

Old and New Diasporic African People in Contemporary USA: Tracing the Relational Journey

by

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relational journey of direct descendants of enslaved African people in the United States and new voluntary African immigrants to the U.S. born in Africa. The paper begins by tracing the connection between African people born in Africa and the African Diaspora back to the turn of the 19th century when the twin struggles of Black nationalism in Africa and the civil rights movement in the United States reinforced each other, culminating into the birth of Pan-Africanism. The paper then analyzes the apparent social and political disconnect between old and the new Diasporic African people in contemporary America against the background of diminished Pan-African spirit; guided by a Critical Race theoretical framework as the author hypothesizes that mainstream racism inherent in U.S. society plays a prominent role in the dynamics of the social and political distance between old and new Diasporic African people.

Personal Reflections

My personal experiences as a Black African student and later, African immigrant in the United States greatly influenced me to conduct research on inter-diasporic African relationships. I sojourned to the United States from Zimbabwe in my early 30s to pursue my graduate studies. During the last two years of my graduate studies, I served as an executive board member of the Association of Black Graduate and Professional Students (ABGPS), an organization virtually dominated by African American graduate students. The organization had more than 50 registered members of which only two were African people born in Africa. Being an executive member of ABGPS enabled me to foster close relationships with African Americans, who in turn felt more comfortable to share their perspectives and personal experiences with me. At that same time, I was also actively involved with an African students' organization that was predominantly constituted by graduate students from Africa, south of the Sahara. The two student organizations shared commonalities in historical experiences and challenges, all directly or indirectly linked to perpetual White domination. Interestingly, there were also fundamental differences between the two student organizations.

It turned out that ABGPS was a discursive space for Black identity expression where African American students organized and deliberated on challenges they faced in their quest for recognition and equality amidst perceived contexts of prejudicial racial attitudes against Black people. On the contrary, the African students' organization provided a forum through which members shared views on political, social, and economic challenges facing contemporary Africa.

In view of these commonalities and apparent differences between the two Black student organizations, I fathomed what would happen if the two organizations had merged into one; how would the students interact? Would that change their agendas? In trying to envision the amalgamation of the two Black student organizations, the complexities of relations between African people born in Africa in the United States and African Americans born in the U.S. became apparent to me. This stimulated my interest to further understand how the relationship between African people and African Americans outside of academic institutions has evolved over the years. In addition, I sought to understand the role played by the mainstream on the relationship between African people born in Africa and African Americans. With these and many other unanswered questions, I began to critically examine the relational journey between these racially homogeneous, but culturally distinct groups of people.

The nature of the relationship and the interaction between people of African descent in the United States has not received as much attention as the relationship between Black and White people has; and yet, as Darboe (2008) argues, Black people in the United States are a diverse group with similarities and differences that warrant examination. It is indisputable that these differences, real or perceived, have significant effects on how people relate. Moreover, tolerance and solidarity among people of deferent races in the United States can only become more meaningful if Diasporic African people begin by uniting amongst themselves.

The Composition of the African Diaspora in the United States

Two main waves of migrations have contributed to the current composition of the African Diaspora in the United States. The first wave was the involuntary exiling of African people born in Africa to North America during the trans-Atlantic enslavement enterprise, which paved way for a large population of the African Diaspora in the United States. This wave of forced migration is to be separated from the later voluntary migration of people of African ancestry, which was set into motion by the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in the United States in 1965. The act replaced the national origin quota system, which favored Euro-American immigration with a new law that prioritized skilled labor, family unification, and humanitarianism (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). The new act culminated in massive voluntary migration of people of African descent to the United States, thus, ushering in a new crop of the African Diaspora.

Hence, the migration of people of African descent to the United States has increased in recent years, following the enactment of the U.S. Diversity Visa Program, created as part of the 1990 immigration reforms to increase immigration from non-traditional sending countries, particularly Africa. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), the program has facilitated the immigration of approximately 25,000 African families per year since its inception in 1990.

