

Nearly ten years ago at a reunion event for Black Harvard alumni, two professors, Drs. Henry Louis Gates and Lani Guinier, put Black immigrant collegians in the spotlight when they stated that the majority of the Black students at Harvard were not the descendants of Black American slaves (Rimer & Arenson, 2004). Instead, they expressed that "...the majority of them — perhaps as many as two-thirds — were West Indian and African immigrants or their children..." (Rimer & Arenson, 2004, para. 3). Since the 2004 "Harvard incident" greater attention has been given to Black immigrants in higher education due to data illustrating that the educational achievement for some Black immigrant groups surpass that of all other immigrant groups as well as that of native-born Blacks and in some instances, native-born Whites (In Educational Attainment, 2003; Rong & Brown, 2001; Stepkick & Stepkick, 2003). This has led to numerous dialogues and debates in academia and in the media ranging from asking whether Black immigrants are the new "model minority" (Page, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2012) to questioning whether they are wrongly reaping benefits of their racial status in university employment and admissions (Jaschik, 2009; Massey, Mooney, Torres & Charles, 2007).

Yet, due to the homogenizing effect of being Black in America, ethnicity and nationality often subsumed by race; thus, distinctions among people of the same race who vary in ethnicity and nationality are commonly ignored (Foner, 2001; Hughes, 1945). Moreover, research on Black college students often merges native- and foreign-born Blacks as a single demographic or excludes Black immigrant data altogether (Massey et al., 2007). The overrepresentation of Black immigrants in higher education coupled with Black student homogenization complicates traditional race-based postsecondary policies, practices, and discourse.

This paper examines the issue of racial positioning for Black immigrants, particularly as it pertains to higher education. I critically analyze this issue using three primary objectives:

- 1) To question the racial positioning of Black immigrant collegians within race-based policies, practices, and discourse in U.S. higher education;

- 2) To illustrate how traditional constructs of race are complicated by globalization, migration, and the growing population of Black immigrants in the United States;
- 3) To acknowledge and extend discourse on Black heterogeneity in higher education.

In this paper, I will first briefly explain the concept of racial positioning and provide an overview of Black immigrants in the United States. Next, I will describe and use the dual purposes of affirmative action – 1) redressing past wrongs and 2) diversity and inclusion – as frameworks to analyze the racial positioning of Black immigrants in higher education because race-based policies, practices, and/or discourse in higher education often stem from at least one of these two concepts. I primarily focus on two positions that have been cited regarding Black immigrants in higher education: 1) Black immigrants wrongly benefit from higher education initiatives created to redress past wrongs against Blacks who are the descendants of U.S. slaves (Graham, 2002); and 2) Campus racial diversity and multiculturalism are enhanced by the presence of Black immigrant collegians (Wilcher, 2011). My intent is to present and complicate both arguments/lenses outlined in this paper as a means of extending discourse on Black heterogeneity, rather than suggesting that one lens is more appropriate than the other. Black heterogeneity can and should be recognized from both a redressing past wrongs and diversity and inclusion perspective; yet, both lenses are limited in their acknowledgement of Black immigrants. This analysis draws from education scholarship as well as sociology and anthropology literature. Within the past five years, there has been growing higher education scholarship on Black immigrants' college access and experiences (for example Fries-Britt, George Mwangi & Peralta, 2014; Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh & Griffin, 2012). Yet, much of the literature on Black immigrants' educational experiences and outcomes in the United States was conducted by anthropologists or sociologists including Philip Kasinitz, Douglas Massey, John Ogbu and Mary Waters; therefore, I synthesize literature from these fields as well. Lastly, I provide conclusions and recommendations, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging

ethnicity and using a heterogeneous lens when conducting research or developing practices/policies affecting Black students.

### **What is Racial Positioning?**

The concept of racial positioning is grounded within group position theory, which was advanced by Blumer in 1958 and extended by Bobo and colleagues thereafter (see Bobo, 1999, 2001; Bobo & Johnson, 2000; Bobo, Kluegel & Smith, 1997). Group position theory focuses on “hierarchical social arrangements, systematic and long-standing advantage and disadvantage, privilege and disprivilege allocated along racial lines” (Bobo, 2001, p. 206). This theory posits that racial prejudice manifests from the desire to protect the dominant group’s social position, entitlements, and privileges via a racialized hierarchy (e.g. the status of racial groups in relation to one another) (Lee, Bean, Batalova, & Sandhu, 2004). The history of colonization and slavery in the United States along racial and ethnic lines lead to the development of a racial hierarchy with those considered White at the top and all other populations considered “of Color” or Black positioned beneath (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Smedley, 1993). Racial positioning in the United States in contemporary times reflects this historical racial stratification, which emphasized a Black-White racialized society. (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Smedley, 1993).

