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African American and Black Caribbean Feelings of Closeness to Africans

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Abstract

African American and Black Caribbean relations dominate research on interactions across black ethnic divides. Using National Survey of American Life data, we explore a different aspect of black interethnic attitudes: how close these groups feel toward Africans. African Americans and Black Caribbeans were largely similar in their feelings of closeness to Africans. For Black Caribbeans, younger and male respondents, those reporting higher levels of financial strain, living in the northeast and persons who immigrated to the United States at least 11 years ago, report feeling especially close to Africans. Being male was the only significant correlate among African Americans. The findings are discussed in relation to how race, ethnicity and national origin shape personal identities within the U.S. and their significance for intergroup perceptions. These broader issues warrant further consideration in light of assertions that race as a defining feature of American life and intergroup relations is obsolete.

Keywords

West Indians; African American attitudes; Caribbeans; African Diaspora; ethnic closeness; immigration

Social scientists recognize that group identity facilitates political solidarity among African Americans that provides critical insight to the potential for social mobility and racial mobilization efforts (Herring, et al, 1999). Even so, an increasing diasporic flow of immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa to the U.S. highlights important differences that impact how black groups navigate America's system of racial stratification (Model and Fisher 2001). Given that social scientists tend to view black identity as a “product of assignment,” there has been minimal exploration of what blackness means for different segments of the Black population (Eggerling-Boeck 2002). The majority of research examining the interactions between Black Caribbean immigrants and native-born Blacks in

the U.S. indicates the former's ambivalence about their American racialized identities, as well as the depiction of Black immigrants as a model minority to which African Americans should aspire (Rogers 2006; Vickerman, 1999; Pierre 2004). Emerging work suggests that Black people's (both native-born and immigrant) encounters with racial discrimination serve to destabilize purported ethnic cleavages and reinforce feelings of commonality across groups. Black immigrants and African Americans, while distinct in several ways, share important similarities. Race, in particular, plays a fundamental role in shaping life experiences for all black groups and bonds them in common cause (e.g., Greer 2013).

Increasing ethnic diversity within Black America complicates what blackness and race means, creating new forms of identity with the potential to challenge racial hierarchies based on being Black or immigrant status and segmented assimilation success stories (Jones, et al. 2015). This multidimensional aspect of experience is absent from much of the empirical attention on how varying Black cultures, histories, and needs produce an ethnically diverse people. A more sensitive examination of Black American life experiences has practical implications for current policy and programmatic formulations that acknowledge interracial, while simultaneously ignoring intra-racial differences. Importantly, this work suggests the need to explore the ways in which ethnicity complicates blackness and feelings of closeness to members of the African Diaspora.

The present study explores African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' attitudes towards African nationals using data from the National Survey of American Life. Research on racial and ethnic identities and intra-group interactions and feelings among African Americans and Black Caribbeans in the U.S. describes the dynamic and complex personal and situational processes whereby racial and ethnic identities are constructed. Using this information as background, we describe differences in how racial identities are developed for African Americans and Black Caribbeans, as well as their potential importance for identification with the African Diaspora and attitudes towards African nationals. The literature review begins with a discussion of racial and ethnic identities for Black Caribbeans and African Americans within the U.S. The literature then examines research on African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' reported feelings of closeness to various race and ethnic groups, with a discussion of major demographic and social correlates.

Black and ethnic identities

A common assumption of work on the African Diaspora in the U.S. is that racial identity produces feelings of closeness to other groups which are construed as dichotomous and mutually exclusive. For example, the literature on relations between Black Caribbeans and African Americans accepts that Black Caribbean acclimation to the United States is hindered by strong national and/or ethnic identities. Further, distinctions between Black Caribbean national and ethnic identities, differential preferences for national versus racial identities among Black Caribbeans (Foner 2001), and racial identities of U.S.-born African Americans, are viewed as deterrents to developing racial solidarity (Rogers 2006) and feelings of mutual closeness.

