatically inherit the fallout of the American political climate on issues pertinent to race while simultaneously contending with issues inherent to separation from their home country (Jung et al., 2007). This phenomenon of having to contend with the political realities of the host nation may be startling for many international students of color, who largely do not get a choice to be passive observers and may feel disinclined to participate or take sides in a charged political discourse surrounding race. In many cases, if this discourse proves too difficult to contend with, students may choose or be forced into a path of negative acculturation. Negative acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs where immigrants may experience acute acculturation stressors that cause them increased levels of distress and may lead them to embrace anti-social behaviors such as actively separating themselves from the host culture (Atterya, 2021) or feeling marginalized from the host culture (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008).

Black Students in U.S. Colleges

The *color line,* as referenced in Solorzano et al. (2000), highlights a distinct, socially constructed differentiation phenomenon based on skin color that is present on many U.S. college campuses and pervasive in the wider society. This color line highlights the racial dominance of one group over another and is more commonly referred to as racism. Solórzano, referencing previous groundbreaking studies on racism by Lorde (1987) and Marable (1992), defined racism as being typically comprised of three distinct features: 1) the idea that one race is inherently superior to another; 2) the group that has the belief of superiority having bestowed power that enables them to carry out acts of racism against others; and 3) race-motivated discrimination and abuse may be perpetrated against members of multiple ethnic and racial groups by the dominant group.

Several studies have pointed to the trauma experienced by students of color when faced with the constant reality of lived racial microaggressions in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education (Sabbagh & Ben-Menachem, 2021; Williams et al., 2021; Williams-Witherspoon, 2021). Many Black students on U.S. college campuses must necessarily deal with processes, structures, and discourses in the college environment that disfavor them politically (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Review of Literature

Sub-Saharan African Students

About 40,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa attend U.S. colleges each year (Institute of International Education, 2021). Some data also shows that when asked about their perceptions of being perceived as Black in the U.S., many sub-Saharan African students felt that the idea of U.S. Blackness—where race is seen as central to Black identity—had a negative connotation and was a posture they as expatriates did not readily assume (Delalue-King Francis, 2014). Consequently, negative immersion in the host U.S. culture by their race, such as that which some Black African students experience, tends to lead to more acculturative stress (Hansen et al., 2018).

Other research shows that African students in the U.S. are often insufficiently aware of the pervasive and ugly history of racism in the United States. As a result, when exposed to it in conversations with host country peers, they will try to avoid these discussions (Manguvo, 2013). Unfortunately, this avoidance strategy may sometimes cause negative interactions, particularly with their U.S.-born Black counterparts, who may interpret this as a refusal to engage with or help to combat racism. These negative interactions may cause more acculturative stress, leading to more distress for these international students (Macharia-Lowe, 2017).

Mandishona (2018) identifies several strategies that university officials and policymakers may use to mitigate the acculturative stressors in Black international students, as follows: 1) evaluate their pre-arrival knowledge and perceptions of race by having frank and honest conversations with them hosted by trusted host country peers, advisors, or mentors; 2) quantify their race salience quotient, meaning the extent to which they believe race is impactful in their everyday living; 3) assess how much have they learned about the U.S. cultural environment since arrival; 4) consider what their interpersonal encounters have been like since their arrival; 5) explore if there are any meaningful inter-group friendships with host country peers, as a baseline to determine what barriers, if any, the lack of intercultural friendships may pose to acculturation; and, 6) offer institutional support that takes into consideration all these other factors (p. 78-79).

Afro-Caribbean Students

The research of Edwards-Joseph and Baker (2012) found that Black students from the Caribbean—like their sub-Saharan African counterparts—often experience feelings of not fitting in, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and value system differences.

As with sub-Saharan African students studying in college in the U.S., many Afro-Caribbean students prefer to use their national origin as their primary lens of self-construal. These Caribbean international students may reject the monolithic *Black* or *African American*

label used in the U.S. and tend to reject this amalgamation of the host and home cultures. The idea of this forced or abnormal assimilation of different ideologies around Blackness may be antithetical to the strong sense of nationalism that many Caribbean students feel toward their home nations and cultures. (Waters, 1994). Afro-Caribbean students studying in the U.S. overwhelmingly favor nationalism and ethnicity over race, so their sense of Blackness tends to be more nuanced (Waters, 1994; Joseph et al., 2013). Research from Taylor et al. (2019) notes that "in the Caribbean context, race itself is defined along a continuum that includes other factors such as education, wealth, occupation, and family standing, all of which assume more prominent roles in defining social status" (p. 465). In many of these countries in the English-speaking Caribbean, peoples of racial and ethnic minorities, as defined in the U.S., comprise a majority of the population. Therefore, upon arrival in the U.S., Afro-Caribbean students tend to arrive with lower levels of internalized racism than their American-born Black counterparts (Mouzon & McClean, 2017).

