

The Experience of Black and Latina Women Students at  
Predominantly White Colleges & Universities

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Mariani German

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Dr. Shameka Powell

## Abstract

This research explores the impact that anti-racism initiatives, sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, and anti-DEI legislation have on the experience of Black and Latina women students at historically predominantly white institutions. The data collected through the study (1) reveals whether racism and sexism impact sense of belonging and academic performance and (2) explains how racial battle fatigue caused by racism and anti-DEI legislation affects the experience of Black and Latina women students on college campuses. The research identifies in what ways racism, sexism, anti-racism initiatives, and anti-DEI legislation impacts the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina women on college and universities campuses. It is guided by critical race and black feminist theory and takes a qualitative approach.

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## Introduction

Colleges and universities in the United States were originally established for the education of white men, and they remained so for centuries (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In the 1830s, colleges and universities began to admit white women but were not integrated until the late 1960s. These changes were made with resistance and created an atmosphere of ostracization and disregard for women and Black students, therefore prompting the founding of the first women's college in 1836 and historically black colleges and universities in 1837 (Wesleyan College History, n.d.; HBCU First, n.d.). Most historically and predominantly white colleges and universities today (1) function under the same structures of oppression they were founded on, (2) continue to be racist, and (3) are expected to serve and educate Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) of all genders (Brunsmas, 2013; Education and title VI, n.d.).

Afro-Latino noted sociologist, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2022) explains in *Historically White Colleges and Universities: The Unbearable Whiteness of (Most) Colleges and Universities in America*, “[f]rom their inception, colleges in the United States were directly tied to white supremacy via the dispossession of Native Americans’ land and the enslavement of Africans” (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 2). Most historically and predominantly white colleges and universities in the United States have a history of racism that continues to shift and shape policies, practices, campus life, and student experience (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). Harvard founded in 1636, William and Mary founded in 1693, Yale founded in 1701, and Codrington founded in 1746, the first colleges in the British American colonies, were weapons for the conquest of Indigenous peoples and beneficiaries of slavery (Wilder, 2013). Bonilla-Silva continues: “[s]lave traders and plantation owners made endowments of stolen land and enslaved Blacks to build these colleges so they could become the colleges’ trustees” (Bonilla-Silva, p. 3). White students at these institutions also brought with them the Black people they had enslaved to help with their daily

tasks (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). Therefore, the first experiences Black people had at colleges and universities in the United States were to build campuses and serve the people who claimed them as property (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). This history continues to impact the experiences of Black and Brown students on college campuses because the foundation of white supremacy continues to disenfranchise them (Adams, 2022). The violence and discrimination Black people endured through slavery and the era of Jim Crow stained U.S. institutions and perpetuated structural racism and systemic oppression, which remains an obstacle for BIPOC families and students (Adams, 2022).

Structural racism maintains social, economic, and political disparities, enabling discrimination (Bell and Funk, 2022). For example, discriminatory hiring and housing practices create economic disparities that subject BIPOC students to underfunded and under-resourced schools (Bell and Funk, 2022). Tracking and disciplinary systems target BIPOC students, contributing to the racial achievement gap and the school-to-prison pipeline, which limits access to higher education and social mobility (Lewis, 2015). This form of discrimination is cyclical; it reproduces social class by restricting the educational opportunities of BIPOC communities and limiting job opportunities (Bell and Funk, 2022). The limitation on job opportunities restricts the possibility of relocation for better opportunities. For BIPOC families with children, this social and economic reproduction impacts entire generations (Carter, 2018).

We see the disparities through what has become an everyday normal. Social reproduction maintained by the systems of oppression is a conduit for the racial discrimination that led to George Floyd's murder (Carter, 2018). George Floyd throughout his lifetime was impacted by the social, economic, and political disparities maintained by structural racism (Olorunnipa, 2024). The history of violence and dehumanization of the BIPOC community in the United

States manifested through his murder; it made more evident that white supremacy and racism are embedded and thriving within U.S. institutions (i.e, racialized poverty, academic achievement gap, the school-to-prison pipeline, police brutality, mass-incarceration, etc.). The blatant disrespect and disregard for Black lives reinforce white supremacy and raise doubts about equity, belonging, and inclusion throughout U.S. institutions (Adams, 2022).

