

Nancy FONER

Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York

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Title

Racialization in an Era of Mass Migration: Black Immigrants in Europe and the United States

Abstract

Comparing Afro-Caribbean and African migrants and their children on the two sides of the Atlantic highlights how social, political, and demographic contexts and historical developments influence the nature and impact of racial boundaries and barriers --- and raises some intriguing questions. Why and in what ways are the racial barriers facing black migrants more severe in the United States than in Britain, France, and the Netherlands? At the same time, how has the history and presence of the large African American population provided black migrants and their descendants with certain advantages that they lack in Europe? Why do identity struggles of the second generation take different forms in the United States and Europe?

References

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NB: these seminar proceedings derive from the hand-written notes taken by Juliette Galonnier during the session. Imprecisions and mistakes may have slipped into the text.

Notes taken by Juliette Galonnier

Nancy Foner

Introduction

I would like to start with a few brief comments. This talk is based on a long-time interest I have had in Black migrants. I started my career as an anthropologist studying Jamaicans and West Indians. From the beginning, my work has focused on comparison. My initial studies compared Jamaicans in New York and London. Today, I will not just discuss West Indians but also Africans and I will not simply focus on the US and the UK but also on other European countries. This talk relies mostly on the qualitative work I have conducted and on secondary literature.

Perhaps no group of migrants has been as deeply affected by racial labels and inequalities as those who trace their origins to sub-Saharan Africa, either in the recent or more distant past.

But if racial barriers are critical for black migrants and their children in both Europe and the United States, blithe assumptions that color-coded race will inevitably affect them in the same way are wrong.

I am a big believer in comparative analysis. A comparative analysis of black migrants and their children in Western Europe and the United States points to the complex ways that the different histories and current contexts on the two sides of the Atlantic influence the nature and impact of racial boundaries.

Of overwhelming importance is that the United States has long had a large, subordinated black population inside its territorial boundaries. This is key. In Europe, Black migration occurred mostly after WW2. Before that, it existed, but it remained very small and limited. In addition, European states, like the US, oversaw slave systems but slavery was located in their colonies, not in the motherland, which is a big difference with the US where slavery took place on American soil. We can hypothesize, therefore, that due to these contrasting histories, the racialization processes of Black migrants will differ in the US and Europe.

The comparative analysis raises some intriguing questions. Why and in what ways, for example, are the racial barriers facing black migrants more severe in the United States? At the same time, how has the presence of a large native black population provided black migrants and their descendants with advantages that they lack in Europe? Why do identity struggles of the second generation in the United States focus more on the desire to have their ethnic or national origins recognized? Do the different current dynamics of race in the United States and Europe also presage different futures?

In Europe, I focus is on Britain, France, and the Netherlands, which experienced large-scale black immigration from colonies or former colonies after the 1950s. Those of African and Caribbean origin now represent around 3 percent of the population in all three countries, some half a million people (in the Netherlands, nearly all Surinamese and Antilleans) and around two million in Britain and France. In the U.S., the black foreign born are now about 9 percent (4 million) of the country's black population (of nearly 45 million). The majority are from the Caribbean but there is an increasing migration from Africa as well these days.

Transatlantic parallels

Studies of black migrants and their descendants on both sides of the Atlantic report that they have to cope with living in societies where they are a stigmatized racial minority and where, unlike in their home societies, skin color becomes an all-important status marker and more significant basis of identity and interactions. In both London and NY, people I interviewed always told me that they became Black through migration. Jamaicans in NY and London: "I never knew I was black until I got here" (Foner 2005). A second-generation Nigerian in Britain put it this way: "In this country as a black person... if I woke up tomorrow morning and I forgot that I was black, people will remind me" (Imoagene 2016)

Studies also report widespread perceptions of and experiences with racial discrimination in housing and the workplace as well as in everyday encounters with racism in public spaces, on the streets, in stores, including subtle everyday experiences tinged with racial suspicions and overtones.