I do not write this paper to support racial positioning or suggest it to be a constructive process. I use and critique the concept to shed light on an issue that exists, but largely goes unspoken; namely considering where Black immigrants fit within U.S. racial constructs and how their racial positioning impacts U.S. higher education, particularly in relation to African American students. Racial positioning continues to permeate social structural systems in the United States (Solórzano, 1998), but may be complicated when considering the racial positioning of Black immigrants who were not historically marginalized in the United States, but who share racial sameness with native-born Black Americans.<sup>1</sup> Bryce-Laporte (1972) used the term “double

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<sup>1</sup> The terms African Americans and native-born Black Americans are used interchangeably. Additionally, the terms Black immigrants and foreign-born Blacks are used interchangeably.

invisibility” to describe the Black immigrant population, stating that due to a minority racial identity and foreign status, their needs and distinct experiences often go unnoticed in scholarly, political, and social arenas. Thus, while the presence of immigrant groups from Africa and the African Diaspora provides a means of interrupting the rigidity of the Black-White racial structure in the United States and further complicates this structure, there has been an underlying lack of acknowledgement of Black immigrants in U.S. society, and particularly in higher education research, policies, and practices.

### **Black Immigrants in the United States**

Many of the Black immigrants who have come to the United States have done so as a result of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, which was created to redress past wrongs against Eastern and Southern Europeans who had been denied access to the United States for forty years due to strict immigration policies and quota systems (Alba & Nee, 1999). However, since the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 (Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments) there has been a massive influx of immigrants of non-European descent to the United States (Massey, 1999). This policy removed restrictions on immigration based on national origin, while emphasizing family reunification and occupational preferences (Massey, 1999). The unintended outcome of Hart-Cellar was an influx in the numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (Farley, 1999; Massey, 1999; Ryu, 2010). This policy was particularly influential for Black immigrants as only 4.3% of Black immigrants presently in the United States entered prior to 1970 (Hernandez, 2012).

The Black immigrant population in the United States, who come primarily from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean has tripled since 1980 and contributed to nearly 25% of Black population growth in the United States from 2001 to 2006 (Kent, 2007). Additionally, at least 25% of Blacks in major cities such as Boston, New York, and Miami are foreign-born (Kent, 2007). Today, over three million of America’s Black population is foreign-born, with first and second generation Black immigrants representing the fastest growing group within the overall

Black population (Kent, 2007). Almost one million Black children in the United States from birth to age 10 have at least one Black immigrant parent, which is approximately 12% of all Black children, a percentage that has nearly doubled since 1990 (Hernandez, 2012).

Approximately 25% of Black immigrants have a postsecondary degree (Hernandez, 2012). More than 12% of all Black undergraduate students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities are foreign-born and first- and second-generation Black immigrants comprise 27% of Black students at selective colleges and 41% of Black students at Ivy League institutions (Kent, 2007; Massey et al., 2007). A study by Haynie (2002) determined that 55% of the Black students at Harvard had at least one parent or grandparent that was foreign-born and 41% of Black students at Harvard were second-generation immigrants. While these statistics show high levels of postsecondary access and achievement for Black immigrants, the studies do not address whether these conceivable advantages should render Black immigrants and Black native-born as distinct populations in a college selection process or other in facets of higher education that often positions them equally due to racial sameness. This paper will address this unanswered issue.

### **Analytical Perspectives**

Alongside the question of why there is an overrepresentation of Black immigrants in higher education, comes the concern as to how their race and ethnicity should be positioned in U.S. higher education. Should Black immigrant collegians' racial minority status be seen as a means of promoting racial diversity or should their nationality/ethnicity exclude them because they are not part of a *historically* marginalized group in the United States? This issue will be framed by two lenses that have been used to construct meanings of race in U.S. higher education and in broader U.S. society: redressing past wrongs and diversity and inclusion.

### **Redressing Past Wrongs**

When slavery ended in the United States, it left an impoverished, highly uneducated and unskilled southern Black population. Researchers who have attempted to place an economic

value on how much White Americans profited from 200 years of unpaid Black slave labor, including interest, give present-day converted estimates of trillions of dollars (Belser, 2009; Darity & Frank, 2005). Notions of how to redress the past moral and economic injustices against former Black slaves was first developed during the Post-Civil War/Reconstruction Era, when the American government had to determine how the newly freed Black population would be incorporated into mainstream economic and political society (Darity, 2008). Yet, restitution strategies, such as General Sherman's Civil War plan to divide up plantations and give each freed slave "40 acres and a mule" as reparations were never realized (Darity, 2008). The concept of racial equality did not gain a strong foothold in the United States and thus both de jure and de facto discrimination and segregation continued to exist into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Leiter & Leiter, 2002).