Several pull and push factors have orchestrated the second wave of migration of African people born in Africa to the United States. The globalization and integration of the world economy as well as the economic and political failures in African countries are key factors contributing to the second wave of migration (Gordon 1998). Additionally, a growing number of African people born in Africa sojourn to the United States for academic pursuits. Originally, most African students come with the sole purpose of advancing themselves academically, hoping to return to their home countries upon completion, but most of them prolong their stay; ultimately transitioning from educational sojourners to permanent immigrants (Manguvo 2015). These multi-faceted factors have culminated into a rapid increase of the immigrant population of African ancestry. Per the U.S. Census data, by 2013, immigrants of African descent in the United States had risen to nearly 4 million, from 130,000 in 1980; representing almost one in ten of all immigrants and, 9% of the nation's Black population.

People of African descent from both ladder waves of migration assume a monolithic identity in the African Diaspora; a grouping that poses conceptual difficulties in construction of a definition. Gordon and Anderson (1999) define African Diaspora as a denotative label for dispersed people exiled from a common territorial origin: African south of the Sahara. This definition embraces members of both waves of migrations; however, it pays little attention to historical conditions and circumstances behind the two waves of migration. Furthermore, the monolithic identity; the African Diaspora, assumes African ancestry as a foundation from which a common Diasporic identity develops, a consciousness that binds them together. The homogenization of the African Diaspora, though it encapsulates consciousness and solidarity among people of African descent (Zezeza 2009), it also poses a limitation on analyzing the astonishing diversity among them. As Butler (2001) argues, the conceptualization of the African Diaspora must accommodate the realities of the phases of diasporization and the multiple identities that developed within each phase. In the frame of this paper, direct descendants of enslaved African people born in Africa within the boundaries of the United States are referred to as the old Diasporic whereas, the new Diasporic refers to people of African descent who voluntarily migrated, particularly after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and their descendants.

Emancipating the ‘Kin Beyond the Sea’

Before critically examining the social and political connection between old and the new Diasporic African people in contemporary America, it is imperative to first trace back the historic nature of the connection between continental Africa and the African Diaspora. This section, thus, traces this engagement back to the turn of the 19th century when twin struggles of Black nationalism and civil rights movements were wedged in Africa and in the United States, respectively. The mutual reinforcement of the two struggles culminated in the birth of Pan-Africanism, a consciousness born and sustained under relentless suppression and physical separation. Conceptualized as both a political and racial philosophy and a movement, Campbell (1994, 285) defines Pan-Africanism as ‘an exercise in consciousness and resistance [which] reflects the self-expression and self-organization of African people.’ The movement aimed at promoting feelings of oneness among people of African descent, continental or abroad, with the goal of self-restoration and emancipation from perpetual White domination.

African Diaspora’s Early Attempts to Emancipate Continental Africa

The African Diaspora initiated and maintained unwavering commitment to liberate and emancipate Africa from colonial and racial subjugation. The Chicago Conference on Africa, convened in 1893, was one of the earliest attempts by the African Diaspora to address the plight of Africa. The conference was aimed at inspiring a responsibility among the African Diaspora to liberate Africa from European imperialism. And similar goals and sentiments to liberate Africa were echoed at a follow-up conference held in Atlanta, Georgia in 1895.

Following political cultivations from these early meetings, Black consciousness came into full conception in 1900 when Henry Sylvester Williams, a London-based Black barrister from Trinidad organized a conference in London. The conference was attended by 32 delegates from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean with resolutions, which included an appeal for European leaders to grant African colonies rights to self-governance. The London conference ushered in a remarkable point in African Diaspora’s commitment to the liberation of Africa from European imperialism. It is not surprising that, following this conference, the spirit of Pan-Africanism began to sow its seeds into various parts of Africa and the African Diaspora. The early decades of the 20th century, thus, witnessed numerous efforts by the African Diaspora to emancipate Black people from perpetual European domination. The period saw the formation of the Niagara Movement in 1905, whose ideals paved the way to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the U.S in 1909. Although most of the organizations in the United States primarily focused on civil rights, they played a vital role in laying the foundation for the emancipation of Africa from European imperialism.