Police harassment is also a common grievance on both sides of the Atlantic, as reports on stop and search and racial profiling of young black men make clear.

This pervades the literature on Blacks in France, the US, the UK, etc. There are many similarities in this respect. But it is the transatlantic contrast that stands out and is particularly interesting to study.

Transatlantic contrasts: racial barriers

To be sure, researchers like Patrick Simon have shown that there are differences within Europe. France, for instance, is a country that defines itself as color-blind, even though actual racial discrimination exists and is well documented. This differs from the UK where color-coded policies have been implemented. But despite differences within Europe, the transatlantic contrast stands out.

Historical legacies of slavery and colonialism: European countries did not have slavery on their soil, which makes a big difference. In the US, by contrast, the black/white color line was primary. While I have written a book entitled *Not just white and black*, which put the emphasis on other groups such as Hispanics, Asians, etc., it must be recognized that the black/white boundary was prior to any other boundary. The United States was founded upon slavery, we need to remember that. Abolition was followed by institutionalized racial oppression. Black people were exposed to threat of violence and lynching. These days, because of Trump's various declarations, there is a renewed interest in the Reconstruction period, during which the South became a place of legal segregation. Given these historical legacies, it is not surprising that the United States is in a class of its own when it comes to the severity of the barriers facing people of African ancestry, immigrant and native-born alike.

Residential segregation: Blacks in the US are much more segregated than in Europe. In the ten American metropolitan areas with the largest Afro-Caribbean populations in 2000, the index of dissimilarity between Afro-Caribbeans and whites ranged from 57 (in Fort Lauderdale) to 83 in New York City --- a score of 100 representing total segregation. When I mention these figures to my students in NY, they are very surprised. They think they live in a much more integrated city, but my West Indians students know very well what I am talking about.

By contrast, the dissimilarity values for sub-Saharan Africans in Paris, Surinamese and Antilleans in Amsterdam, and Caribbeans in London are much lower, in the 30 to 40 range (Alba and Foner 2015).

Intermarriage: Unions between blacks of migrant origin and whites are much less frequent in the United States than in Europe. Only about 10 percent of the West Indian second generation in the United States have white partners. Now, these intermarriage figures are very old (they date back from the 90s) and they might be higher now. But although we lack contemporary data, I suspect these figures are still very low.

It is very different in the Netherlands, where nearly half of the Surinamese and an astounding 70 percent of the Antillean second generation are in mixed unions with long-established Dutch natives. In Britain, already by 2011, more children in England and Wales under 15 had one black Caribbean and one white parent than two black Caribbean parents. And in France, over two-fifths of the second generation of black African origin had partners from the mainstream French population.

In the US, there is a potential larger pool of Black partners but the intense segregation between whites and Blacks prevents contact. Let's also remember that until 1967, marriage between Blacks and whites was illegal. Higher rates of Black/white unions in France and the Netherlands reflect higher possibilities of contact and interaction.

Black incarceration in the U.S.: let's also emphasize the extraordinary high rates of Black incarceration in the US. 1 in 11 Black men in their 20s and early 30s were incarcerated in 2015.

Transatlantic contrasts: benefits of the African American presence

But there is also an other side of the story.

The civil rights struggles and legislation of the 1950s and 1960s -- and the presence of a large native black population --- have provided African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants with advantages that their counterparts in Europe lack .

Affirmative action and diversity outreach programs developed in the aftermath of the Civil Rights have also benefited Black migrants in the US. Mary Waters, Philip Kasinitz and John Mollenkopf have shown that affirmative action ended up working better for non-white immigrants and their children rather than for the native African-American minority. A study by Doug Massey et al. has also shown that the foreign-born and their children are overrepresented among Black students in selective colleges.

By contrast, programs and policies to expand opportunities for ethnic and racial minorities have been less extensive and far-reaching in Europe than in the US. European countries, as John Mollenkopf and Jennifer Hochschild (2010) have argued, “have little experience with robust affirmative action laws, voting rights laws, minority advocacy groups, litigation against discrimination, minority business set asides, and all the other policies and organizational strategies intended to help mitigate the consequences of centuries of racial hierarchy.”