However, during the Civil Rights era, African Americans made significant strides in gaining access to facets of society that were previously closed due to segregation. Initiatives such as affirmative action were created in part to "redress past wrongs," focusing on restitution for a history of discrimination against African American and other marginalized populations (Leiter & Leiter, 2002). On March 6, 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925, which included a provision that government contractors "take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin" (EEOC, n.d., para 21). The intent of this executive order was to affirm the government's commitment to equal opportunity for all qualified persons, and to actualize this commitment. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, which gave the Secretary of Labor responsibility for administration and enforcement of the order of affirmative action. Johnson (1965) once stated,

Freedom is not enough. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely

fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. (para. 11 – 13)

Thus, affirmative action policies sought to “level the playing field,” particularly for African Americans, in education and employment.

Affirmative action policy is situated within the context of a historical system of racism in the United States highly based on a Black-White racial dichotomy. From this perspective, race is a characteristic that creates societal stratification and can be considered a master status. Hughes (1945) stated, “Membership in the Negro race, as defined in American mores and/or law, may be called a master status-determining trait. It tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (p. 357). A master status is an identity characteristic that is always salient because it determines one’s social position as well as rewards and resources from society (Hughes, 1945). Blackness as a master status illustrates how African Americans could be systematically placed at the margins of society because their race was deemed inferior to the White race. The concept of redressing past wrongs seeks to address and rectify a historical societal racial bias and systemic racial discrimination (Leiter & Leiter, 2002).

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a number of historically marginalized populations in the United States demanded greater inclusion and civil rights (Skrentny, 2002). Scholar John Skrentny (2002) termed this period the “Minority Rights Revolution.” Policies that emerged from this revolution included bilingual education for Latinos (1968 Bilingual Education Act), equal rights for the disabled (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), and equal rights for women in education (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972) (Skrentny, 2002). Multicultural education also became a priority and initiated a call for school reform so that students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds could experience educational equity and engage in interactions and awareness across difference (Banks, 1981). Thus racial diversity in

the classroom was seen as serving a larger social and pedagogical purpose, improving the learning outcomes of students who were taught in integrated classrooms.

“Diversity” as a term used in law and education policy gained prominence in the Supreme Court decision of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978 (Skrentny, 2002). In *Bakke*, the Court ruled that the use of race alone was not allowable as grounds for admissions decisions (it could only be taken into consideration with other factors), but that the attainment of diversity in university admissions was a constitutionally permissible goal (Skrentny, 2002). Later, the Reagan, Bush, Sr. and Clinton presidential administrations called for greater scrutiny of affirmative action policies, which led to more support for the ideals of diversity and inclusion in employment and education organizations (Leiter & Leiter, 2002).

While affirmative action targets the historically disadvantaged, diversity can be inclusive of all groups and there is no standardized method for achieving it (Wilcher, 2011). Thus, diversity and inclusion goals create complexities for organizations seeking to attain them. However, striving for diversity and inclusion can also be more flexible because organizations each have their own distinct history, characteristics, and needs. The diversity and inclusion lens allows organizations the flexibility to define diversity in the way that best fits their unique organizational context (Wilcher, 2011). Unlike the concept of redressing past wrongs, which views race as the predominant marker for creating inclusive organizations, through the diversity lens, race is considered one of many characteristics that can contribute to the diversity of an organization (Wilcher, 2011). Furthermore, individuals contribute multiple dimensions of identity within the diversity and inclusion framework (e.g. race, religion, national origin), instead of focusing primary attention to race alone. Unlike the concept of redressing past wrongs, diversity and inclusion has no ancestral or citizenship requirement.

### **Arguments and Analysis**

The issue of race in the United States is complex and based on a unique historical context. Yet, the arrival of new immigrants has added another level of complexity regarding how

race is considered and positioned for these groups. This is particularly salient for Black immigrants, who share racial, but not ethnic sameness with African Americans. This discussion will analyze the position of race for Black immigrants in U.S. higher education using each of the concepts previously addressed. The first is “redressing past wrongs,” which centers on racial constructs, particularly around Blackness, being tied to a history of racial injustices in the United States. Next, I will address this issue using a “diversity and inclusion” lens, which emphasizes multiculturalism that reflects contemporary U.S. demographics, racial constructs being impacted by intersections of other social identities, and the social/learning outcomes associated with diversity. For both perspectives, I include a section titled *Complicating the Complicated* to acknowledge that while this analysis seeks to elucidate the racial positioning debate, both arguments are multi-layered and complex with many factors that should be considered.