In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, Black Lives Matter protests called for a reckoning to confront structural racism and systemic oppression. As a result of the movement, many colleges and universities across the country committed to anti-racism initiatives (Wesley, 2021). Those initiatives include changes or actions in mission and goal development, resource investment, hiring and recruitment, education or training, data assessment, pedagogy, public statutes and buildings, and campus police reform (Wesley, 2021). However, racism at historically and predominantly white colleges and universities is also implicit, which poses challenges. Implicit, or averse, racism in higher education also negatively impacts the experience of BIPOC students (Sue, 2007).

Derald Wing Sue, in *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice* states, "the invisible nature of acts of aversive racism prevents perpetrators from realizing and confronting (a) their complicity in creating psychological dilemmas for minorities and (b) their role in creating disparities in employment, health care, and education" (Sue, p. 272). To become anti-racist, colleges and universities need to confront both explicit and implicit forms of racism on their campus and within their policies and practices, but this requires an in-depth interrogation of racist history, policy, practice, and interaction (Wesley, 2021). It also requires admitting that the institution has an anti-black legacy of some sort, which can be challenging to acknowledge in the capacity that is needed to become anti-racist. To move forward, the past must

be confronted, which is more than what most colleges and universities are doing by setting new missions or institutional goals and implementing practice and policy changes (Wesley, 2021). Most colleges and universities are not acknowledging their history but moving ahead with plans of equity and inclusion (Wesley, 2021). Other colleges and universities and legislators are vehemently trying to halt any agendas of equity and inclusion.

Although the Black Lives Matter protests sparked an anti-racism movement, what persisted was the attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across higher education to further disenfranchise BIPOC students (Landry-Thomas, 2024). Since George Floyd's murder, Affirmative Action has been restricted by the Supreme Court, and 132 anti-DEI bills in 29 states have been introduced, 19 have final legislative approval ("Students for", 2023; Lu et al., 2025). The Supreme Court decision in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2023), reversed 45 years of legal precedence, which prompted the consideration of race in college and university admissions. Affirmative Action was a system that combated the consequences of structural racism and provided BIPOC students with access to higher education. The anti-DEI legislations aim to further reinforce institutional racism by inadvertently barring BIPOC students from the resources that mitigate discrimination and systemic oppression to provide a sense of belonging at historically and predominantly white institutions. The Chronicle of Higher Education describes the legislation proposed in Kentucky and Ohio: Senate Bill 6, House Bill 9, Senate Bill 9, Senate Bill 165, House Bill 4, House Bill 33, Senate Bill 83/House Bill 151, House Bill 394, Senate Bill 1/House Bill 6; these legislations aim to impose restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, ban DEI training and missions/statements, and close DEI offices (Lu et al., 2025). As of now, only two of these legislation have been signed into law: House Bill 4 and Senate Bill 1/House Bill 6 (Lu et al.,

2025). In Kentucky, House Bill 4, prohibits DEI initiatives, offices, personnel, training, statements and race conscious admissions/hiring. Senate Bill 1/House Bill 6, in Ohio, bans DEI statements, training and offices.

Although most of the proposed anti-DEI legislation introduced were not enacted—they were tabled, vetoed or failed to pass because DEI related proposals were altered or removed—the resistance to equity-focused agendas alone is enough to shift the experiences of students on college campuses (Lu et al., 2025). Additionally, the enacted changes alters the campus and therefore, the student experience by increasing racial disparities (McKeever, 2024). Students are then confronted by racial battle fatigue. This is the social, mental, and physical stress that occurs as a result of experiencing the discrimination and disparities encountered due to being a part of a racially oppressed group (Minnesota State University Mankato, n.d.). It's exhausting to continually have to defend your being, prove that you belong and, therefore, should receive the same privileges as white students; the counseling center at Minnesota State University Mankato says, “[a]ttempting to cope with these persistent hostile, violent, demeaning, dismissive, and toxic race-based stressors completely depletes one’s physical, emotional, and mental energy”. These stressors result in anxiety, depression, low motivation, social isolation, sleep disturbance, and more; all of these can have a detrimental impact on a student’s sense of belonging and overall college experience (University of Colorado Boulder, 2024).