Pan-African Congresses

Feelings of mandated responsibility by the African Diaspora to liberate Africa took full force through a series of Pan-African congresses that were organized throughout the first half of the 20th century. The first Pan-African congress was organized by Du Bois in 1919 and was attended by sixty representatives from sixteen nations, protectorates, and colonies and included members of the NAACP and some Black women's rights activists. The Congress came in the aftermath of World War I, which, as DuBois (1996) submits 'was a war over spheres of influence in Asia and Africa.' Attendees resolved to exert pressure on delegates of the Versailles Peace Conference to consider 'the importance of Africa in the future world' (Du Bois 1996). An appeal for the establishment of a Human Rights Charter that would guide European colonial powers' relations with African people born in Africa, guided by the League of Nations, was forwarded to delegates of the Versailles Peace Conference. The congress also demanded, among other things, the abolishment of slavery and capital punishment of colonial subjects especially in the Belgian Congo. The delegates also demanded the right to education for African people. Nonetheless, as Adejumobi (2001) submits, European powers represented at the Versailles Peace Conference were non-committed to any of these demands.

The Pan-Africanists reconvened and held major congresses in London and Brussels in 1921 and 1923, respectively, and echoed earlier resolutions of denouncing European imperialism in Africa and racism in the United States. The fifth Pan African Congress organized by London-based George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and held in Manchester in 1945 was pivotal for Pan-African movements. The congress was attended by a record number of African scholars, intellectuals, and political activists including Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Hastings Banda of Malawi, and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo; who later became influential leaders in Africa. It was at this Congress that a commitment was made to decisively radicalize the movement for African freedom and strategic military approaches for the liberation of African countries were adopted (Adi and Sherwood 2003). The asserted declaration of militant approach later manifested in the form of armed liberation movements in several African countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe as well as mass protests in Congo, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, and Zambia. Throughout these struggles, the African Diaspora maintained an unwavering commitment towards complete emancipation of Africa from European domination.

Alongside Pan-African congresses, several organizations and movements advocating freedom and emancipation of Africa also gained momentum in different parts of the African Diaspora. For example, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded in 1914 by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born nationalist and United States immigrant, played a pivotal role in the 1920s. In addition to advocating for civil rights for Black people in the United States, the UNIA also primarily advocated for the total emancipation of continental Africa from European subjugation. On the other hand, the International African Service Bureau (IASB), founded in 1937 by George Padmore, mobilized activists from Africa and the Caribbean to promote Pan-African unity.

During the same period, other organizations such as the Council of African Affairs (CAA) were exerting pressure on the United States government to implement policies that would expedite the advent of African independence (Watson, 2000). Additionally, the CAA also worked towards providing concrete assistance to African nationalist movements (Gwekwerere 2000). Several other organizations in the United States such as the National Anti-imperialist Movement in Solidarity with African Liberation (NAIMSAL), the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), and many others did not only campaign against colonialism in Africa, but also provided concrete assistance to African liberation movements (Von Eschen 1997).

Twin Struggles Reinforcing Each Other

While the African Diaspora's commitment to the liberation and emancipation of Africa is unquestionable, what is often not highlighted is the fact that by sharing the same vision, Pan-Africanists from continental Africa were also instrumental in energizing the civil rights movements in the United States (Meriwether 2002). For example, African leaders strongly condemned racial segregation in the United States at the commencement of the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963 (Mwakikagile 2006). During the following year's convention in Egypt, Malcolm X appealed to African leaders to address the plight of African Americans at the upcoming United Nations General Assembly convention. The appeal culminated into resolutions by the OAU to reaffirm the organization's concern about persistent racial discrimination in the United States, urging the U.S. government to take deliberate steps to end racism (Mbughuni 2014).

As the struggles for freedom in Africa gained momentum in the 1960s, the struggles became a profound source of inspiration for African Americans' cause for civil rights (Minter and Hill 2008). Using Black American-controlled media outlets, African activists and journalists established well-connected networks that effectively transferred Black nationalism to members of the African Diaspora (Tate 2015). For example, the magazine *Africa Today*, first published in 1954 by the American Committee on Africa, served as a key source for the transmission of African nationalism to the African Diaspora. The medium, thus, facilitated dialogue between continental activism and the African Diaspora on racial injustices inflicted on Black people across the Atlantic.