### **Black Immigrants and Redressing Past Wrongs in Higher Education**

For African Americans, redressing past wrongs in part means achieving greater access and success in institutions that were previously barred to this population until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Massey et al, 2007). If using this historical context as a lens, Black immigrants’ race should not be positioned in the same manner as African Americans in higher education because Black immigrants are not a historically marginalized group in the United States and often arrive with high levels of human capital and/or other forms of capital (Massey et al., 2007; Waters, 1999).

Many researchers have concluded that social mobility and access to college for Black immigrants is related to social structural advantages (Griffin et al., 2012; Haynie, 2002; Massey et al., 2007, Waters, 1999). Privileged class and educational backgrounds contribute to who migrates to the United States. Foreign-born Blacks who come to the United States voluntarily (e.g. not refugees/asylum-seekers) are often positioned more favorably to be successful (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel 1997; Model 1995). For example, according to Lobo (2001) African immigrants are disproportionately represented in professional, managerial, and technical

occupations compared to other immigrant groups. Similarly, literature highlights that structural factors such as a greater likelihood to have college-educated parents, attend private school, and grow up in a two-parent household may advantage Black immigrants in college access (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Massey et al., 2007). Griffin and colleagues (2012) also emphasize that some Black immigrants benefit from having displaced capital, referring to when immigrants' affluence in the home country is not transferable to the United States; yet, the memory of their former social/economic status acts as a resource and motivation towards upward mobility through education. Black immigrants often exceed parity as participants in postsecondary education (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Haynie, 2002; Massey et al., 2007), which leads to the concern of whether this population is in some way privileged in the college admissions process above African Americans (Jaschik, 2009; Rimer & Arenson, 2004). Massey et al. (2007) concluded,

Immigrant origins per se are not favored in the admissions process but, for whatever reason, children from [Black] immigrant families have come to exhibit the set of traits and characteristics valued by admissions committees, both those that are readily observable (grade point average, quality of high school, and advanced placement courses taken) and those that are more difficult to observe directly (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social distance from Whites). (p. 268)

These findings would suggest that providing opportunities and support to Black immigrant students (akin to African Americans) as a means of "leveling the playing field" with Whites is unnecessary. In addition, while some postsecondary institutions have sought to increase their numbers of native-born minorities by promoting affirmative action-based initiatives, many have actually provided access to foreign-born people of color. At one research university, records illustrated that nearly 20 percent of their Black faculty hired under affirmative action programs were foreign-born (Graham, 2002). The university was criticized for allowing foreign-born minorities to benefit from these programs, particularly when native-born Blacks continue to lack representation in the professoriate (Graham, 2002). This is but one example of how the desire

to increase racial diversity has allowed Black immigrants to access race-based/affirmative action-based programs in higher education due to their race without consideration of heritage/ethnic background (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997).

Although in the United States, Black immigrants may be perceived as African American due to a shared race, research suggests that Black immigrants often interpret race differently (Benson, 2006; Fries-Britt, et al., 2014; Rogers, 2001). First generation Black immigrants (e.g. born abroad) often find racial identity to be less salient than their ethnic identity/nationality (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Stepkick & Stepkick, 2003). Arthur (2000) stated that most participants in his study of first generation African immigrants “acknowledged that their foreign backgrounds made it difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the meaning of [B]lack-White polarization in American society” (pp. 73-74). Ogbu & Simons (1998) suggest that many Black immigrants are voluntary immigrants who come to the United States for economic reasons, social mobility and educational opportunities. As a result, they may be more optimistic about overcoming racial barriers in the United States or see these barriers as less significant than African Americans (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Additionally, because of racial discrimination, some Black immigrants actively work against being perceived as African American, as a protective form of social distancing (Jackson, 2010). Social distancing by Black immigrants can include the use of cultural objects (e.g. national flags, accents) to highlight an ethnic/foreign identity that can protect from racial stereotypes and prejudices that are projected towards African Americans (Jackson, 2010; Vickerman, 2001; Waters 1999). Another form of social distancing includes avoiding close relationships with African Americans. Again, while this behavior is often used as a protective mechanism to cope with racial realities in the United States, this is an option that African Americans do not have. Unlike Black immigrants, African Americans cannot use ethnicity as a form of protection from racism, and research shows that racism can result in decreased academic confidence, stereotype threat, pressures to prove academic merit, and

poorer academic performance, which can impact access to and performance within the P-20 education pipeline (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993; Steele, 1997).