Additionally, there is a factor of commonalities in language. The fact that students from the Afro-Caribbean region share English as a common/first language with the vast population of the U.S. tends to remove the barrier of language discrimination. The language insufficiency barrier, used as a pretext for racial slights, is mainly seen in the experiences of Black students from sub-Saharan Africa (Mitchell & Bryan, 2007).

Nonetheless, despite any advantages gained from language commonalities, many Afro-Caribbean international students still believe they may incur negatively unfavorable or unbeneficial consequences if they wholly embrace the Black American culture (Joseph et al., 2013), and so they are hesitant to engage. Afro-Caribbean students are also highly cognizant of how the larger society may see their engagement with the broader African American culture and thus may be more inclined to pursue a strategy of separation or marginalization from the host culture and have only practical (the minimum that is required) immersion in any parts of the American culture.

Despite taking such measures, Afro-Caribbean students in higher education cannot outrun the pervasiveness of racial animus commonly found in U.S. interpersonal interactions. And studies have shown that these students, too, experience discrimination and racism in college that flows along a continuum from low discrimination and microaggressions to disrespect and condescension, from general discrimination that may be intermittent or singular to outright, chronic, and relentless discrimination (Clark et al., 2015; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014).

These unchecked racial attitudes toward these students may lead them to negative acculturation. They feel marginalized and lose any incentive to engage inter-culturally with their U.S. counterparts (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Research by Malcolm and Mendoza (2014) shows that Afro-Caribbean international students often felt that their needs were left un-examined or unmet by university administrators and that any such institutionalized programmatic efforts were often too general and not sufficiently reflective of their actual needs.

Conceptual Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

This study examines U.S. campus racial and political environment via the theoretical lens of critical race theory (CRT), which lays out the parameters for an inquisitive multidisciplinary scholarly discourse on race relations and ethno-transnational racism in higher education. CRT grounds racism as the basis to analyze societal inequities and challenge historically racially oppressive institutions, such as the system of American jurisprudence, education, and housing (Donnor, 2016; Taylor, 1998), and as such, is an appropriate framework for this study.

Racism is widely considered a social construct (Gannon, 2016; Morning, 2007). As such, it must be subjected to a radical deconstructive shift via a strong counter-narrative, which is evident when utilizing a CRT lens to address inequities in U.S. education.

Berry's Acculturation Model (BAM)

Berry's Acculturation Model (1990, 1997) is the second framework under which this research study was conducted. Under Berry's theory, immigrants to a new country or culture do not simply follow a linear path of assimilation with the host or dominant group. Instead, individuals can choose how to interact or relate to the host culture by employing a distinct acculturation attitude. This acculturation attitude manifests itself in two main choice dimensions: (a) the individual's choice of adopting or rejecting the host culture and (b) their choice of retaining or rejecting the home culture (Worthy, Lavigne & Romero, 2020). From these two dimensions, four distinct strategies or attitudinal postures are manifested: 1) *assimilation* – which is blending in fully with the host culture and letting go of the home culture; 2) *integration* – which is when the host culture is adopted while fully maintaining and preserving the home culture; 3) *separation* – which is a rejection of the host culture and full retention of the home culture; and, 4) *marginalization* – which is a 'no-man's land' attitudinal posture where the host culture is rejected, but there is an element of loss or letting go of the home culture as well (Berry, 1990, 1997). This study focuses on the separation and marginalization strategies – that is, the negative interactions manifested by a rejection of the host culture, rejection of the home culture, or rejection of both.

Several other researchers have also built on Berry's model over the years (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Kosic, 2002; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008; Ward & Kus, 2012), and BAM continues to be a useful and relevant framework through which to explore the acculturative attitudes of immigrants. In addition, some researchers have done studies specifically on the acculturative attitudes of international students (Araujo, 2011; Boafa-Arthur, 2013; Tadmor et al., 2009), and this study seeks to expand the findings of those works to look at the acculturative attitudes of Black international students in the U.S.