Structural racism, the patriarchy, and attacks on DEI and women’s rights (i.e., the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*) lead BIPOC women to be amongst the most oppressed (Coen, 2022). As higher education can be used as an avenue to fight racial and gender injustices, I am interested in studying how racial battle fatigue caused by racism and anti-DEI legislation impacts the experience of Black and Latina women students on college campuses. In what ways have

racism, sexism, anti-racism initiatives, and anti-DEI legislation impacted the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina women-identifying students at predominantly white institutions? Through this research, I'll interrogate racism as it intersects with the patriarchy (i.e., sexism) and underscore the overlooked experiences, therefore marginalization, of Black and Latina women in movements for racial justice. The analysis and framing of this research are predominantly informed by the critical race theoretical lens interest convergence and Black feminist theory's intersectionality (Bell, 1996; Crenshaw, 1996).

## Literature Review

For decades, Scholars have examined the experience of Black and Latina women-identifying students in higher education through racial and gender disparities. Much of this research has highlighted the structural challenges that impact students' sense of belonging and academic performance. However, despite the interest to improve racial disparities after the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests and the subsequent political attack on diversity, equity and inclusion there is a gap in the research: how the shifting institutional and political priorities—movement towards equity and then the curtailing of equity driven initiatives—uniquely impact Black and Latina students. My research addresses this gap by investigating how racism, sexism, anti-racism initiatives and anti-DEI legislation impacts the experience of Black and Latina students at predominantly white colleges and universities.

Douglas S. Massey and LiErin Probasco (2013) in *Divergent Streams: Race-Gender Achievement Gaps at Selective Colleges and Universities - PMC*, highlight the racial and gender disparities in academic performance. Through their research, they show that Black men and women and Hispanic men get significantly lower grades than other race and gender groups. This is often related to a hostile racial climate, family stress, and stereotype threat. Although this

study highlights the systemic inequalities amongst BIPOC students, it does not highlight how these dynamics affect Black and Latina student experiences at predominantly white campuses post the murder of George Floyd, anti-racism movement and anti-DEI legislations.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1996) in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* introduces the concept of intersectionality and critiques the way anti-racism frameworks marginalize women of color by overlooking gender disparities. This resonates and influences the purpose of my study by laying the theoretical groundwork and highlighting the need to interrogate intersectionality through the experiences of Black and Latina women navigating racism and sexism amidst anti-racism movements and the attack on DEI.

Scholars have recently examined the possible effects of anti-DEI legislation on Black women. Lee et al. (2024) in *Gender and Racial Disparities in College Admissions and Computing Programs: The Future of Black Women in the Face of Widespread Anti-DEI Legislation* argues that the underrepresentation of Black women in computing programs is not an institutional admissions problem but a culture problem of hostility toward their inclusion. Lewis (2024) in *Exploring Black Women's Initiative Programs at Community Colleges: Potential Possibilities for Institutional Support* discusses how anti-DEIJ legislation and institutional programming influence Black women's experience and sense of belonging on college campuses to combat the historical and continued oversight of Black women. These studies center Black women's experience but are limited to specific fields or programs which leaves questions about overall academic performance and experience.

Since the Black Lives Matter protests after George Floyd's murder, Scholars have conducted a variety of research studies about the college/university commitments to anti-racism

initiatives. However, the question about how the efforts impact Black and Latina experiences on campus remains. Casellas Connors and McCoy (2022) in *Performing Anti-racism: Universities Respond to Anti-Black Violence* reveal how institutions use statements to construct a history of advancing racial equity, codify institutional mission and values, and evoke calls to action. Bell (2021) in *Becoming an Anti-Racist Institution: The Challenges Facing Higher Education* discusses how the bureaucratic governance structure of higher education can impede the progress of anti-racism initiatives proposed after the protests from the murder of George Floyd. Both of these studies highlight the performativity of institutional DEI commitments but overlook how it affects and/or further marginalizes Black and Latina students.

Most recently, in response to the attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion, scholars have begun analyzing the impact of anti-DEI legislation. Russell-Brown (2023) in *The Multitudinous Racial Harms Caused by Florida's Anti-DEI and 'Stop WOKE' Laws* explains the negative impact of anti-DEI legislation on universities in Florida to show the threat these laws pose to historical and contemporary knowledge of race. Landry-Thomas (2024) in *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Era of Hostility: A Plea for Action and a Roadmap for Moving Forward* highlights the shift from the anti-racism initiatives after the murder of George Floyd to the anti-DEI movement directed at institutions of higher education. McKeever (2024) in *Students for Fair Admissions: Some Background and Possible Ramifications* explains that anti-DEI legislation will increase racial disparities and erase the progress that has mitigated them until now. These studies analyze the impact of anti-DEI legislation but do not fully explore their emotional and academic effects on Black and Latina women students.