### **Complicating the complicated: Racialization.**

The structural advantages and lack of association with American conceptualizations of Blackness would suggest that historical injustices to African Americans do not impact Black immigrants and that they should not benefit from higher education programs and policies seeking to redress past wrongs. However, although they do not share a U.S. slave-based ancestry, Black immigrants may share the negative implications that this history has had on Blacks in America (Jackson 2010; Waters, 1999). This is part of the racial socialization process in the United States, or racialization. Shahsiah (2006) uses the term “racialization” in her work to illustrate the practice in which individuals either receive or are denied societal benefits (e.g. power, status) based on how they are “raced.” Racialization is a form of “othering” projected through stereotyping and results in denying access to resources, labor markets, and full participation in society, projecting a “not-quite citizenship’ status (Shahsiah, 2006). If racialization is a process integrated into the socialization of Black immigrants in the United States, then Black immigrants also experience the remnants of historical marginalization of African Americans via contemporary racial discrimination.

Because race is a master status in the United States (Hughes, 1945), while Black immigrants’ ethnic difference may initially distinguish them from African Americans, eventually the system of racial stratification in the United States imposes a Black racial identity. Bashi and McDaniel (1997) state “New arrivals may not know their race when they arrive, but they certainly learn it eventually” (p. 676). For example, in a study on the racialized experiences of foreign-born students of color, findings suggested that participants initially did not feel connected to issues of race and racism in the United States but over time and with a number of racial encounters began to consider their own racial status and identity in a U.S. context (Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). Combinations of racial stratification and assimilation for Black

immigrants often leads to a transition from an identity based on national origin (e.g. Nigerian) to a pan-national identity (e.g. African) to a pan-ethnic American identity (African American) over the course of time in the United States and over a period of generations (Guenther, Pendaz & Songora Makene, 2011; Rong & Brown, 2001; Rumbaut, 1994; Waters, 1994). For example, much of the literature on second-generation Black immigrants finds that socialization in the United States, particularly within the school environment, tends to influence these individuals to self-identify as African American and have African American peer groups (Doucet & Suarez-Orozco, 2006; Rong & Brown 2001; Waters 1994, 1999). Additionally, many children of first generation Black immigrants identify more so with racial constructs within the U.S. context as they often do not view their parents' country of origin as a primary frame of reference, and/or may internalize the negative implications of the historical context of race in the United States (Waters, 1999). Thus, while the children and grandchildren of first generation Black immigrants may not be ancestrally connected to the historical racial context of native-born Black Americans, they often feel more connected to this racial context. Allowing Black immigrants to benefit from race-based programs and policies may work to buffer the negative implications of racialization.

Overall, from a "redressing past wrongs" perspective Black immigrants should not be racially positioned in the same way as African Americans because many race-based programs/policies in higher education were derived from the U.S. struggle with racial inequality over a number of generations. Black immigrants are not a historically marginalized group in the United States, as the majority migrated after 1965 and are still considered a new immigrant population. Subsequently, Black immigrants should not qualify for programs/policies initially developed for historically marginalized populations in higher education, particularly at the expense of African Americans as Kasinitz (2008) explains "The emphasis on diversity may have allowed higher education institutions to sidestep the nation's most vexing racial problem, the persistent poverty and exclusion of so many of the descendants of American slaves" (p. 265). Yet, while a history of racial injustices towards African Americans would suggest that the racial

positioning of Black immigrants and African Americans are different, in many ways dominant society in the United States racially positions Black immigrants and African Americans equally. Therefore, it is important to understand that even with the aforementioned forms of capital or coping mechanisms that Black immigrants may possess, racialization can leave Black immigrants susceptible to racial marginalization and injustices that can negatively impact their educational pursuits.

### **Black Immigrants and Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education**

The diversity and inclusion lens focuses on embracing multiculturalism and in recent years has become a more common paradigm in postsecondary education than the concept of redressing past injustices against historically marginalized groups. Higher education has moved from merely tolerating diversity to celebrating diversity (Kasinitz, 2008). If using the diversity and inclusion lens, Black immigrants' race can be positioned comparably to African Americans because Black immigrants contribution to campus racial diversity reflects the heterogeneity that exists within the Black population.