Research Design/Methods

The qualitative design approach of this study is underpinned by a phenomenological research lens that seeks to make meaning of the shared experiences of the sample population. Phenomenology as a philosophical framework is a complex theory that deals with the human

consciousness from a point-of-view experience and the feelings and emotions through which the consciousness is shaped by those experiences (Balls, 2009; Connelly, 2010). As a research method, phenomenology is mainly used to describe the essence or underlying structure of a lived experience. That essence is developed from a composite analysis of collecting qualitative data from the individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Selection

A sample size of 15 foreign-born Black students was chosen for this study. Nine students are from the Sub-Saharan African region, and six are from the Afro-Caribbean region. The target population from which the samples were drawn are college students attending or having previously attended institutions in a Mid-Atlantic, Western, Southern, or Midwestern U.S. college. The sample frame was limited to graduate, undergraduate, or recently graduated students who met the following criteria: foreign-born students from anglophone Afro-Caribbean or Sub-Saharan African nations; students of Black or mixed ethnicity (Black plus another race or ethnicity); and students who otherwise identify as being ethnically Black. Data collection followed a purposive sampling strategy where participants were randomly selected from the population of students who met the specific inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling was also used after the initial outreach efforts to recruit other participants who fit the research inclusion criteria.

Description of Participants

The participants ranged in age from 20-49 years old, with five identifying as female and ten identifying as male. There was an almost even split between those currently enrolled and those who had previously graduated from these colleges. There needed to be more parity in the regional representation of the sample, as there were nine participants from the sub-Saharan African region and only six from the Caribbean. Additionally, one of the Caribbean participants identified as Afro-Panamanian and was born in the country of Panama. Panama is geographically a part of Central America and is culturally most often considered to be one of the Latin American countries. However, Panama has a rich history of socio-geographical affiliation with the Caribbean region. Its inhabitants share many cultural traits with their counterparts in the various island nations of the Caribbean Sea basin, as many Caribbean nationals settled there as migrant workers helping to build the Panama Canal. The Panamanian participant also reported growing up in a household that was rich in Caribbean history, culture, and practices, as both her grandparents were from Caribbean nations (Barbados and Jamaica).

The participants attended predominantly white colleges and universities that ranged from mid-sized urban campuses in high population cities to large sprawling suburban campuses in the traditional college towns found throughout the U.S. Some were smaller, standalone colleges with a single campus, and others were part of large, statewide university systems.

The participants also reported varying levels of financial sufficiency to pay for their college education in the U.S. and associated living and educational expenses. For example, eight participants reported personal funds or family finances as their source of funding, a few listed

personal loans or student loans, one had grants and scholarships, another had athletic scholarships only, and several had a combination of loans and grants/scholarships.

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview technique. Using the Bearman (2019) approach, several questions were prepared for the participant interviews, each addressing one of the research questions being investigated in this study.

Data Analysis

Following the best coding practices outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018) and Saldaña (2016), the interview data collected for this study were coded following a data analysis spiral method. First, the data were securely stored and organized per research participant, followed by an initial coding cycle to reveal emergent or salient ideas, followed by a second cycle where identified codes were classified into major themes; finally, interpretations of the themes were developed and assessed to address the research questions. The data were then visualized and represented manually in a color-coded Excel spreadsheet, and from this spreadsheet, an account of the research findings was drawn.

The process of coding employed in this study followed an iterative, multiple-cycle *pattern coding* method that saw each cycle of interaction with the data seeking to draw out a salient portion of the empirical data, such as a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph, and then labeling it with a researcher-generated universal word or phrase that creates a relationship with similar datum from elsewhere in the dataset (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, a strategy of *member checking* was employed whereby four participants were asked to check for congruency in the quality and accuracy of the data extrapolated from their interviews. Creating a vector between researcher, participant, and data helped triangulate the accuracy of the concepts and theories that underlay meaning-making from the empirical data.

The study has some limitations that were out of the researcher's control. First, as noted above, the study employed a snowball method of finding participants beginning with direct outreach via online recruitment. Therefore, the sampling strategy introduced some unpredictability in the response rate based on the strength of the relationships of the first few participants within their peer groups. Secondly, there were some concerns with establishing trust with the participants, as the research data collection relied primarily on cold calls, direct, unsolicited contact, Internet recruitment, and other online outreach via social media.