Moreover, social class differences may provide affluent Black immigrants opportunities to transcend racial classification. However, despite ethnic, cultural, and historical diversity, immigrants are regarded as Black in the U.S. (Nunnally 2010). Black Caribbeans often arrive with substantial social capital which advantages them over other native Blacks in terms of material resources (e.g., income, education and occupational prestige) (Manuel et al. 2012). Given their superior economic circumstances, Black Caribbeans are depicted as a “model minority” who are differently assimilated due to their “elevated minority status” (Greer 2013). In response, many Black Caribbeans emphasize cultural cues (e.g., accented speech) that distinguish them from native-born Blacks (Model and Fisher 2001; Waters, 1990). Given the dynamic nature of the social processes that produce race and ethnicity, we argue that racial/ethnic boundaries are fluid, with both race and ethnicity playing divergent concomitant roles in intra-group relationships.

Race and ethnicity in social context

Debate about Black Caribbean and African American affiliations with Africans involves whether black ethnics in the U.S. emphasize their identities as separate from or shared with persons of African descent. However, this dichotomous view hides a more multifaceted set of issues related to group identity within particular social contexts. Specifically, our connections to others are based in part on our perceived bond with them, as well as how and where others place our group membership (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). Like Greer (2013) we argue that both race and ethnic factors influence the quality of group affiliations. Black immigrants move to the U.S. often with strong ethnic identities that are reinforced in a hierarchical society. However, for some immigrants, race becomes a primary identity, while others retain an ethnic identity. In sum, processes associated with ethnic and racial identity are both important and interact with one another within a dynamic social context.

Length of time in the U.S. also impacts Black Caribbeans’ attitudes towards African Americans with first generation immigrants distancing themselves from African Americans (Bryce-Laporte, 1993; Seaton, et al 2010). Among second generation Black Caribbeans (i.e., born in the U.S.), experiences with pervasive racial inequalities and interaction with native-born African Americans, instills a shared racial and African American identity (Kasinitz et al. 2001; Butterfield 2004). Second generation Black Caribbeans are also less likely than first generation immigrants (born in the Caribbean) to report feeling close to their parents’ country of origin (Thornton, et al. 2013). Finally, although ethnic identity is prominent among first generation Black Caribbeans, there are specific contexts in which racial identity assumes primary importance.

Case-studies and small-sample surveys of perceptions of Africans as expressed by African Americans and Black Caribbeans suggest that African American attitudes toward Africans range from hostile to tenuous to a special rapport (Jackson and Cothran 2003; Moikobu, 1981). Analyses using nationally representative samples reveal that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans feel close to Africans (Thornton and Taylor, 1988; Thornton, Taylor and Chatters 2012), especially among males and those who are older. However, Black Caribbeans feel significantly closer to Africans than do African Americans. Further, Black Caribbeans feel closer to African Americans than the reverse (Thornton et al. 2012),

indicating that Black Caribbeans feel closer than do African Americans to all members of the Diaspora (i.e., Africans and African Americans).

Black Caribbean ethnic and racial identities (vis-à-vis African Americans) are the result of dynamic processes and complex social interactions. However, it is unclear, whether and how immigration status (e.g., length of time in the U.S.) and other social factors are associated with Black Caribbean attitudes towards another Black ethnic group, namely Africans. Overall, empirical research on American Black's views of African nationals is severely underdeveloped. Further, because this work typically ignores issues of within group ethnic diversity, the views of Black Caribbeans towards African nationals have not been examined.

Indicators of attachment: Feelings of closeness

Research on intergroup relations identifies ingroup attachment and preference over outgroups as a general principle (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Related to this, attitudes such as ingroup favoritism engender greater levels of trust, positive perceptions and more cooperative behavior (Hewstone, Rubin and Willis 2002). Alternatively, basic “we/they” distinctions are sufficient to activate disparate reactions to others (i.e., ingroup vs. outgroup members). Despite this, ingroup bias is not inevitably linked to disdain for outgroups in all circumstances, nor is it associated with intergroup hostility (Ahmed 2007), suggesting the need for a more nuanced approach to assessing ingroup-outgroup perceptions.