Even if these programs have not always worked in the United States (and, like affirmative action, have been diluted by recent Supreme Court decisions), they have provided a “scaffolding upon which migrants and their supporters have been able to hang some policy innovations” --- scaffolding which migrants lack in Europe (Mollenkopf and Hochschild 2010: 28). Today, it is unclear to what extent affirmative action will survive in the US but some policies continue to be implemented and have passed scrutiny. At CUNY, we have what we call the “Target of Opportunity Hiring program”, in which attempts are made to hire minorities for faculty positions. And this is not illegal.

The very existence of a huge black native minority population in the US has had benefits for black immigrants and their children. Although the second generation often feels excluded from white America, and embraces aspects of their ethnic heritage, they also generally come to feel a part of the larger black minority community and may, in some instances, unite with African Americans politically to promote their common goals. This is very clear in New York city, where there is a huge non-Hispanic Black population (2 million out of a total of 8,4 million population). Second-generation Caribbean and African migrants are a significant share and can rely on a long-established Black population. At city-wide levels, Blacks are the most consistently Democrat group. This critical mass of Black people can be mobilized politically.

There are also patterns of incorporation into the middle class minority culture of mobility and an ability to enter and gain contacts in institutions dominated and led by black Americans such as some urban labor unions, student organizations and political groups. In New York, unions long held by African-Americans are now being taken over by Black Caribbeans migrants. In contemporary US politics, the Republican party has become a white party. Non-whites overwhelmingly support the Democratic party and recent candidates reflect this trend: Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, Stacey Abrams, etc.

By contrast, in the absence of a large and long-established native black population, blacks of migrant origin in Europe lack, racially speaking, a critical mass of this kind.

Transatlantic contrasts: identity issues

In the United States, identity issues are intimately bound up with relations with African Americans in a way that does not happen in Europe. African-Americans are at the bottom of American hierarchy and Black migrants often do not want to be lumped with them. Attempts by black migrants to distinguish themselves from, and avoid the stigma associated with, African Americans are central in their construction of identities in the United States. Many West Indians I interviewed said that they were treated more favorably by white people when they said that there were not African-American. I am not sure whether this is actually true, but the fact that they believed it to be true is significant.

Yet, as put by Milton Vickerman, distancing and identification always go hand in hand. West Indians might claim distancing and at times feel superior but they also strongly identify with African-Americans.

Distancing does not only happen in the US. Distancing strategies are also found in Europe -- with a difference. In France, French Antilleans may claim superiority over African migrants because of nationality, history, or religion. In the UK, Nigerians may claim superiority over other groups because of education, class and social status, etc.

The identity struggles of the second-generation children of black migrants take different forms on the two sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, where American and black are inextricably linked and foreignness is often perceived to be an advantage by the second generation, the struggle is to be recognized for their ethnicity --- and not seen, or only seen, as African American. In Europe, the struggle is to be recognized as French, Dutch, or British, and not just in terms of their ethnicity, which is associated with being black and foreign.

The problem for the second generation in the U.S. is that they have difficulty having their West Indianness or Africanness recognized in a society that racializes black people with little regard to their ethnicity.

According to Milton Vickerman, American society has a powerful tendency to homogenize blacks -- or a reflexive habit of identifying "black" with "African American" (Vickerman 2016), which in turn is associated with "poor, unworthy and dangerous". Without an accent or other cues to immediately signal their ethnicity to others, the second generation is seen as African American and their black race is what matters most in encounters with whites. One interviewee complained: "at the end of the day, we are just Black. People don't see the white and green colors of the Nigerian flag in us". That is why many second-generation Black migrants try to signal their ethnicity, by wearing T-shirts saying "Nigerian girl" or by displaying Nigerian flags in their car, for instance.