This body of literature demonstrates how racial and gender inequities negatively impact BIPOC students but they do not interrogate how they intersect to affect Black and Latina

students amidst the wave of anti-DEI legislations and the curtailing of women's rights. By focusing on racial battle fatigue and its effect on the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina students this study moves beyond institutional impact and lived experience. It examines the impact and effectiveness of anti-racism initiatives and the erosion of diversity, equity and inclusion.

### Methods/Methodology

This research explores the impact that anti-racism initiatives, sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, and anti-DEI legislation have on the experience of Black and Latina women on college campuses. The data collected through the study (1) reveals whether racism and sexism are impacting a sense of belonging and academic performance and (2) explains how racial battle fatigue caused by racism and anti-DEI legislation affects the experience of Black and Latina women students on college campuses. The research identifies in what ways racism, sexism, anti-racism initiatives, and anti-DEI legislation impact the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina women at predominantly white institutions. It is guided by critical race and Black feminist theory and takes a qualitative approach: open-ended qualitative interviews and historical-context analysis. A qualitative approach is important because drawing influence from critical race and Black feminist theory, this study aims to center the voices and experiences of Black and Latina women; the theoretical frameworks establish a lens for analyzing lived experiences and the nuanced impact of changes in policy and practice.

### *Interviews*

Before interviews were conducted, information was gathered about each college and university's acknowledgement and action during the George Floyd Black Lives Matter protests,

anti-racism initiative commitments, and diversity, equity, and inclusion mission and goals. This information was gathered through news articles, college and university public statements, and websites. The information gathered was not used to inform or shape the questions or conversation, only to provide context about the college or university's anti-racism and DEI efforts and, therefore, be able to understand the interview participant's experience and relationship to the institution.

The structure of the interviews was guided by critical race and Black feminist theory's emphasis on the experiential knowledge of marginalized peoples and centered on the voice and experience of participants. Interviews were conducted with Black and Latina women students who attend(ed) U.S. Midwest College, U.S. Midwest University, or U.S. Northeast College. Each participant was recruited for the study through communications on LinkedIn. Demographic information was collected at the beginning of each interview to confirm eligibility, and responses to all questions were transcribed for data collection and analysis. There were two participants from each college/university (i.e 6 interviews total) to gauge different perspectives and experiences at each college/university. Given that the study aims to understand the collective experience of Black and Latina women students at historically predominantly white colleges and universities, it was important to understand various experiences across institutions with different anti-racism and DEI commitments, responses, and actions.

### *Data Collection*

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy. After all the interviews were complete, participant responses were compiled and analyzed for both similarities and differences. To examine the results, survey-style questions were asked to participants and used to generate visual graphs that helped identify key trends. Additionally, the responses to the

open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively to provide deeper insight and context. This process identified (1) whether colleges and universities are effectively addressing racial and gender disparities and (2) the experience, sense of belonging, and academic performance of Black and Latina women students on campus. The open-ended and survey-style questions can be found in the Appendix.

### *Sociopolitical Context*

To understand the results of this study it is important to understand the socio-political context from 2020 to 2025, present day. The murder George Floyd initiated the Black Lives Matter protests that led colleges and universities to commit to anti-racism initiatives (Wesley, 2021). At the forefront of the attention and media coverage for this instance was the COVID pandemic which shut down the country in March 2020 (Coronavirus Timeline, 2024). When George Floyd was murdered in May 2020 people were entrenched by the news and social media, therefore this tragedy and the protests took center stage (Leading the Way, n.d.). Enrollment and profit at institutions plummeted during COVID and to be labeled a ‘racist’ institution could have caused further damages therefore, colleges and universities complied, either performatively or with the intent to create sustainable change (College Enrollment, n.d.; Wesley, 2021; Elias, 2023; Bilge, 2020). After the pandemic other matters came into focus and efforts have since been divided. In 2022, Roe v. Wade was overturned and Affirmative Action was challenged (Coen-Sanchez et al, 2022; Students for Fair Admissions, 2023). Anti-DEI legislations started to be introduced in 2023 (Lu et al, 2025). Many colleges and universities have since been targeted and sued for their DEI initiatives, some of those initiatives having been developed during the anti-racism movement (Kim, 2025). The Israel-Palestine war and genocide came into spotlight in October 2023, the protests as of result have been the source of many I.C.E deportations in 2024

and 2025 (Sharp, 2024; Selig, 2025). The presidential campaign and election also shifted perspectives and priorities, as the 2024-2028 administration has committed to mass-deportation and ending diversity, equity and inclusion (The United States Government, 2025a; The United States Government, 2025b).