Sociological research recognizes that racial and ethnic identity can be conceptualized as feelings of closeness toward individuals and/or groups who share a common ideology, feelings, thoughts and racial/ethnic symmetry (Chavez and Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Racial identity, like other social identities, is multidimensional, involves an awareness of belonging to a social category or group, along with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Ashmore, et al., 2004; Rowley et al. 1998). Racial identity is thought to protect mental health by boosting psychosocial resources and enhancing self-esteem and mastery by connecting people to others via meaningful social roles in their families and communities (Brown et al. 2002).

The concept of perceived closeness is used to estimate how similar respondents view themselves in relation to their own group and in relation to different racial/ethnic groups. The construct of *closeness* is commonly used as an indication of ingroup bias in research exploring black racial attitudes (e.g., Gurin, et al. 1989; Herring et al, 1999). Perceived closeness or one's psychological attachment or identification with a particular social group (e.g., Conover 1984; Gurin et al. 1980) is used to assess interracial attitudes (see Jackman and Crane 1986; Tropp and Pettigrew 2005) and clarify the relationship between racial identity and outgroup attitudes. This approach assumes that individuals can express positive attitudes across ethnic (i.e., outgroups) boundaries (Sanchez 2008), despite the fact that their self-concept and identity is based in their primary social relationships to their own ingroup (Brewer 2001: 117).

Correlates of closeness to Blacks in Africa

A small body of research in the areas of racial identity and in-group, out-group attitudes (based mostly on African Americans) provides information on possible correlates of perceived closeness to African nationals. Among African Americans, age and gender have the most consistent relationships with closeness to other target populations (e.g. Black Caribbeans, Asians, Blacks in Africa). Research using the National Survey of Black Americans found that both older persons and men felt closer to Africans than their younger and female counterparts (Thornton and Mizuno 1995; Thornton and Taylor 1988). Gender and age were similarly associated with African Americans' felt closeness to Blacks (i.e., in-group) in the United States (Thornton et al. 2013). In contrast, there are few income, education, or marital status differences in African Americans' perceptions of other groups (Thornton and Mizuno 1995). Black Caribbeans similarly demonstrate only a few age, gender, marital status and socio-economic status differences in perceived closeness to groups. However, persons from Jamaica (as compared to those from Trinidad-Tobago) and first generation Black Caribbeans (compared to those born in the U.S.) report being closer to other Black Caribbeans (Thornton et al. 2013). Region is also a significant correlate of perceived closeness to in-groups and out-groups. African Americans in the Northeast (compared to those in the South) reported closer feelings to West Indians, Hispanics and Asian Americans, but not African nationals (Thornton and Mizuno 1995), while Black Caribbeans in the Northeast (compared to other regions of the U.S.) were closer to other Blacks from the Caribbean (Thornton et al. 2013). Accordingly, age, gender, and region may be important for African Americans, while country of origin (i.e., Jamaica) and immigrant generation (first generation) may emerge as correlates of felt closeness to Africans for Black Caribbeans.

Finally, we expect that reported discrimination and financial strain will be positively associated with closeness to other groups. African Americans and Black Caribbeans who have experienced high levels of discrimination and/or have had more financial difficulties may report greater feelings of closeness with other groups, especially other marginalized populations. With regards to discrimination, being mistreated is believed to create a common experience, which is linked to a perceived common identity. As Black Caribbeans encounter discrimination in the United States, they become more aware of the importance of race (Vickerman 1999; Waters 1990) which leads to closer feelings towards similar racial groups. This is consistent with previous research among Black Caribbeans in which discrimination was positively associated with feelings of closeness to Blacks from the Caribbean (Thornton et al. 2013). Similarly, African Americans and Black Caribbeans who have experienced financial difficulties may have more tolerance for other Black marginalized populations. This is consistent with previous research on African Americans which found that characterizing the economic circumstances of African Americans as severe was associated with feeling closer to West Indians (Thornton and Mizuno 1995).