In Europe, the second generation generally does not struggle to be recognized for their ethnicity -- this already tends to happen. People are already associated with their ethnicity. Instead, a problem is that many in the native majority do not see or accept them as fully English, French, or Dutch. The struggle is to be recognized that way. As put by one interviewee, "English people will never see you as English if you've got Black skin". In the Trajectories and Origin survey, it also appeared that many Black Antilleans say that they feel French but are often not viewed as French by others.

On the whole, members of the Afro-Caribbean and black African second generation on both sides of the Atlantic want to be included in the national identity while also maintaining an ethnic identity, but their racial status complicates identity issues in different ways.

In the United States, they are accepted as American --- but as black Americans, a racial identity that unites them with a significant segment of the U.S. population but also often ignores their ethnic origins. In Europe, their ethnic identities are acknowledged, but these are associated with their racial status, and too often they do not feel their European national identities are accepted.

Looking ahead

We still have a lot to learn about black migrants in both Europe and the US, including:

- the different experiences of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans with ethnoracial barriers and identities;
- for both groups, the impact of gender (AfroCaribbean and African men are more exposed to racial discrimination than women), religion (Black Africans who are Muslim face additional discrimination), social class (middle-class people are likely to have a stronger ethnic identification), and residential patterns on racial dynamics;
- and the effects of the particular urban context: how does the black migrant experience vary among cities within the United States and European countries ? We can add another layer of comparative analysis by comparing across different cities. Most of my research concentrates on New York but things might be different in Miami (which is dominated by Cubans) or Atlanta (with a strong, historically powerful Black population).

There is also a host of additional questions about the evolution of racial boundaries in the future: Racial divisions based on black African ancestry may prove less “blur-able” in the United States given the weight of history and the more highly rigid boundary surrounding all blacks, whatever their national or ethnic origins. On the one hand, there are forces that may lead to a loosening of the racial boundary separating blacks from others in the United States (including a greater presence of African-Americans in the US, the election of a Black president and many Black candidates in the next election) ---- but, on the other, powerful forces operate in the other direction. There are continuing high rates of poverty and incarceration among Blacks in the US. Children of Black and white couples have more limited identity options: many are often seen as Black only (President Obama is a case in point in this respect: although he was raised by his white grandparents, he remains consistently seen as Black only). Research shows that biracials tend to lean more to the Black side. The argument of E. Bonilla Silva according to which American is evolving towards a tripartite racial system (whites, honorary whites and collective Blacks) suggests that Blacks will remain in the lower position.

In Europe, the lower rates of residential segregation and higher rates of mixed unions among blacks of migrant origin provide more optimism about the possible loosening of racial boundaries there --- although there are serious worries, too.

Overall, studies of mixed unions are critical for the future. Will children of Black/white unions be labeled as Black, irrespective of their own preferences? If rates of intermarriage continue to grow, the blurring of boundaries might occur.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen if, and how, racial boundaries in the United States and Europe will blur in the context of future developments. Whatever the exact direction or pace of change, however, race is likely to continue to affect black migrants and their descendants on both sides of the Atlantic for some time to come --- although how it does so, as well as the dynamics of change, are bound to differ in significant ways in the United States and Europe.

As the transatlantic comparison makes clear, there is no such thing as the black migrant experience --- and the presence or absence of a large black native minority population with a long history of oppression is a fundamental part of the story.

Questions from the audience

Patrick Simon

Thank you for this great talk, which occurs while we are currently in the UN international decade for people of African descent. There is strong concern and interest at the international level for this question. I noticed that you did not use the term “people of African descent” or “Afrodescendants” which has been imposed by social movements and international organizations. One argument for using this term is that it is a one-size fit all term that can be used everywhere. Picking up on your looking ahead and conclusion sections, I would like to ask you to expand on your comparison of the evolution of racial boundaries in Europe and the US. One might say that racial boundaries have been established for a long time in the US. But in Europe, we are only at the beginning of discovering racial boundaries on European soil. Actual physical interactions have only taken place since the 1950s. There might be a cross-point where racial boundaries are declining the US and becoming more strengthened in Europe.