Regardless of the apparent non-commitment by the dominant forces towards addressing Pan-Africanists' demands, there is no question, as Gwekwerere (2000) argues, that Pan-African movements played a major role in the struggle for Africa's freedom. The movements were both a symbol and a strategy for consolidating greater unity among people of African descent. The Pan-African spirit inspired a development of a united front between continental Africa and the African Diaspora. It was a bridge that connected people of African descent in America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa in the quest of self-liberation and emancipation. Undoubtedly, the growth of Pan-Africanism molded Africa and its Diaspora into a solitary entity. (Walters 1997, Olisanwuche, 1994).

The unquestionable connection between African people born in Africa and the African Diaspora was not only cemented by ancestral ties but it was also reinforced by a shared quest for self-identity and self-determination. With the attainment of civil rights in the United States and political independence by African countries from European colonialism, it is not surprising that there was a momentary loss of a common vision between African people born in Africa and the African Diaspora. However, as African countries have shifted their focus from attainment of political independence to economic independence, it is unquestionable that the African Diaspora can still play a significant role (Skinner 2000). Not surprisingly, the African Diaspora continues to be well represented in the African Union and is considered an integral part of the African world. Considering that Pan-Africanism as a political movement has somewhat faded into history, nevertheless, this paper further analyzes the relationship between old Diasporic African people (direct descendants of enslaved African people in the United States) and new Diasporic African people (voluntary African immigrants to the U.S. born in Africa and their descendants) in contemporary America (Markle 2017).

Old and New Diasporic African people in Contemporary USA

The affinity between old and new Diasporic African people in contemporary America is not as strong as the historical and political bonding of the Pan-African era. Several studies have shown increased social and political disconnect between the two groups (See Adeleke 1998; Arthur 2001; Darboe 2013; George Mwangi 2014; Iheduru 2013; Manguvo 2015; Mwakikagile 2007; Nsangou & Dundes, 2018; Traore 2003; Wamba 1999). For example, a focus group study by Iheduru (2013) revealed that members from both groups hold negative perceptions and report negative experiences about each other. According to the study, the experiences are characterized by high levels of disrespect and demeaning interactions. Studies by Darboe (2013) and Nsangou and Dundes (2018) also unveiled several conflicts, stereotypes, and grudges that persistently characterize the relations between old and new Diasporic African people. The disconnect is possibly a manifestation a lack of awareness and appreciation of shared historical struggles and political connections fostered during the Pan-African movement eras.

There is no question that time and distance have systematically impacted negatively on the bond between old and new Diasporic African people, culminating in the development of radically different cultural identities. While assuming a prescribed monolithic identity; the African Diaspora, their relationship, as Manguvo (2015) analogizes, can be equated to identical twins separated at birth who, upon a reunion at adulthood, will certainly have major differences despite their common genome. Notwithstanding the differences imposed by time and distance, this presentation explores the role played by inherent mainstream racism in widening the social and political distance between old and new Diasporic African people in the United States. Thus, guided by the Critical Race theoretical framework, the paper considers racism as a critical analytic lens to examine the nature of the relationship between old and new Diasporic African people.

Racial Stereotyping, Stigmatization, and Discrimination

Upon migrating to the United States, perceived self-identities of new Diasporic African people quickly fade into the realms of the U.S. racial categorizations. The larger U.S. society does not make a distinction between African identity and African American racial identity. By American construction of race, new Diasporic African people are simply considered Black/African American. As Orray (2013) contends, skin color becomes the primary 'ID' that determines their placement into the rigid U.S. racial hierarchy. The designated racial identity for new Diasporic African people exposes them to racial stereotyping, stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination that the Black racial minority is subjected to. For example, as Welch (2007) contends, throughout American history, Black people, especially males, are consistently stereotyped as criminals. The label of criminality is so deep-rooted in public consciousness that race does not even need to be specifically mentioned for a connection to be made between the two (Welch, 2007). Similarly, African-American women are oftentimes stereotyped as dominant, lazy, and always wanting to live on welfare (Peffley Hurwitz and Sniderman 1997). In addition to racial stereotyping and stigmatization, as Pager and Shepherd (2008) reiterate, the Black racial minority is persistently subjected to discrimination and prejudice in education, employment, housing, and a wide range of other social domains. Racial stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, and prejudice against the Black racial minority has perceivable negative impact on new Diasporic African people, who, by racial homogeneity, are caught in the web upon arrival in the United States.