Purpose of the present study

This investigation uses data from the National Survey of American Life, a national probability sample of African Americans and Black Caribbeans, to explore feelings of

closeness to Black people in Africa (i.e., African nationals). The study examines: 1) overall differences between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in feelings of closeness to Africans; 2) within group differences in felt closeness to Africans; and 3) for Black Caribbeans, differences by immigrant status and country of origin. We explore demographic and social factors influencing perceptions of closeness both within and across the two groups, as well as connections across nationality and ethnic groupings indicating the role of diaspora and race in identity formation.

METHODS

Sample

The Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research collected the data for the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL). The Institute for Social Research's Survey Research Center conducted fieldwork in cooperation with the Program for Research on Black Americans. The NSAL sample has a national multi-stage probability design consisting of 64 primary sampling units (PSUs). The NSAL contains the first major probability sample of Black Caribbeans, defined here as persons who trace their ethnic heritage to a Caribbean country, but now reside in the United States, are racially classified as Black, and who speak English (but may also speak another language). In both the African American and Black Caribbean samples respondents self-identified their race as black. Those identifying as black were included in the Black Caribbean sample if they: 1) answered affirmatively when asked if they were of West Indian or Caribbean descent, b) said they were from a country included on a list of Caribbean area countries presented by the interviewers, or c) indicated that their parents or grandparents were born in a Caribbean country.

The data were collected from February 2001 to June 2003. A total of 6,082 interviews were conducted with persons aged 18 or older, including 3,570 African Americans, 891 non-Hispanic Whites, and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent. The overall response rate was 72.3%. Response rates for subgroups were 70.7% for African Americans, 77.7% for Black Caribbeans, and 69.7% for non-Hispanic Whites. Final response rates for the NSAL two-phase sample designs were computed using the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) guidelines (for Response Rate 3 samples) (AAPOR 2006) (see Jackson et al. 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample). The NSAL data collection was approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. The African American and Black Caribbean subgroups constitute the analytic sample for this study.

Measures

Dependent variable—The present study uses an indicator of subjective closeness to out-groups in which respondents were asked “How close do you feel in your ideas and feelings about things to Black people in Africa.” Response categories and associated values were: very close (4), fairly close (3), not too close (2), or not close at all (1). A large body of research has found that this type of measure of generalized feelings of closeness (i.e., affective measures like felt closeness) is especially useful for assessing racial attitudes (see Tropp and Pettigrew 2005) as compared to other attitude measures.

Independent variables—Included are everyday discrimination, financial strain and sociodemographic factors. Everyday discrimination is measured by several items. First, respondents were asked: “In your day-to-day life how often have any of the following things happened to you?” They are then asked how often they have: (a) been treated with less courtesy, (b) been treated with less respect, (c) received poor restaurant service, (d) people acted like they are not smart or are dishonest, (e) people acted afraid of the respondent, (f) people acted as if they are better than the respondent, (g) people called the respondent names, (h) people threatened the respondent, and (i) they have been followed by security when shopping in stores. Higher scores on this summary scale denote higher levels of discrimination (0 to 10). Financial strain was measured by the question: “How much do you worry that your total (family) income will not be enough to meet your family's expenses and bills” (4 = a great deal; 3 = a lot; 2 = a little; 1 = not at all).

Sociodemographic variables include age, gender, family income, education, marital status, and region. Missing data for household income was imputed for 773 cases (12.7% of the NSAL sample). Missing data for education was imputed for 74 cases. Additionally, two demographic variables particularly relevant to Black Caribbeans are included in this analysis: immigration status and country of origin. Immigration status has five categories corresponding to respondents who were: 1) born in the United States, (born in another country and) 2) immigrated to the United States 0 to 5 years ago, 3) immigrated to the United States 6-10 years ago, 4) immigrated to the United States 11-20 years ago, and 5) immigrated to the United States more than 20 years ago. Consistent with research on the Caribbean region, country of origin was categorized based upon historical and anthropological designations of the Caribbean as Anglophone (English speaking), Hispanophone (Spanish speaking), and Francophone (French Speaking) (see Gossai and Murrell 2000; Zane 1999). Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, and other English-speaking countries (e.g., Barbados) represent the Anglophone countries; Spanish-speaking countries include Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Cuba; and Haiti is the Francophone country. The resulting variable, Country of Origin, is recoded into five categories: Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, Other English-speaking country (e.g., Barbados), Spanish-speaking country (e.g., Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic) and Haiti. The distribution the independent variables utilized in this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Analysis strategy