Differences in ethnicity reflect just one of many forms of Black student diversity. While there is still little disaggregation in research and practice regarding ethnicity/nativity of Black collegians, there is growing scholarship elucidating other within-group differences in Black students' experiences, particularly related to gender, socioeconomic status, achievement patterns, sexuality, religion and geographic origin (for example Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Stewart, 2009; Strayhorn, Blakewood, & DeVita, 2008). Theories and conceptual models such as the Heterogeneous Race Model developed by Celious and Oyserman (2001) and intersectionality have highlighted the importance of recognizing diversity within the Black population across multiple dimensions of identity as well as the impact of these factors in the experiences of Blacks and their interactions with one another (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Jean-Marie, Williams & Sherman, 2009). Furthermore, researchers such as Harper and Nichols (2008) have found that Black students perceive and experience their racial identity

differently in relation to their environmental context and salience of other aspects of their identity. From a diversity and inclusion lens, these Black within-group differences in experiences, perceptions, and backgrounds all contribute to enhancing campus racial diversity. Black heterogeneity, which includes the presence of Black immigrant collegians, can provide opportunities for interactions across difference at both the intergroup and intragroup level, which when supported can have a positive impact on student learning and overall campus racial climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1999). Thus, while the Black race cannot be defined uniformly, the racial positioning of Black students and faculty should be comparable in terms of contribution to campus racial diversity and multiculturalism. Black immigrants' racial positioning should not be considered lesser or greater than that of African Americans.

Additionally, because race is a social construct, how it is defined and perceived evolves to reflect U.S. society. Historically in education, research and practice related to Black students often focused on comparing this population to White students, who were treated as the gold standard of achievement (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Yet, the growing presence and acknowledgement of Latino, Asian, multiracial and other populations has complicated the constructs of a "Black and White" racial environment in the United States (Lee et al., 2004). What it means to be Black or a Person of Color (or White) in the United States cannot be tied to a "one drop rule" or physical characteristics/phenotype. Changing demographics in the United States are ultimately impacting racial constructs and positioning. From a diversity and inclusion standpoint, racial diversity in higher education should be representative of students who reflect the racial composition of American society, which has been impacted tremendously by recent immigration (Massey et al., 2007). As aforementioned, approximately three million of America's Black population is foreign-born and this group contributed to nearly 25% of Black population growth in the United States from 2001 to 2006 (Kent, 2007). American society has been transformed both racially and ethnically by immigration from Africa and the African Diaspora. Black immigrants' presence in higher education can make significant contributions to campus

racial dialogue, programs, and policies by pushing institutions to reflect on and redefine traditional racial constructs.

### **Complicating the complicated: Homogenization.**

Studies on recent immigrant groups who are also people of color demonstrate that racial stratification is integrated into opportunities for assimilation, socialization and upward mobility (Alba & Nee, 1999; Waters, 1994). Although there are ethnic differences that exist within the Black population in the United States, there still persists a monolithic view of what it means to be Black in America (Bryce-Laporte, 1972). Thus, the Black-White racial lens of American society subsumes Black immigrant ethnicity into a homogenous Black identity (Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Waters, 1999). For example, when college admission committees have sought to provide greater access to Black students, they do not attend to whether the students' parents or grandparents were born in the United States (Haynie, 2002; Massey et al, 2007). Furthermore, if a foreign-born Black student naturalizes or attends most of their K-12 schooling in the United States, they are typically perceived as African American (Massey et al, 2007). In regards to race and ethnicity, college applications ask, "Are you Black/African American?" which addresses both race and ethnicity as identical and excludes the ability for Black immigrants (particularly those who are second or third generation immigrants) to highlight their ethnicity (Massey et al, 2007). College admission offices (and postsecondary institutions overall) often do not collect or disaggregate data on the ethnicity or nativity of Black students.

Black immigrants' ethnicity and nativity often go unacknowledged in higher education. Wilcher (2011) argues that although there is no standard "formula" for diversity, there is an unspoken hierarchy of characteristics. A racial minority status is placed near the top (if not at the top) of this hierarchy, primarily because it is often a visible characteristic and one that is inquired about in hiring practices and college admissions. Thus, an organization can be judged as "diverse" when it is inclusive of people of color because this can be "relatively" easy to observe, whereas other characteristics may be less easy to identify (e.g. religious diversity, sexuality)

(Wilcher, 2011). Black immigrants can contribute racial, ethnic, and other forms of diversity; yet, it is their racial identity that may be the initial marker of diversity. This reinforces a homogenous perspective of the Black population, which is counterintuitive to the heterogeneity that diversity and inclusion supports.

From a “diversity and inclusion” lens, Black immigrants should be racially positioned comparably to African Americans. Both groups’ racial backgrounds contribute to campus racial diversity, climate, and constructs, although the intersections of other social identities can impact how these contributions are made. Instead of considering whether one group is “Black enough” to be positioned equally to another, the diversity and inclusion lens recognizes that Black immigrants and African Americans reflect the Black heterogeneity that exists on college campuses. Still, while intragroup differences and diversity exist within the Black population across characteristics such as ethnicity, nativity, religion, socioeconomic status, and sexuality, these characteristics are not consistently acknowledged in higher education because of racial homogenization.