Internalization of Mainstream Racism

The inevitable confrontation with racial stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, and prejudice leaves new Diasporic African people with very limited options but to internalize the racism as an adaptive response. Internalized racism refers to one's acceptance of beliefs that denigrate one's racial group (Idehuru, 2013). Having been raised in relatively racially homogeneous societies in continental Africa, a majority of new Diasporic African people have limited experience of confronting racism. As Gainor (1992) submits, when victims of racism are powerless to challenge or confront the agents of their oppression, they often turn against each other. This is quite relatable particularly to new Diasporic African people, whose incapacity to confront inherent racial stereotyping and stigmatization leaves them with little choice but to turn against fellow African descendants. Confronted with the pressure exerted by mainstream racism, new Diasporic African people seek exoneration by presenting themselves as Blacks of a different kind. To make a clear distinction from old Diasporic African people, they present themselves as law-abiding, family-oriented, with stronger work ethics and value for education. In addition, new Diasporic African people constantly dress in their ethnic attires, mention their nationality or continent of origins, and stress their accents to deliberately solidify their perceived separate Black African identity.

Gainor (1992) attests that when stereotypes and stigmatization of one's own group have been internalized, spending time with others like oneself becomes very minimal. This is quite evident with new Diasporic African people settlement patterns in the United States. As an additional buffer against inheriting the racial stereotypes and stigma of the Black racial identity, new Diasporic African people usually avoid living in neighborhoods where the majority are Black people. By preferably living in predominantly White neighborhoods, new Diasporic African people are pressured to adopt values consistent with the mainstream, thus, further widening their social distance with old Diasporic African people. As Hipolito-Delgado (2010) reiterates, this acculturation process further cements their internalization of mainstream racial stereotyping.

The adoption of strategies to establish a distinct identity that is not linked to old Diasporic African people culminates in new Diasporic African people colluding with mainstream racial stigmatization and stereotyping of African Americans. As Pierre (2004) argues, new Diasporic African people play a role in reinforcement and propagation of the mainstream stereotypes. In response, attempts by new Diasporic African people to dissociate themselves are usually condemned by fellow old Diasporic African people, who, as Mwakikagile (2007) argues, perceive this behavior as "arrogant and pompous." It is from this vantage point that one can argue that mainstream racism plays a pivotal role in preventing old and new Diasporic African people from connecting with each other. The author, thus, argues that inherent mainstream racism significantly perpetuates and exacerbates the social distance between old and new Diasporic African people.

Regardless of their perceived distinguished identity, new Diasporic African people are still subjected to mainstream racism and stereotypic perceptions. As Foner (2016) submits, encounter with American racial profiling is a central component of all Black people in the United States, regardless of place of origins. Thus, new Diasporic African people's perceived ethnic distinctiveness do not always buffer them against racial profiling. As Johnson (2016) reiterates, the 1988 killing of Ethiopian student in Portland and the 1999 fatal shooting of West African Amadou Diallo are typical examples of the essential role of race in racial profiling of new Diasporic African people, regardless of the self-perceived distinguished identity.

Confronting Mainstream Racism

It is evident that, regardless of efforts to distinguish themselves, new Diasporic African people are confronted with racial discrimination and prejudice as fellow old Diasporic African people. However, the way these groups of people confront and react to mainstream racism is another vital source of their social and political disconnect. It is indisputable that slavery in the United States and European imperialism in Africa initiated racial hierarchies that left long-lasting effects with regards to racial inequalities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. However, there is no question that racism was experienced differently in these two parts of the world.