First we present bivariate analyses of ethnic differences in closeness to Africans. Percentages are weighted based on the sample's race-adjusted weight measure. Second, multivariate analyses of the indicator of closeness to Africans by ethnicity are conducted with demographic factors, financial strain, and discrimination used as controls. Third, subgroup regression analyses are presented—one set of analysis is conducted solely with African Americans and a second set of analysis is conducted among Black Caribbeans.

Analyses were conducted using SAS 9.13 which uses the Taylor expansion approximation technique to calculate complex design-based estimates of variance. To obtain results generalizable to African American and Black Caribbean populations, all analyses use analytic weights. All statistical analyses account for the complex multistage clustered design

of the NSAL sample, unequal probabilities of selection, nonresponse, and poststratification to calculate weighted, nationally representative population estimates and standard errors.

RESULTS

Bivariate analysis reveals that Black Caribbeans feel significantly closer to Black people in Africa than do African Americans (Table 2). For instance, 28% of Black Caribbeans as compared to only 21% of African Americans report feeling very close to Black people in Africa. Overall, 7 in 10 Black Caribbeans feel close (combining very and fairly close categories) to Black people in Africa compared to about 6 in 10 African Americans.

Although there is a bivariate relationship between the degree of closeness felt by Black Caribbeans and African Americans, this relationship may not remain significant when controlling for other potential confounders such as income and education. Consequently, we conducted a multivariate analysis controlling for the demographic and other independent variables. This analysis also revealed that Black Caribbeans feel closer to Blacks in Africa than do African Americans (analysis not shown). Thus, the ethnic group difference in levels of closeness in the bivariate analysis remains significant when controlling for socio-economic status and other variables.

We next conducted separate regression analyses for African Americans and Black Caribbeans (Table 3) so that we could take full advantage of the Caribbean-specific variables, as well as the demographic variation within these two populations. For instance, the region categories reflect the geographic distribution of the African American and Black Caribbean populations. Because Black Caribbeans are highly concentrated in the Northeast (e.g., Connecticut, Washington, D.C., New York), region is represented by two categories—Northeast and Other. Four regional categories are used for African Americans—Northeast, North Central, South, and West. Additionally, the two Caribbean-specific variables—immigration status and country of origin are included in the Black Caribbean analysis.

An examination of Table 3 indicates that different sets of variables influence African Americans and Black Caribbeans feelings of closeness. Among African Americans, only gender is significantly related with closeness to Black people in Africa, with men feeling closer than women to Africans. Regression analysis among Black Caribbeans indicates that age, gender, financial strain, region, and immigration status are associated with closeness to Black people in Africa. Younger persons and men feel closer to Black people in Africa than their older and female counterparts. Respondents reporting higher levels of financial strain and those residing in the Northeast also feel closer to Black people in Africa. Lastly, Black Caribbeans who immigrated to the United States 11-20 years ago and 21 or more years ago feel closer to Black people in Africa than do Black Caribbeans who were born in the U.S.

Given the importance of immigration status on Black Caribbeans' attitudes, we further explored potential differences between persons for who were born in the U.S. versus those who immigrated here by testing interactions between immigration status (foreign born, born in the United States) and age, financial strain, and region. Although these relationships were significant in preliminary sub-group analyses (comparing foreign and U.S. born Black

Caribbeans), they were not significant in this more stringent analysis using interaction terms and are not included in our final models.

DISCUSSION

The commonly accepted definition of diaspora indicates a dispersal of people living outside their ancestral homelands or people with a common affiliation who are scattered around the world (Agunias and Newland 2012). The immigration of people with African ancestry to the United States has a long history, beginning with the slave trade and continuing via immigration to the US from Africa and the Caribbean for economic and social reasons (Kaba 2011). These immigration experiences yield distinct ideas of community, identity and culture (Vertovec 1997; Hall and Rutherford 1990). Within the U.S. context, race and racial marginalization remains central to these experiences and shapes diverse forms of racial and ethnic identities, as well as intra-group relationships and perceptions.