Findings

Six main themes emerged from the data related to one or more research questions. These themes all supported the idea that there are indeed some discernable patterns across the experiences of the students that give credence to the idea of ethno-transnational racism practices (i.e., racism across international cultures and ethnicities) found in and around the campuses of predominantly white college institutions in the U.S. A resultant negative acculturation posture was observed in the data taken from Black foreign-born students at the center of this phenomenon.

The major themes that emerged from the data are: 1) Initial Attitude Towards Race in the U.S.; 2) Race Salience: Accepting U.S. Racial Status; 3) Impact of Race on Sense of Isolation; 4) Impact of Cultural Synergies; 5) Individual and Group Racial Advantages; and 6) College Administrators' Impact on Racism.

Research Question #1

What is the relationship (if any) between racism and perceived negative acculturation trends in students of Afro-Caribbean or sub-Saharan African-born backgrounds in higher education?

The findings indicate that initial attitude towards race in the U.S. (IATR), or the race salience (RS) – that is, understanding and accepting of the students' racial status within the U.S. and impact of racial status on their sense of isolation (RSI) -- was related to how the participants acculturated to life in the U.S.

Research Question #2

Are there any differences in negative acculturation trends between Black international students from sub-Saharan Africa versus Caribbean nations?

The findings from the second research question suggest that the impact of cultural synergies (ICS) and some individual and group differences play a role in whether Black international students assumed a negative acculturative posture. For example, U.S. college students from the Caribbean region may have a slight acculturation advantage stemming from English being their first language or from the ease of English language written or spoken proficiency. There was also some evidence to show that the proximity of the Caribbean region with a shorter distance of travel to the U.S. may create more cultural similarities between home and host country as opposed to the students from African nations with a more considerable distance between home and the host nation.

Research Question # 3

What might universities do to address any negative acculturation trends seen in the Black international student population?

A major theme espoused by participants was that many designated school officials (DSOs) were not fully aware of the cultural nuances involved in providing support to Black international students or of their significance in being a bulwark against campus racism. The data collected in this study also shows that many Black international students believe the level of support provided by administrators differs significantly from that provided to international students from other, non-Black groups with a larger economic footprint in the university. They also believe this is an area where the university may have the most impact in helping their Black foreign-born students to acculturate more positively.

John Berry (1990, 1997) has studied extensively how immigrants, upon arrival to another country, go through an identity fluidity period of sorts, during which several major variables impact how well they adjust to life in the new environment. Other researchers have built on Berry's Acculturation Model with research that is specific to international students and which shows that any number of the variables mentioned in Berry's research may become a source of

disruptive acculturative stress to international students (Atteraya, 2021; Rajab, 2014) and may prohibit these students from achieving their desired favorable acculturation or educational outcomes.

Those disruptive stressors may manifest themselves in what Berry (1997) describes as the acculturative postures of *marginalization* or *separation* sometimes seen in the population of immigrant students attending school in the U.S. This separation or marginalization, sometimes referred to as "otherizing," usually manifests in the form of power dynamics, and for Black international students, more pointedly as racial power dynamics, as described by George-Mwangi (2016). Therefore, from the data collected in this study, we see how these six major emergent themes align and interplay with the acculturative postures of marginalization and separation for the participants and how race and racism are the common underpinnings of each.

Themes

Initial Attitude Towards Race and Racism

The data collected shows that initial attitudes towards race and racism in the U.S. influenced how the participants eventually situated themselves in the college ecosystem. Some participants were already very aware of the ubiquity of racialized interactions experienced by Black people in the United States before they arrived. This may have been from having friends or family already in the U.S., as in the case of P6, who noted he understood the racial environment because "I have a couple of friends who were here before I got here." While others were quite apathetic at the idea of personalized racism directed towards them, having had little experience with this phenomenon previously (Said P11, "that's something that I did not even worry about where I'm from, everybody around me was Black"). Some reported being perplexed at the prospect of and questioned the necessity to interpret some of their interactions through the lens of race, as with P3 ("I don't see it as a racial issue, but obviously it's taken as such."). Others were hypersensitive to the idea of racism directed towards them and braced themselves ("My friends and I were waiting for the racism," P7).