The legacy of slavery and institutionalized racism in the United States had more severe far-reaching effects as race continues to dictate inequalities and disparities in various sectors such as education, employment, and justice system (Franklin, 2014). Moreover, a majority of recent immigrants from Africa grew up long after their countries had attained political independence from European colonizers and were raised in relatively less racially segregated societies.

Notwithstanding these factors, it is also arguable that new Diasporic African people make conscious decisions to adopt passive approaches when confronted with racism as a way of presenting themselves as politically different. The adoption of passive approaches to racism is usually done to project a perception of racial non-aggressiveness to the mainstream White community. This, according to Manguvo (2015), presumably places them in a favored situation in which they will not be subjected to the same degree of denigration and discrimination as African Americans. New Diasporic African people also consciously adopt racial disengagement and avoidance as strategic responses to racism as a means to get access to White privileges. Indeed, they are often given preferential treatment, for example, in higher education and in society at large because they, perceivably, do not focus on race and racism as much as their native-born counterparts (George Mwangi 2014; Nsangou and Dundes 2018). The outcome scenario is, thus, a manifestation of the mainstream's perpetuating dominance through building subservience into the minds of the dominated groups (Tappan, 2006).

I got to experience the differential approaches to racism between African people born in Africa and African Americans through my involvement in the Black student organizations when I was a graduate student. As discussed earlier in this paper, recognition and equality amidst perceived prejudicial racial attitudes against Black people was the dominant theme in the African American student organization I was affiliated to; a theme that was virtually non-existent in the African student organization. As I transitioned from being an educational sojourner African immigrant, it dawned on me that the observed differences in approach to racism between the two student organizations was a mirror image of the larger society. Alex-Assensoh (2009) illuminates these differences in a study of old and new Diasporic African cultural associations in New York City. The study revealed that cultural associations for old Diasporic African people focused on anti-discrimination and political empowerment whereas those of new Diasporic African people focused on non-racial themes such as homeland engagement and inter-ethnic dialogue within the confines of African communities.

As mentioned earlier, apart from avoiding racial topics in their public discourses, most new Diasporic African people adopt passive strategies when confronted with racism. Two well-documented strategies are often used by victims of racial discrimination as coping strategies. These are *approach* and *avoidance*; the approach strategy is perceived as problem-focused whereas avoidance is emotion-focused (Moos and Schaefer 1993). New Diasporic African people usually adopt avoidance copying strategies, for example, inner acceptance of the realities of racism than an outward reaction to it (Manguvo 2015). With a strong desire to be viewed as racially non-aggressive, most new Diasporic African people feel less compelled to openly express themselves on race related matters.

It is, therefore, not surprising that most of them adopt ‘outsider-looking-in’ and ‘not-my-struggle’ approaches (Manguvo 2013). On the contrary, united by traumatic historical trajectories of slavery, enslavement, segregation, and civil rights struggles; old Diasporic African people tend to invoke intense sensitivity to race and racism. Their well-documented sensitivities were, for example, manifested following the recent controversial killing of unarmed Black men in suspected cases of racial profiling. The incidents, as Franklin (2014) submits, rekindled the mobilization of Black movements against structural injustices of the post-civil right era. Whereas new Diasporic African people oftentimes perceive old Diasporic African people as obsessed with race, old Diasporic African people may perceive new Diasporic African people as oblivious to racism, something that can be logically interpretable as an act of racial betrayal (Arthur 2001).

New Diasporic African people’ self-distinguishing attitudes coupled with their seemingly lack of sensitivity to racism and passive approaches deter their full socialization into American Blackness. Not surprisingly, a study by Manguvo (2015) revealed that some old Diasporic African people doubt the authenticity of new Diasporic African people’ Blackness. For old Diasporic African people, Blackness is not just about skin pigmentation and a confirmation of African ancestry; it also entails certain political mindsets. It is an identity upon which Black people mobilize and defend themselves against perpetual White domination. Considering that a majority of new Diasporic African people do not conform to and exhibit the expected political mindsets; old Diasporic African people oftentimes perceive new Diasporic African people as ‘not Black enough’ (Manguvo 2015). Differential sensitivities and approaches to race and racism, thus, takes a center stage on the disconnect between old and new Diasporic African people, resulting in reciprocal in-group dis-identification, a scenario that can easily degenerate into lack of trust and inter-group suspicion.