Findings from this study of African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' perceptions of closeness to African nationals support a notion of a shared connection with people in Africa. The majority of both Black Caribbeans and African Americans felt close to Black people in Africa. However, Black Caribbeans endorsed this view to a greater extent than did African Americans with 72% of Black Caribbeans and 58% of African Americans reporting that they feel either very or fairly close to Black people in Africa. This difference may reflect the fact that because Black Caribbeans are immigrants themselves they endorse higher levels of closeness to groups of the Diaspora than African Americans. Further, Black Caribbeans and African immigrants tend to reside in recognized 'gateway' regions and metropolitan areas (e.g., Northeast) of the U.S. (Nunnally 2010), in contrast to the broader population of native born African Americans who are more geographically dispersed. Black Caribbeans may interact more with African immigrants in the United States and as such develop more affinity with blacks in Africa. Finally, Black Caribbeans are more likely to have transnational extended families consisting of family members who may live in the Caribbean, Canada and England (Chamberlin 1999; Taylor et al. 2014). Being a member of transnational families may reinforce the importance of the Diaspora and closeness to Africans.

Gender was the only demographic correlate for feelings of closeness for African Americans, while Black Caribbean perceptions were more nuanced and varied by gender, age, region, financial strain, and immigration status. Gender findings for both groups were consistent with research on interracial attitudes among African Americans in which men endorse closer feelings toward other groups (Thornton and Taylor 1988; Thornton and Mizuno 1999; Thornton, Taylor and Chatters 2013). Why women are more distant than men is unclear (Hughes and Tuch 2003), but perhaps their experiences with multiple oppressions (Hummer et al. 1999; Szymanski and Stewart 2010) tempers feelings of closeness to other groups. Further, given women's involvement as primary socializers for interracial/intra-group protocols and ethnic pride (Brown and Krishnakumar 2007; Hughes et al. 2006; Thomas and Speight 1999) and their greater exposure to ethnic and racial socialization messages, women may be more alert to and protective of their environments and more distant from other groups. This social context may embolden Black women to resist (Childs 2005) and feel less

trustful of intergroup relations (Hughes and Chen 1997; Smith 2010). Contrary to previous research (Thornton and Mizuno 1995), age and closeness to Africans were not significantly related among African Americans. However, younger Black Caribbeans felt closer to Africans than their older counterparts, reflecting a similar phenomenon among African-descent populations in England (Lam and Smith 2009), Holland (Witte 2014) and Norway (Mainsah 2014), possibly related to greater access to others in the African diaspora via the Internet (Mainsah 2014).

Consistent with past research (Thornton and Mizuno 1999; Thornton, et al. 2013), Black Caribbeans living in the Northeast (location of immigrant gateway cities e.g., New York, Boston) were more likely to feel close to Africans. Black Caribbeans and Africans likely encounter parallel experiences both as immigrants and newcomers to the U.S. racial stratification system. Consequently, residing in the Northeast exposes Black Caribbeans to greater levels of interaction with and awareness of other black ethnics (Nunnally 2010) resulting in perceptions of closeness to Africans. Greater financial strain was also significantly associated with feelings of closeness towards Africans. The experience of living with financial strain may bolster a connection with other groups who are perceived to share similar life situations and economic marginalization. Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) indicate that positive attitudes toward outgroup members occur when people categorize themselves and outgroup members in terms of a common, superordinate identity (e.g., economic disadvantage). These findings demonstrate that the link between economic circumstances and black intra- and inter- racial attitudes deserve greater attention.