Race Salience

Whatever their initial attitude towards race, they all invariably got to a point where they understood the salience of their race and racial status as integral to their continued existence in the U.S. college environment, a phenomenon also reported in previous research by Mandishona (2018). As much as many of the students would have preferred to blend in and remain incognito, they reported having constantly been reminded of their outsider status as they stood at the intersection of race and immigration. For example, P10 pointed out that, in terms of class classification and social status, he did not fully realize he was culturally and socio-politically Black or the implication of this position until he got to college in the U. S. and experienced the phenomenon of race-related *otherness*. There came a moment when most of the participants realized that understanding and acknowledging their racial status in the U.S. was inescapable. For several participants, this happened when they were faced with circumstances of subtle microaggressions; for others, it was overt racism.

P 8 explained her experiences trying to find housing when she arrived in the U.S. and some of the challenges she faced because of her race:

> Honestly, this is my very first time coming in very close contact with racism. All the time, it's like reading about it or maybe hearing about it. Then coming in here for these past months, I have seen it. I felt it. From the point of looking for accommodations, it was heavy. The first contact of it is when someone is hearing your voice and feeling that you have an accent and puts you in a box somewhere. So, it is something that is very, very strong.

P 11 relayed an incident that happened to him where he went to a produce store to get fresh produce for preparing a meal. After getting his produce, he stopped at a local corner deli close to his campus to get a can of soda. He had a backpack full of fresh produce when he entered the corner store and was ultimately confronted by the deli clerk, who asked him to empty his backpack to prove he had not stolen any items from the store.

In another incident, P6 recalled how he was reported to the police as a suspicious looking person while he was walking in the park near his apartments to find a quiet spot to pray one night.

P6 said he had to explain to the officers that he lived there in the complex and was not trying to break into any vehicles but was simply trying to find a good place to pray outside on a nice night, in accordance with his religious beliefs.

Upon realizing their race salience status, most participants fully accepted the need to navigate around the resulting sense of isolation that this outsider status brought upon them. At first, many reported having very little knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of their U.S. racial status and reported that they felt alone, unheard, and unseen in some cases.

Impact of Race on Sense of Isolation

Participants described themselves as feeling alone, frequently unaware of or uninvited to social gatherings, and separated from within-group norms of their U.S.-born peers, both White and Black.

"There was a distinct separation with my classmates in a sense; there was definitely the view of I am the 'other,' kind of thing," noted P14.

P10 mentioned that being one of few Black students in many of his classes, he had uncomfortable experiences that made him wonder if race is a factor. He mentioned that classmates didn't overtly tell him he didn't belong in a certain social, project, friendship, or class group. However, he always felt isolated when groups organically formed, mostly leaving him as an outsider. There were times, he said, when he would encounter White classmates in the lobby or the elevator, and they wouldn't speak to or acknowledge him even though they frequently see each other in class. He also mentioned that he often felt left out when groups were needed for class projects. Even when part of the group, he felt as if he wasn't readily welcomed and had to work hard to earn within-group status, even if temporarily. "I don't think I was really welcome

because the collaboration, cohabitation if I should use the word, it was really weird (P10, explained), because they are very uncommon racial experiences that I couldn't believe that exist".

This is congruent with findings from Tadmor et al. (2009), which speak to the outsider-within status of many international students of color in higher education settings. But, again, this is where 'integrative complexity,' or cultural differentiation, may cast a shadow on whether some international students are welcomed within-group with their U.S. counterparts.

Impact of Cultural Synergies

In some cases, there were sliding scales of inherent advantages and disadvantages based on various socio-political factors. For example, some students could navigate their outsider status within the paradigm of strength in numbers, while others could not. Those cultural synergies formed with others from their home nations helped to situate some students better environmentally as they acculturated to life in the U.S. As such, many Black international students were at a disadvantage due to the lack of other students who shared their national origin on their college campuses. For example, students from prime international student pipeline countries such as China (~300,000 students to the U.S. per year) and other traditionally represented countries such as India (~160,000 students to the U.S. per year), which expatriates some of the largest numbers of foreign-born students to U.S. colleges annually (NAFSA, 2021), seemed to have an easier time settling in.