Access to Opportunity and Affirmative Action

With the influx of new Diasporic African people into the United States in recent years, especially after the 1965 immigration act, it is inevitable that issues with regards to access to opportunity under the auspice of affirmative action would come to surface. Considering the mainstream monolithic categorization of old and new Diasporic African people as simply ‘Black,’ new Diasporic African people are placed in competition with old Diasporic African people on affirmative action, a program born of civil rights movements to address historic disparities in opportunities between Black and White people. A lot of debate is currently underway with regards to affirmative action; whether new Diasporic African people should be eligible for affirmative benefits. Current trends of access to opportunity, for example, in higher education unveil a preference of new over old Diasporic African people. For example, a cross-sectional study by Brown and Bell (2008) revealed that by the early 2000s, new Diasporic African people constituted about 40% of Black students enrolled in highly selective Ivy League universities. Given the proportional representation of new Diasporic African people of only 9% of the overall Black population, the disproportionality in filling out the places reserved for Black minorities is quite evident.

This results in new Diasporic African people being the larger beneficiaries of affirmative action. This disproportionality in access to opportunity, thus, leads to further discrimination and prejudicing of old Diasporic African people. As Henry Louis Gates Jr, an African-American professor at Harvard University argues, the disproportional enrollment of Black immigrants undermines the long-term mission of U.S. affirmative action policies to redress historic wrongs against African Americans (Rimer and Arenson 2004). This, obviously, is a potential source of the apparent social and political distance between old and new Diasporic African people. The level of tension was recently manifested by University of Cornell union of native-born Black students' protests against the university's disregard for the heterogeneity of the Black population on its admission policies. According to the students' petition, the disproportional admission of new Diasporic African students at the university 'may be obscuring the continuing problems faced by members of long-standing minority [old Diasporic African people]:

We demand that Cornell admissions come up with a plan to actively increase the presence of underrepresented black students on this campus. We define underrepresented black students as black Americans who have several generations (more than two) in this country. The black student population at Cornell disproportionately represents international or first-generation African or Caribbean students. While these students have a right to flourish at Cornell, there is a lack of investment in black students whose families were affected directly by the African Holocaust in America. Cornell must work to actively support students whose families have been impacted for generations by white supremacy and American fascism." As a result, the relative success of immigrants and their children may be obscuring the continuing problems faced by members of long-standing minority populations (Black Students United; 2017).

Inherent mainstream racism once again plays a significant role in widening the social distance between old and new Diasporic African people through the disproportionality in access to opportunity. The disproportionality, as Pierre (2004) highlights, has often been used by the mainstream as a measure of the significance of race on access to opportunity in the United States. The statistics are presented as arguments to dispute race as an impediment to achievement of old Diasporic African people because their other Black counterparts have considerable success under similar conditions (Pierre 2004). These arguments downplay the significance of continuing racial inequalities on access to opportunity in the United States. Interestingly, a majority of new Diasporic African people fall into this trap by engulfing into a self-perceived "model Black minority" complexity. The complexity bestows on them an elevated minority status that, presumably, contrasts the unflattering stereotypical views of inferior academic prowess and motivation of old Diasporic African people. They have the arrogance of believing that their disproportional access to opportunities is a reflection that they are better than old Diasporic African people and yet they forget that it is these very same people who opened doors for them to enter the American mainstream when they fought for racial equity (Mwakikagile 2006).