### **Conclusion: Position of Race for Black Immigrants in Higher Education**

The purpose of this paper was to consider the racial positioning of Black immigrants in higher education. The frameworks of redressing past wrongs and diversity and inclusion present two distinct ways of analyzing this issue, which are often on opposite ends of the spectrum. The redressing past wrongs framework is based on a history of exclusion that continues to impact higher education today for African Americans. For example, while Black immigrants often exceed parity as participants in postsecondary education, particularly at selective institutions, the same is not true for native-born Blacks (Massey et al., 2007). Thus, programs seeking to increase college access and persistence of Black students are often developed for African Americans, not Black immigrants. Overall, the redressing past wrongs argument suggests that Black immigrants’ race should not be positioned in the same way as African Americans in higher education, and they should not receive race-based support or opportunities in higher education,

at least, not to the same extent that exists for African Americans. Yet, from the diversity and inclusion paradigm, being Black is positioned as one of many identity characteristics that contribute to creating a diverse organization. This paradigm highlights that race intersects with other aspects of identity (e.g. religion, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, nativity) and illustrates that because of these intersections, Blackness cannot be defined in solely one way. Furthermore, the construct of race in the United States is evolving with the growing impact of globalization, particularly increases in immigration to the United States from Africa and the African Diaspora (Graham, 2002). Overall, the diversity and inclusion lens suggests that Black immigrants contribute as much to campus racial diversity as African Americans, which also suggests a comparable racial positioning.

Both the redressing past wrongs and diversity and inclusion lens require acknowledgement of the presence of Black immigrants on college campuses. Yet, in higher education, the racial positioning of Black immigrants is often not considered through either a redressing past wrongs or a diversity and inclusion lens. Instead, the race of Black immigrants is positioned the same as that of African Americans due to lack of disaggregation of Black student data by ethnicity, nativity, and generational status in higher education and lack of acknowledgement of Black within-group diversity. In their college student study, Awokoya and Mann (2011) state, “the within-group diversity as it relates to ethnicity, class, language, and national and geographic origin are often minimized in conversations about the Black student population” (p. 24). Studies on Blacks in the United States have historically centered on the “universal Black experience,” in which the characteristics, experiences, and history of this population are merged and compared to the White population (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Researchers have argued that it is important that educators, administrators, and social science researchers distinguish between the diverse ways in which Black students navigate the educational system and define their social identities (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Stewart, 2009). Yet, researchers have also expressed that this perspective has not fully taken hold in

scholarship or practice. Harper and Nichols (2008) observe, “within-group differences...have been, at best, trivially considered in published higher education literature” (p. 199). Celious and Oyserman (2001) also state “This system of homogenization mandates the use of stereotypes for in-group and out-group interactions, erasing the experiences of women, men, middle-class, and immigrant people of African origin from academic literature, popular culture, and, most importantly, daily interactions” (pp. 156-157). Therefore, while racial diversity may be celebrated in campus dialogue and practice, a “one size fits all” perspective and approach to the Black student population often exists. The ethnicity of Blacks often goes unacknowledged although American society is increasingly being transformed both racially and ethnically by contemporary waves of Black immigrants. Furthermore, there are a number of states (e.g. Washington, Texas, California, Florida) that have chosen to ban affirmative action in college admissions and most recently the Supreme Court made a decision to uphold an affirmative action ban within the state of Michigan (DeSilver, 2014). Thus, some states appear to be moving farther away from racial disaggregation, which threatens to only exacerbate homogenization and other issues developed in this paper.

When ethnicity does become a part of the dialogue about Black students, it is often with a xenophobic undertone. Conversations begin to revolve around a fear that Black immigrants are being hired or admitted at the expense of the Black-native born (Graham, 2002). Ultimately, the Black native-born are the descendants of the racial injustices suffered by their ancestors in the United States, and Black immigrants should not benefit from initiatives that were created for them [Black native-born] if it interferes with the ability of Black native-born students to obtain these benefits. However, this issue is not a clear “zero-sum game” in which one group has to be excluded so that the other can be included. Instead, it is important that postsecondary institutions are inclusive of the diversity that has resulted from societal demographic shifts across race and ethnicity. It is also important to acknowledge both populations and the complexities around definitions and perceptions of Blackness that exists on today’s campuses.

While I have used two distinct lenses to articulate arguments in this paper, it is more likely that campuses work somewhere in between a redressing past wrongs lens and a diversity and inclusion lens, with where they fall on the spectrum moving and changing over time.