Black Caribbeans who immigrated to the U.S. more than 11 years ago were more likely to report feeling close to Africans than those born in the U.S., a pattern found elsewhere (Thornton, et al 2013). In contrast, second and later generation (U.S.-born) Black Caribbeans resembled native-born African Americans in their feelings of closeness to Africans, suggesting that socialization experiences associated with growing up in the U.S. are in operation. Immigration status differences for closeness to Africans may also be related to beliefs about blackness in America (Rogers 2000; Vickerman 2001). Some Black immigrants sustain a racial link to the African diaspora and recognize a shared experience of slavery, while for others, national identity trumps racial identity (Foner 2001). This split may be especially pronounced for first generation immigrants who may value both their Caribbean identities and their ties to Africans, but are more ambivalent about their U.S. brethren. First generation immigrants may also have more negative perceptions of Black interethnic relations (Jackson and Cothran 2003), perhaps making it difficult to bond with native African Americans (Alex-Assensoh 2000). In contrast, second generation, U.S.-born immigrants may adopt identities more firmly rooted in U.S. culture and their nationality as U.S. citizens, in contrast to a racial identity with specific links to and feelings of connection with Africa and its people.

LIMATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Several limitations of the current work should be noted. First, the sample excludes Black Caribbeans who do not speak English (i.e., persons who only speak Spanish, Haitian-French); consequently, the study findings are not generalizable to these groups of Black

Caribbeans. Second, we examined one aspect of identity, racial group identity via perceived closeness. The other aspect of identity is group evaluation, referring to appraisals of one's own group, which may be relatively positive or negative (Hughes, et al. 2014). The present study lacks information about how reported attitudes are related to actual interactions between the groups involved. Some research reveals a mixed picture of intergroup relations that is often characterized by conflicted exchanges and mutually-held stereotypic beliefs (Benson 2006; Bideshi and Kposowa 2012; Ellis, et al 2010; Jackson and Cothran 2003). The contrast between expressed feelings of closeness highlighted in this study and real-life interactions involving African Americans, Black Caribbeans and Africans warrants further studies exploring the nature and correlates of intergroup relations within the contemporary African Diaspora.

Overall, feelings of closeness to Africans expressed by both African Americans and Black Caribbeans were largely similar (fairly and very close). Conjecture as to the social and political implications of these sentiments are based in two different perspectives. First, historically, both African Americans and Black Caribbeans have been associated with pan-African movements—most notably, Marcus Garvey's (a Jamaican immigrant) movement to return to African as a means of black liberation and advancement. Further, the time period of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the emergence of independent African and Caribbean nations were roughly comparable and forged connections to and affiliation with liberation and civil rights movements across these different contexts. Second, contemporary events associated with prominent figures in U.S. political spheres (Barak Obama) and popular culture (Oprah Winfrey), as well as the visibility of African leaders of world stature and renown (Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela) have underscored the concerns and connections between African nations and both African Americans and Black Caribbeans.

Given this background, the social and political implications for African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' expressed felt closeness to Africans may be focused on contemporary issues facing African nations with respect to national and humanitarian concerns involving health, overall development, national security and foreign aid. For example, continuing health issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as Ebola outbreaks, vividly underscore the significant underdevelopment and lack of functioning health infrastructures in many African nations. Further, modern transportation has accelerated the rapidity of disease transmission, thereby 'shrinking' the globe and obliterating the meaning of national borders. Consequently, the feelings of closeness of African American and Black Caribbean to Africans may be an important element in shaping attitudes and mobilizing support for U.S. foreign aid to address these issues.

In conclusion, there is a common belief that race is no longer deterministic of life in the U.S. and is diminishing in significance (i.e., post-racial America). In this worldview, race is what ethnicity has been, signifying a fluid and voluntary association based on choice, selected from a number of membership options, and representing an "affiliation by revocable consent" (Hollinger 2008:1037). This is in contrast to a view of race as an involuntary identity and ascribed status. The present work contributes to a body of literature suggesting that Black Caribbeans' notions of race and ethnicity and their intersections are fluid, dynamic and context-specific. For Black Caribbeans, perceptions of closeness to Blacks in

Africa (as a manifestation of racial identification) were both pervasive and associated with several social correlates. African Americans reported lower levels of closeness that were, on the whole, uniform across this group. Of particular note were immigrant generation influences which identified greater affinity towards Africans among foreign born Black Caribbeans in contrast to their U.S. born counterparts (second and later generation Black Caribbeans). This suggests that within a generation, conceptions of race identity are transformed as reflected in diminished perceptions of affinity and connections to people of African descent. Future work should continue to examine the social and demographic correlates of racial identification with the African Diaspora among ethnically diverse Black populations in the U.S.