The mainstream argument that old Diasporic African people are solely responsible for their lack of achievement and should not blame racism because their other Black counterparts have considerable success in similar conditions does not also consider the different circumstances and experiences of the two groups of people. On one hand, the legacy of enslavement and institutional racism, and the pathologies they spawned within old Diasporic African people such as poverty and self-doubt have far-reaching effects on their utilization of opportunity, even within the confinements of affirmative action. On the other hand, new Diasporic African people, who voluntarily migrate to the United States, are likely to be the most talented among their own ethnic groups; the reason why the second wave of migration is infamously referred to as the Brain Drain. The professionals who constitute a large majority of new Diasporic African people are by no means true representations of African ethnicities. Most new Diasporic African people are originally from economically privileged classes within their respective societies. Although some may not necessarily come from economically privileged classes, they, however, arrive in the U.S. with greater social and cultural capital that propel them to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the United States, which allows them to engage on an upward mobility.

Conclusion

The disconnect between old and new Diasporic African people in contemporary America is unexpected when one considers the shared historical struggles and political connections of the Pan-African eras. This paper uses mainstream racism as a critical analytic lens to examine the disconnect. The author argues that mainstream racism, unquestionably inherent in the U.S. society, plays a significant role in perpetuating and widening the social and political distance between old and new Diasporic African people. The impact of mainstream racism on the disconnect between old and new Diasporic African people has not been adequately addressed and remains down-played in most discourses of inter-diasporic African relations. Despite the unacknowledged silence, much like ignoring the elephant in the room, it is the author's argument, as discussed throughout this paper, that mainstream racism continues to play a significant role and negatively influences the relationship between old and new Diasporic African people. If Diasporic African people in contemporary America are indeed to work in unison, it is important to identify and understand factors that perpetuate their disconnect. The author recommends for new Diasporic African people to self-reflect on their internalization of mainstream racial stereotyping and stigmatization of the Black racial identity through taking comfort in false convictions that they are not part of the stereotyped Black people. They should reconsider their deliberate dissociation from old Diasporic African people as a means of buffering themselves from Black stereotypes. The author recommends rapprochement and unity between old and new Diasporic African people. As stated earlier, tolerance and solidarity among people of deferent races in the United States can only become more meaningful if African people begin by uniting amongst themselves. Charity should always begin at home.

Indeed, old and new Diasporic African people in the United States can move beyond their real and perceived differences and build on what they share. Africana Studies programs, available at most major American universities, can provide an opportune platform in bridging the gap. Most Africana Studies programs have evolved from Black/African American Studies programs, having engulfed in self-reformation processes and sought to encompass continental Africa and the other African Diaspora locations in their curricula. In spite of the notable evolution, a cross-sectional analysis of the programs, however, evidently unveils existence of African American Studies programs that are exclusively separated from African Studies programs (most of which are dominated by White Africanists). With scholars from each program exhibiting different agendas, there is sometimes little communication between African Studies and African American Studies programs. The disengagement implies that generations of both groups in and outside of the academy continue to live in ignorance of each other's history, culture, and experiences. Notwithstanding, the self-reformation that has occurred with many Black Studies programs in recent years, continuous self-reformation may go a long way in bridging the disconnect between old and new Diasporic African people. There is need for direct dialogue between and among African descendent academics in Africa and the Diaspora in order to develop an amalgamated Pan-African curriculum (perhaps the fusion of Africology and African American Studies as implemented at Eastern Michigan University and Temple University can aid the process). In particular, the author recommends that African Studies programs develop, as part of its core curriculum, courses that deliberately expose students to recent migration trends of people of African descent into the United States and their subsequent effects on the African Diaspora landscape. The curriculum should also directly target the disparate long and short-term socio-political relational outcomes among old and new Diasporic African people in the context of the continuously evolving African Diaspora landscape as well as meticulously examine the subsequent role of mainstream racism on these relations.

Reflections in this paper are based on the author's personal experiences and observations as well as on existing literature, all of which have, indeed, unveiled the existence of a disconnect between old and new Diasporic African people. Most of the studies reviewed, however, are cross-sectional. Future (Africological) research should seek to incorporate longitudinal qualitative studies, which investigate developmental trajectories of the relational dynamics between old and new Diasporic African people over time. Future research must also investigate relational dynamics of second and third generation African immigrants and determine whether to categorize them as old or new Diasporic African people.

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