Again, it is through acknowledgement of Black heterogeneity that Black immigrants should become visible as individuals who can contribute to campus racial diversity, rather than their invisibility reinforced under a homogenous pretense that they are African Americans. In many ways, focusing on this acknowledgement is a more significant and asset oriented approach than the notion of racial positioning. Racial positioning requires a more “black and white” or concrete ranking of race, often in reference to the dominant racial group, which may reinforce racialization and racial homogenization. While it was useful for shedding light on Black immigrants and race in higher education, I recommend that this dialogue continue in future research and practice using Black heterogeneity and acknowledgement of intragroup diversity as the focal points.

### **Recommendations**

In this paper, I have highlighted the complexities that can arise when ethnicity and nativity is not acknowledged within the Black population in higher education or when it is considered from only one perspective or another. I suggest that researchers use a heterogeneous lens when studying Black students and faculty in higher education so as not to perpetuate the stereotype of in-group sameness within this demographic. For example, current research on Black students often excludes or does not disaggregate data based on nativity and ethnicity (Massey et al., 2007). Researchers may believe that Black immigrants are too small of a population to disaggregate; however, as aforementioned, Black immigrants typically comprise a large percentage of Black college students. Therefore, colleges and universities present a useful setting that researchers can use to study the Black immigrant population (Awokoya, 2012; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Griffin et al., 2012). Yet, more data and research on this population is needed in order to understand their experiences, backgrounds, educational expectations and

needs. While there is growing literature on Black immigrants in higher education, I was quite limited in the quantity of research available on Black immigrants to write this paper and thus turned to other disciplines to fill some of these gaps. If needed, higher education researchers can also turn to the work that sociologists and immigration researchers have developed regarding Black immigrants and/or post-1965 wave immigration to help guide additional research in this area.

Yet, it will be impossible to disaggregate data on Blacks' ethnicities if the question of their ethnicity and/or nativity continues to go unasked. Today, many college students are not only first generation immigrants or international students, but are also the children and grandchildren of immigrants. An immigrant background does make an impact on individuals' worldviews and experiences (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters & Holdaway, 2008). Thus, institutions should collect data on the nativity and ethnicity of their Black students as these aspects of their identity may be quite salient, and also because doing so would reflect the demographic shifts in contemporary society occurring as a result of post-1965 immigration. However, colleges and universities may not be motivated to collect or report data on Black immigrant and international student populations due to standards set by national education data reporting structures. For example, the federal government's higher education database, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), does not disaggregate data by both race and citizenship; thus non-U.S. citizens and non-permanent residents are categorized as "nonresident aliens" and the race/ethnicity of this group are not reported (Byrd, Dika, & Ramlal, 2013). Byrd and colleagues suggests, "The category of "nonresident alien" should not be counted as a separate group, but placed within the racial or ethnic groups. This approach would allow the race and ethnicity counts to be disaggregated by citizenship status..." (p. 499). This change in data collection and reporting at the federal level and at the institutional level would provide postsecondary practitioners with data on Black foreign-born collegians. While this would not resolve the problem of limited data on the populations of Black immigrant second-generation and beyond, it

would provide a place to start acknowledging the diverse ethnicities and nationalities present among Black collegians.

Yet, even if data on Black student ethnicities/nationalities continues to be unavailable, university practitioners can still embrace a heterogeneous perspective when developing services and programs for Black students, so that they do not take a “one size fits all” approach. For example, by considering language use to recognize that the term “African American” may not encompass how all Black students identify as well as presenting opportunities for acknowledging within-group diversity among Black student populations in academic and social spaces (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). Okpalaoka and Dillard (2012) recommend providing opportunities for intra-group dialogue among Black native-born and immigrant students as one way to share experiences, unpack potential within-group stereotypes/tensions, and identify the similar as well as distinct needs of these student populations.

Lastly, I recommend further bridges be built between internationalization efforts and multicultural efforts on college campuses. Because Black immigrants often fall at the crux between these two efforts, which are often separate, greater collaboration between the two may help in better acknowledging and supporting Black immigrant and international collegians. Practitioners can turn to established resources to begin building these partnerships such as the American Council on Education’s (ACE) toolkit, “At Home in the World: Educating for Global Connections and Local Commitments,” which provides strategies and models for collaboration between diversity/multicultural education and internationalization efforts/administrators on college campuses (ACE, 2013; Olson, Evans & Shoenberg, 2007). This toolkit is based on longitudinal data from eight universities that worked to create or enhance synergy between diversity/multicultural education and internalization efforts (ACE, 2013). By developing partnerships and greater collaborations, these two dimensions can play a large role in leading efforts to understand how the intersections of race, ethnicity, and nativity status can impact the experiences of students who are both racial minorities and international/immigrant students.

This may also allow for greater emphasis on the impact of globalization on race, diversity, and multiculturalism in campus-based policies, practices, and dialogue.

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