=> Answer: in some ways, that may be true but the history of oppression of Blacks in the US is so strong that it is hard to say that boundaries will become blurred. Intermarriage is actually NOT blurring boundaries in the US since mixed-race children are lumped into the Black population, while I think it will blur boundaries in the UK and in the Netherlands. Of course, there have been changes in the US: a Black president was elected; it has become more normal to see Blacks in high positions, etc. but residential segregation remains very high and intermarriage very low.

Patrick Simon

I am unsure about how to interpret the effects of intermarriage on racial boundaries. In a way, the story you tell is one of whitening, like the one that was for long told in Brazil: with intermarriage, Blacks will disappear, and the population will end up being mixed, etc. But there are two ways to blur boundaries:

- to pass: the boundary stays the same, but through a whitening process, some people are able to escape it
- a decline in the significance of the boundary itself

In Europe, let's also remember that there is a continuous migration from Africa and that children from mixed couples may also find partners from Africa, etc.

=> Answer: yes, this is true. By contrast, since the 1970s, Afro-Caribbean migration to Britain has basically stopped.

Juliette Galonnier

I was really interested in the interplay of racial and ethnic identifications you highlighted. I wonder about the role of social movements in strengthening racial identification. We know that in Brazil, the Black movement invited several segments of the Brazilian population to identify as Black. Similarly, have recent movements like Black Lives Matter been able to foster racial solidarity among West Indians, Jamaicans and African-Americans, irrespective of ethnic divides? Another question is about distancing: we know a lot about how Black migrants seek to distance themselves from African-Americans but do we have studies about how African-Americans perceive Black migrants and their children? Do they also partake in distancing by putting the emphasis for instance on native capital?

=> Answer: concerning Black Lives Matter, I have no idea how it has impacted boundaries. But one thing is certain: the longer West Indians live in the US, the more they identify with African-Americans. Black lives matter may make them feel more bonded to African-Americans. It may foster greater identity. It is important to remind that there is not just distancing involved, but also identification. The two work together. They do feel a racial bond and you can see it very clearly in local politics. Una S.T. Clarke, an elected member of New York city council is a second generation West Indian and she gets both the West Indian and African-American votes. As to whether African-Americans distance themselves from foreign-born Blacks, we do not know. That shows the limits of the literature we rely on. But we do know that there is a lot of resentment. A common slur that African-Americans use towards West Indians in the 70s-80s was "monkey-chasers" (see: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3041137?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents). I do not know whether that is still the case but I suspect some negative feelings continue to exist. There is a long history behind this. We may recall that West Indian parents are absolutely frightened and fearful for their children: they worry that their children are going to be negatively influenced by African-Americans and that will undermine their social mobility. In addition, with regards to residential segregation, West Indians are often pioneers in moving to white neighborhoods. In the 80s, in NY, Canarsie was an all-white neighborhood and now it is overwhelmingly Black. I remember an interview with a West Indian women who had been the first Black woman to move into that neighborhood. Interestingly, with gentrification today, the reverse is happening. In neighborhoods like Bushwick, whites are moving in, who are well-off and buy houses. Housing projects remain in the area but NY city schools have made it easier for gentrifiers because in an attempt to decrease school segregation, they allow parents to send children to schools that are not the local school. So white parents moving to Black neighborhoods have opted to send their children to schools outside the neighborhood. Highly selective schools in NY have very little Blacks or Hispanics among their students...

Ognjen Obucina

I would like to emphasize that there are different Europes. The UK specifically is different from France, the Netherlands, etc. because "British" operates like a kind of supranational identity

(over Irish, English), etc. So the British identity could also function as a type of safe haven for minorities.

=> Answer: that is a very good point. And I don't think there is a study on that. Identities have different meanings, and it might be that Black people can claim a British identity in a way that they cannot claim an English identity for instance.