### *Limitations*

The methods and results of this study are a depiction of the socio-political unrest described (i.e. rollback for Roe v. Wade and Affirmative Action, anti-DEI legislation, the Israeli and Palestinian war/genocide, lawsuits against colleges and universities over DEI, deportation of international students by I.C.E., presidential election). A limitation of this study was the limited number of participants. Recruitment for the study faced challenges for reasons that could be related to concerns for personal emotional safety, legal repercussions, social and political retaliation. This was relevant for participants who feared deportation, targeting under anti-protest notions, and institutional retaliation for speaking out against university policies and practice. Additionally, anti-DEI legislation posed a challenge for the study as it led to institutions ending and removing DEI information/efforts from their website during the course of this study. This action limited the access to consistent and accurate historical data impacting contextual analysis. The study also required the preservation of anonymity of the institutions and participants—for the same reasons participants were hesitant to be part of the study. This restricted the amount of detail that could be disclosed and therefore, limited the specificity and transparency of the study.

Table 1

*Colleges and University Demographics*

	U.S. Midwest College	U.S. Midwest University	U.S. Northeast College
Does the state the college/university is located in have anti-DEIJ Legislation (proposed and/or approved?)	Yes	Yes	No
Type	Private, Liberal Arts (undergraduate)	Private, Liberal Arts (undergraduate)	Private, Liberal Arts (undergraduate)
Students Enrolled	1,000-1,500	2,000-2,500	1,500-2,000
Female Students	50%-55%	50%-55%	50%-55%
Male Students	45%-50%	45%-50%	45%-50%
Students of Color	20%-30%	20%-30%	20%-30%
White/Caucasian Students	65%-75%	55%-65%	55%-65%
Financial Aid	100% need-based	100% need-based	100% need-based

*Ethical Considerations*

This research prioritizes ethical practices consistent with critical race and Black feminist theory, ensuring that the voices of marginalized students are amplified rather than exploited. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the confidentiality of their responses were maintained. To maintain participants and the institution's confidentiality no identifiable information was written down or recorded. The interview was conducted in a private space to prevent the possibility of other people overhearing the participants' responses. Participants were also asked to change and/or remove their name on Zoom. Participants were audio-recorded for accuracy of the data but the recording was paused if any identifiable information was shared. Once the recording was transcribed and de-identified the recording was deleted. Additionally all

information and data related to this research was stored using a password protected software only accessible by the research team. Special attention was paid to the emotional safety of participants from marginalized backgrounds, each participant was connected to resources as needed. IRB approval was secured before data collection. To ensure trustworthiness of the data and findings. Measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and findings were at the forefront of planning and execution: multiple data sources and participants were used, researcher biases were interrogated and an academic advisor oversaw the execution of the study.

### *Researcher Positionality*

I am a researcher and higher education professional. I received a Double Bachelor of Arts at Hamilton College, a predominantly white institution, in Africana and Hispanic Studies which provided me with the foundation to pursue my studies in the Educational Studies program at Tufts University. My interests involve examining the intersections of race, gender, and class as they relate to power dynamics in academia; to address and resolve structural inequalities that have historically prevented marginalized groups from accessing higher education and, in addition, exclude them from feelings of belongingness within institutions. I am motivated by this work and field of study because of the disparities I experienced and witnessed as a student and staff in higher education. Through my research, I intend to inform anti-racist policies and practices within higher education and contribute to the ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

### Theoretical Frameworks

Critical race theory (CRT) principles, intersectionality, and interest convergence carry the understanding that racism is structural and reproduced through systems of oppression (Crenshaw,

1996; Bell, 1996). In this research, critical race theory allows us to understand how racial battle fatigue, racism, and anti-DEI legislation impact the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina women students on college campuses. CRT also helps to make sense of institutional priorities and effectiveness in creating equitable and inclusive campus environments. Black feminist theory addresses the intersection of racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1996). The experience of marginalized students on college campuses varies with identity (race, gender, etc.), Black feminist and critical race theory add context to the complexities of those experiences and, therefore, help interpret the study's findings. The critical race and Black feminist literature that informs this research project are authored by Sirma Bilge, Derrick Bell, Audre Lorde, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw and are described below.