The students well represented in numbers have a built-in advantage, as often it is easier for those described in U.S. colleges as a nation-bloc to navigate the intricacies and challenges of life as a foreign national in a U.S. higher education together. However, as reported by NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2021), except for Nigeria (~12,000 to the U.S. per year), very few countries in the sub-Saharan region of the African continent even approached the threshold of 5000 represented students annually in U.S. colleges. For example, Ghana sent approximately 4500 students, and Kenya about 3500 in total, by NAFSA's estimates.

The numbers for Afro-Caribbean nations are even more infinitesimal relative to their Asian counterparts. Approximately 2300 total students from the Bahamas and 2700 from Jamaica were reported enrolled in U.S. colleges for the 2020-21 academic school year—and these are the largest two international student pipeline countries from that region. Therefore, the data collected in this survey shows that national origin synergies are an important factor in how some international students acculturate. The students from majority Black countries appeared to be at a distinct disadvantage in this regard.

In terms of additional cultural synergies, other findings emerging from this data showed that similarities between the U.S. culture and some of these students' home countries also play a key role in how they reacted to race and racism in the United States. Some students, particularly those from Caribbean nations, benefited from close cultural ties with the U.S. These close cultural ties made it easier for them to contextualize race and racism when presented with those situations. As P7 noted, "coming from islands in the Caribbean, sometimes value systems align" with life and living in the U.S. as there are, in some instances, support systems from other

Caribbean students and organizations, as well as expatriate Caribbean populations in and around most large U.S. cities. Many North Americans also have a sense of familiarity with Caribbean culture as they frequently vacation at Caribbean destinations and have had exposure to those cultures. He said that sense of alignment allowed him to "lower his shoulders a little bit" and not have to be always so tense and guarded.

Individual and Group Advantages

Inherited ethnocentric racial disadvantages experienced by native-born Blacks in the U.S. were another factor found in this data to be a major inhibitor to positive acculturation by foreign-born Black students. As noted earlier in this study, racism generally encountered by Black students and faculty in higher education has been widely documented (Tatum, 2019; Williams, 2021; Williams-Witherspoon, 2020). Upon arrival in the U.S., these Black foreign-born students report being thrown into a smoldering race-conscious national environment that none of them desire. No differentiation or accommodations, the data shows, are made for their national origin as a mitigating factor against racism, as race and skin color are the primary defining variables in racial encounters.

While some of the participants reported that they were not as socially negatively impacted by the color of their skin as some of their Black international student peers, there was a well-coalesced theme that emerged indicating that White European, Asian, or White-Hispanic international students had a much easier time acculturating than did the Black foreign-born students. As P12 explained, referring to a White international student friend from Germany, "his acculturation to the United States was completely different to mine. I did not have as much of a warm welcome in terms of people broadly inviting me in."

Several reasons were given for this, including that White Americans in and around the college environs tended to be more open to acceptance of White international students; that White international students seemed to have more social outlets; and that, in many cases, it appeared that White international students were more likely to be relieved of their outsider status and welcome within-group, in a racial context, than were their Black international counterparts.

College Administrators' Impact on Racism

The final major theme that emerged from the data is that college administrators, such as the designated school official (DSO) charged with managing the onboarding of international students, play an integral role in how well Black foreign-born students acculturate to life on campus. Many participants reported feeling abandoned and overlooked by the school officials in charge of their transition from home nations to life on campus. One participant remarked that she felt like the college "just took my money and did not care afterward." Another participant noted that some administrators may pay more attention to Asian or Indian students than Black international students because "an economic factor" is at play.

It is the perception of many of these Black international students that the efforts and attention paid by university officials to non-Black internationals, who may number more,

have the unintended effect of leaving Black immigrant students with insufficient resources and support to navigate the challenges unique to them found at the intersection of immigration and race.

While designated school officials play an important role in helping to bridge cultural gaps between host and home countries for these students, they may not always be the most knowledgeable about the idiosyncratic cultural behaviors of specific nations. This is where expatriate communities may play an important role. Several participants mentioned having family or friends who came to the U.S. ahead of them. However, many participants had no natural support system outside the few other international students from their home nation they may have run into on campus if they matriculated at a large enough institution.

Campus student social clubs and organizations certainly give a leg up to those students with large populations from their country or global region. For example, several colleges referenced in this study have chartered African student unions or Caribbean student organizations on campus. These on-campus expatriate social communities can be a source of strength for many of these students, as they may be able to liaise with others from their region of the world, even if not from their own countries.