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Table 1Distribution of demographic and other independent variables^a.

Demographic variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans	
	%	N	%	N
Age				
Mean	42.32	3570	40.27	1621
S.D.	14.49		5.77	
Education				
Mean	12.43	3570	12.88	1621
S.D.	2.23		1.01	
Income				
Mean	36,833		47,044	1621
S.D.	33,068		15,190	
Gender				
Male	44.02	1271	50.87	643
Female	55.97	2299	49.13	978
Marital Status				
Married	32.91	960	37.56	559
Partner	8.74	260	12.57	131
Separated	7.16	286	5.36	128
Divorced	11.74	524	9.29	178
Widowed	7.89	353	4.28	78
Never married	31.54	1170	30.91	542
Region				
Northeast	15.69	411	55.69	1135
North Central	18.81	595	4.05	12
South	56.24	2330	29.11	456
West	9.25	234	11.14	18
Discrimination				
Mean	3.87	3524	4.05	1604
S.D.	3.74		1.57	
Financial Strain				
Mean	3.11	3511	2.98	1600
S.D.	0.87		0.36	
Country of Origin				
Spanish	--		14.07	180
Haiti	--		12.64	298
Jamaica	--		31.72	510
Trinidad-Tobago	--		9.98	170
Other English	--		31.57	440
Years in the US				
US born	--		35.75	440

Demographic variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans	
	%	N	%	N
Less than 5 years	--		7.89	119
6-10 years	--		8.25	164
11-20 years	--		19.91	364
21 years or more	--		28.18	512

Note:

^a Percents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted.

Table 2

Bivariate cross-tabulation of African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' closeness to Black people in Africa

	African Americans	Black Caribbeans
Black people in Africa		
Very close	21.03	28.27
Fairly close	37.43	43.95
Not too close	28.63	20.70
Not close at all	12.89	7.06
N	3481	1584
Rao-Scott	20.85***	

Note: Percents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted.

Table 3

Regressions for African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' feelings of closeness to Black people in Africa

	African Americans		Black Caribbeans	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Age	0.000	0.001	−0.008 [*]	0.003
Gender	−0.161 ^{***}	0.042	−0.362 ^{***}	0.064
Education	0.004	0.007	0.005	0.014
Income	−0.000	0.002	−0.008	0.005
Marital status				
Cohabit	−0.058	0.063	−0.174	0.145
Separated	−0.048	0.072	0.029	0.146
Divorced	−0.030	0.067	0.009	0.101
Widowed	−0.020	0.100	0.041	0.183
Never Married	0.015	0.051	−0.158	0.083
Financial strain	0.039	0.024	0.068 [*]	0.026
Discrimination	0.001	0.004	0.006	0.013
Region				
Northeast	0.054	0.040	0.169 [*]	0.068
North Central	0.013	0.055	--	--
West	−0.150	0.097	--	--
Immigration status				
0 to 5 years	--	--	0.178	0.118
6 to 10 years	--	--	0.059	0.083
11 to 20 years	--	--	0.237 ^{**}	0.101
Over 21 years	--	--	0.234 ^{**}	0.093
Country of origin	--	--		
Spanish	--	--	−0.031	0.138
Haiti	--	--	0.116	0.097
Trinidad-Tobago	--	--	0.065	0.114
Other English	--	--	0.004	0.139
N	3453		1558	
Model F-value	2.91 ^{**}		24.09 ^{***}	
R-Square	0.011		0.08	

Note: Several independent variables are represented by dummy variables. Gender, 1 = female, 0 = male; Marital Status, married is the excluded category; Region, for African Americans, South is the excluded category, for Black Caribbeans, Other regions is the excluded category; Immigration status, Born in US is the excluded category; Country of origin, Jamaica is the excluded category.

^{*}
p<.05

^{**}
p<.01

^{***}
p<.001