Sirma Bilge's (2020), *We've Joined the Table but We're Still on the Menu: Clickbaiting Diversity in Today's University* discusses "clickbaiting diversity": the performativity of diversity agendas at colleges and universities. Bilge (2020) argues that corporate interests drive diversity and quotes David Roediger's (2017, n.d.) *Class, Race and Marxism*: it is "neither anti-racist nor redistributive, instead, it seeks to generate surplus value out of diversity or desire for the surplus value produced by diversity". Bilge's (2020) concept of clickbaiting diversity at colleges and universities refers to higher education institutions using the diversity on campus as a tool to raise enrollment and, therefore, generate profit from tuition. Through this concept, colleges and universities use the diverse student body and proposed anti-racism and equity-based initiatives as marketing strategies to attract BIPOC students (Bilge, 2020). They boast the initiatives as signs of a culture of inclusivity and belonging, whether or not they're effective in improving the experience of BIPOC students.

The performativity of equity-based agendas explains why Black and Latina women students have negative experiences on campuses and reveals institutional priorities: the appearance of equity and inclusion for socioeconomic gain (Bilge, 2020 & Elias 2023). When capital and profit are prioritized, the effectiveness of proposed anti-racism and equity-based practices and goals are undermined (Elias, 2023). At the institutions with a superficial commitment to anti-racism and equity, the intention of anti-racism and equity-based initiatives is to attract diverse students and generate profit, not to improve the experience of BIPOC students. For the proposed research project, this context helps to explain why Black and Latina women students have negative or positive experiences with race and gender at their college or university. The results of this research will amplify the voices of Black and Latina women students but also demonstrate the college or university's commitment to anti-racism and equity-based initiatives.

For higher education institutions to become anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive, the interests of the university and BIPOC students must converge (Bell, 1996). Derrick Bell in *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma* (1996) explains this theory as interest convergence: for liberation or equity, the interest of the subordinate group must meet the interests of the dominant group and not threaten hierarchical power. Through the concept of interest convergence, the interests of the college or university and Black and Latina women students need to align and not jeopardize the university's standing or profit (Bell, 1996). However, anti-DEI legislation poses an obstacle to the interests—equity and inclusion—of BIPOC students. The anti-DEI legislation requires some colleges and universities to disband anti-racism and equity-based initiatives; otherwise, federal funding could be suspended, or they could be subject to lawsuits. Some of the Universities under investigation for alleged race-exclusionary practices are: Duke University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University

(Office for Civil Rights, 2025). This divergence in interest can negatively impact the experience of Black and Latina students. Anti-DEI legislation forces colleges and universities to neglect BIPOC student needs, reinforces systems of oppression, and can trigger racial battle fatigue. Through this research, the positive or negative experiences Black and Latina students have on college campuses will reveal whether the interests of the institution and BIPOC students are in alignment, or if anti-DEI legislation has succeeded in further marginalizing BIPOC students, specifically Black and Latina women-identifying students.

Furthermore, this research aims to amplify the experiences of Black and Latina women students by identifying the shortcomings or successes of college and university anti-racism and equity-based initiatives and propose changes or highlight the reasoning for their effectiveness in creating an inclusive and equitable campus environment. Audre Lorde (1984), Patricia Williams (1987), and Kimberle Crenshaw's (1996) theory of deconstructing and reimagining systems of oppression for social justice provides guidance to determine the needed changes or identify the process of creating an inclusive and equitable institution. In *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1984), Audre Lorde asserts that systems of oppression cannot be deconstructed with the same methods or tools used to initiate them: “[t]hey may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (Lorde, p. 112). Patricia Williams (1987) in *Alchemical Notes: Reconstructing Ideals with Deconstructed Rights* states that social justice requires reimagining current frameworks for equity and inclusivity. Kimberle Crenshaw (1996), in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, says: “...the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction” (Crenshaw, p. 357). Higher education institutions have the

power to choose and promote equity, racial justice, and inclusion. However, intersectional marginalization must be considered, and practices and policies need to be deconstructed and reimaged. Black and Latina students' experience on college campuses depends on whether colleges and universities are willing and able to deconstruct and reimagine the racist and misogynist policies and practices on their campuses. Policies and practices must be reconstructed to include an intersectional perspective and adequately mitigate inequities and discrimination.