However, as the Black global diaspora is culturally non-homogenous, many country-specific entertainment, political, gastronomic, educational, socialization, and national familial factors are missing when students are isolated from others who share their specific national homogeneity. Along these lines, local community-based expatriate groups may play a key role in filling that gap and complementing the work of the DSOs. It behooves the DSOs to be aware of their limitations in creating nation-specific cultural bridges and to know when to reach out to and foster relationships with local external expatriate groups in the community that may help these students to reengage with a slice of their home culture. Joint workshops that bring in members of local expatriate community groups may go a long way in furthering the cause of equity-focused leadership as it pertains to Black foreign-born students.

Conclusions

Universities and colleges in the United States may be deleteriously impacted in terms of institutional reputation, shrinking enrollment numbers, and the associated economic impact of both if more care is not taken as to the unique needs of international students coming from various parts of the world. New data from a recent study shows that many European nations, which some consider to be more low-cost, budget-friendly destinations than the U.S., appeal to more study-abroad students (PIE News, 2022). PIE News reports that Italy, Portugal, and Poland are seeing the most growth in study abroad interest from students worldwide. With enrollment numbers and reputation as an impetus, U.S. universities must pay particular care to the needs of their constituent student bodies for their own sake. However, building a more diverse student body and creating an educational environment where all students feel welcome is just as important.

The participants in this study, in general, agree that steps must be taken to mitigate the impact of ethno-transnational racism on predominantly White college campuses. And while most participants in this study hinted at various levels of cultural integration as perhaps the most useful strategy, they believe that acculturative integration can be a two-way street. An example of such symbiosis would be the implementation of affinity programs such as African or Caribbean cultural exchange clubs where international students can share a little bit about their culture while learning more from their peers about the U.S. culture. While Black students' Greek letter organizations have long existed at many U.S. universities, some Black international students indicated an unwillingness to join these organizations, as they believe, as one participant mentioned, the perception is that much of the focus of these groups is on racial issues. P14, for example, said he didn't feel a need to prove he was Black enough and therefore resisted joining an all-Black fraternity.

The most salient theme that emerged from this study was university officials' impact on the acculturation of Black students on these predominantly white U.S. college campuses—or the lack thereof resulting from their low involvement. It is evident from the data that the designated school officials should be more aware of the cultural idiosyncrasies and nuances that make the needs of Black international students unique. DSOs may benefit from participating in cultural sensitivity training specific to students from majority-Black nations. This may help to create safe spaces (physical or figurative) where meaningful cultural exchange can happen to contextualize the intersectionality of immigration and race. While many U.S. universities now boast diversity offices, and some even have Chief Diversity Officers or other high ranking university officials in charge of diversity, better usage must be made of these existing resources to inform a more robust cosmopolitan campus perspective. Consequently, more synergies should be created between International Student Offices and Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on U.S. college campuses. This will ensure sufficient equity focus on the unique needs of international students of color who sit at the confluence of race, higher education, and globalization.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines many of the duties of a designated school official (DSO) programmatically and purely in terms of practicality: helping students with social security numbers and driver's licenses, helps with their majors or programs, transferring to a new school, program extensions, etc. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022). However, there is little, if any, guidance or best common practice on addressing the cultural nuances and unique needs of students from majority-Black countries coming to school in the U.S. and the challenges inherent in the ubiquity of racial and ethnic microaggressions they must face.

International students are very vulnerable, explained P5, and so "they need to be prepared for the reality that's on the ground." In this spirit of guardianship, many of the participants see the DSOs as their acculturative lifelines and gatekeepers to, or providers of, safe places while they are away from home and family.

Future Research

This research builds on the work of several higher education researchers, such as the prolific Dr. Chrystal George-Mwangi, but it does have some limitations. There is a sizeable gap in published research in this area of race and immigration when juxtaposed with the scholarship on international students in general. With the lack of quality antecedent data, this study may do more to describe than explain the phenomenon. In the coming years, I hope to see more research done in the ethno-transnational space in higher education. One avenue for future research may be to look at the acculturative experiences of Black international students from wealthier nations versus those Black students attending from lower GDP nations. Another important area of study may be to look at pre-admissions attitudes towards racism of high school students from majority-Black nations and whether there are any correlations with U.S. college acceptance rates and or matriculation from these regions.

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