Arnfinn Midtboen

Picking up on Patrick's comments on the differences between the US and Europe, I would like to mention that I am currently part of a research group with Lincoln Quillian and Ole Hexel in which we perform a meta-analysis of hiring discrimination studies in different countries. We found that in the US since the 80s, there has been absolutely no change in hiring discrimination against African-Americans. At the same time, the US is in the lower range of hiring discrimination compared to European countries. France, for instance, is much higher. So in terms of market opportunities, it is not necessarily the case that the situation is worse in the US.

=> Answer: concerning the fact that there seems to be less discrimination in hiring in the US; one explanation could be the civil rights legislation. It has made employers more nervous and they are very careful now. It is true that in general when West Indians talk about discrimination in the US, it is not related to work but rather to police discrimination or to more subtle types of discrimination (daily interactions, etc.). Yet, it is also true that they work in workplaces that are mostly Black.

Edward Telles

Following up on the Brazilian case, we should remember that the US had 5% of all slaves on their soil. Brazil had 50%. Brazil has a much longer and larger history of slavery. At the same time, Brazil has much higher intermarriage rates. But the discrimination is very high and killings of young Black men by the police are also extremely high. That is the reason why I always have second thoughts when people put too much emphasis on intermarriage.

=> Answer: yes, Brazil is a fascinating case to compare with. I always wonder what would happen if Black migrants would go to Brazil.

Mrs. ???

Intermarriage is high in Europe but we know that it mostly takes place in certain social segments of the population. What are the patterns in the US?

=> Answer: In the US, it is mostly in the middle classes that you find high rates of intermarriage.

Rosita Fibbi

Why is Canada not in your scope? Will it be somewhere between Europe and the US? Canada often gets discussed for religious matters but much less for racial issues.

=> Answer: yes, I agree that we need to pluralize North America. In *Strangers no more*, we did cover Canada. There are studies on race in Canada, for instance on Haitians in Montreal. Canada also has high intermarriage rates, which makes it interesting.

Patrick Simon

On the issue of how African-Americans welcome African immigrants, we may also look at literature on how African-Americans from the North welcomed African-Americans from the

South of the country after the Great migration. There was a complex interplay of culture, race, region, ethnicity, accent, etc. in their relations.

=> Answer: yes, migration of Blacks from the South is a very important case study. In an panel on migration for the SSRC we discussed whether we could consider African-American migration from the South to the North as a case study. Finally, we decided to focus on international migration only, but we could say that moving from the South to the North was like moving from another country: food habits, accents, culture, etc. were different. Southerners were the archetype of the migrant drive, working hard, animated by the desire to do well, etc. And they ended up being even more segregated than in the South.

Overall, we need to be cautious about studies who tend to blend Blacks together. Studies of intermarriage for instance look at Black/white intermarriage but do not differentiate within groups. A PhD student of mine is currently looking at intermarriage within the Nigerian community (Ibo/Hausa, etc.). We need to look at all these complexities, and not simply race. Let's remember that in the US white groups have their ethnic identities easily recognized (see *Ethnic options* by Mary Waters), which is much less the case for Blacks.

Edward Telles

On the relations between African-Americans and Black immigrants, studies have shown that at Princeton, 52% of the Black student population is West Indian. At Harvard, it is 70%. The resentment of African-Americans towards Black immigrants and their children can also be explained by the fact that they have been ripping the benefits of affirmative action programs. In the current election race, people keep saying that Kamala Harris (the daughter of Jamaican and Indian parents) is not Black enough because she does not come from the slave tradition.

=> Answer: we may wonder whether affirmative action programs at the university will yet be another case of Black Americans having other groups leap-frogging on their rights.

Christelle Gomis

In the movement for reparations, we also see these distinctions. A subgroup like #ADOS has been claiming reparations only for the Black native population (American Descendants Of Slavery). Who is entitled to receive reparations is a big debate.