With guidance from this literature, the results of this research project (1) highlight the experiences of Black and Latina women students on college and university campuses, (2) reveal the interests and priorities of colleges and universities, (3) identify the shortcoming or success of college and university anti-racism and equity-based initiatives and (4) explain how colleges and university become anti-racist, equitable and inclusive.

## Results

After the murder of George Floyd and during the Black Lives Matter protest, each college and university highlighted in this study committed to anti-racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion action plans, mission statements, and goals. Each college and university has also faced state and/or federal scrutiny through anti-DEI proposed/enacted legislation.

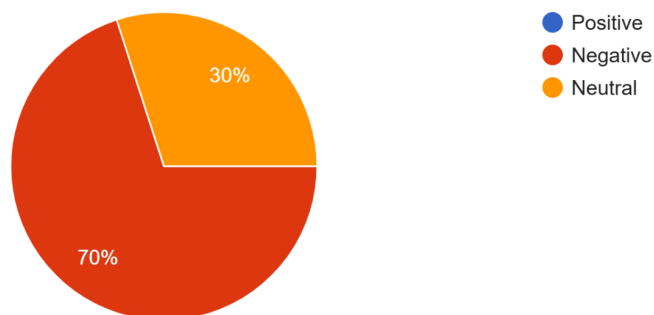
### *U.S. Midwest College*

U.S. Midwest College, in public statements, pledged its commitment to the community and DEI values. The College emphasized their intent to mitigate power imbalances, bias, and systems of oppression. They also provided a list of anti-racism and social justice educational resources. After the murder of George Floyd, faculty, staff, and members of the administration released a statement of solidarity that also pledged commitment to racial equity and justice.

Following the statement of solidarity, the same faculty, staff, and members of the administration established a fund to support anti-racism initiatives. It is also important to note that U.S. Midwest College is located in a state that has had multiple proposed anti-DEI legislations. Participants explained that racism, sexism, and anti-DEI policies harm students' sense of belonging and academic performance, leading to emotional fatigue and stress. More specifically, participants expressed feelings of isolation due to being the only person of color in various spaces on-campus, instances of tokenism and racial hostility. They also highlighted the need to enhance resources to address racial battle fatigue and improve anti-racism initiatives, which have been ineffective in improving campus climate for Black and Latina women students. Despite anti-racism efforts the college culture remains unchanged and Black and Latina students have a negative sense of belonging.

Figure 1

*The Negative Experience of Black and Latina Students at U.S. Midwest College*



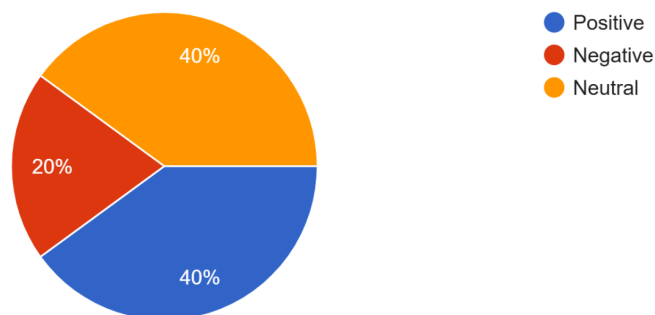
Note. This data is a compilation of all the answers U.S. Midwest College participants gave the survey-style questions. The answers were coded to signal either a negative or positive experience.

### *U.S. Midwest University*

After the murder of George Floyd, U.S. Midwest University condemned structural racism and announced the creation of an anti-racism task force to advance U.S. Midwest University's goal of racial equity. The University developed a plan to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts throughout campus, and it received external recognition. As an institution, they were publicly vocal about their equity mission, goals, and values; however, most of the information about diversity, equity, and inclusion has since been removed from their website. This could be related to the fact that U.S. Midwest University is located in a state that has had multiple proposed/enacted anti-DEI legislations that banned DEI statements and missions. During the interviews, participants shared that racism, sexism, and racial battle fatigue have some effect on their emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and academic performance. Participants also explained that although the institution's anti-racism initiatives have made some progress, further improvements are needed in resources to address the mental toll of these issues for Black and Latina women students.

Figure 2

### *The Experience of Black and Latina Students at U.S. Midwest University*



Note. This data is a compilation of all the answers U.S. Midwest University participants gave the survey-style questions. The answers were coded to signal either a negative or positive experience.

### *U.S. Northeast College*

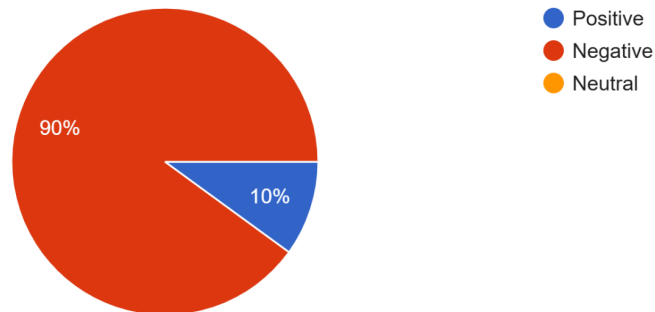
In 2020, U.S. Northeast College condemned racism and inequity through public statements, proposed an individual commitment to racial equity, and distributed commitment cards to their community. As an institution, they publicly committed to racial justice, began to observe Juneteenth as a holiday, and developed action plans (e.g. hosted listening sessions, developed an advisory council, “enhanced” their DEI strategic planning, and re-allocated money for equity and inclusion initiatives). In 2021 and 2022, the advisory council developed racial equity and DEI proposals, and the College assigned staff and faculty to lead implementation. A campus sponsored magazine available to the public was released highlighting BIPOC accomplishments in the community, and a Dean and VP of DEI were appointed.

Amidst the state and federal scrutiny of DEI and legislation proposals/enactment/ and rollbacks, the College has, through public statements, re-emphasized their commitment to honor and support their community. Despite the efforts made by the College, participants expressed the existence of a hostile campus climate and environment. Participants disclosed experiences with explicit racism and no apparent intervention from the College. Racism, sexism, and racial battle fatigue negatively affect students' sense of belonging and academic performance, causing emotional stress. The institution's anti-racism initiatives have been ineffective in addressing these issues, particularly for Black and Latina women students. Overall participants expressed negative experiences with sense of belonging and academic performance due to encounters with racism,

sexism, and anti-DEI legislation. The proposed and implemented anti-racism initiatives at U.S. Northeast College did not improve circumstances for Black and Latina students.

Figure 3

*The Negative Experience of Black and Latina Students at U.S. Northeast College*



Note. This data is a compilation of all the answers U.S. Northeast College participants gave the survey-style questions. The answers were coded to signal either a negative or positive experience.

*Key Takeaways*

Racism, sexism, racial battle fatigue, and anti-DEI policies have a profound negative impact on the sense of belonging and academic performance of Black and Latina women students. These students often face significant emotional fatigue, frustration, and stress due to encounters with racism or microaggressions on campus. The resources available at institutions are insufficient in addressing the mental and emotional toll of racial battle fatigue. There is a clear need for institutions to enhance their support systems to better address this issue. Racial and gender biases further harm Black and Latina women students' sense of belonging and hinder their ability to focus on academic responsibilities. Additionally, the anti-racism initiatives

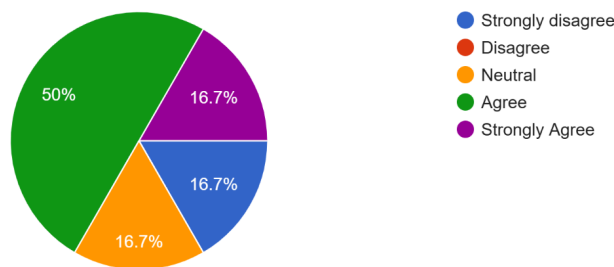
implemented by institutions have largely been ineffective in improving the campus climate or addressing the specific challenges faced by Black and Latina women-identifying students.

Figure 4

*Negative Impact on Sense of Belonging and/or Academic Performance*

Racism, sexism, racial battle fatigue, and/or anti-DEI policies have negatively impacted my sense of belonging and/or academic performance at my institution.

6 responses



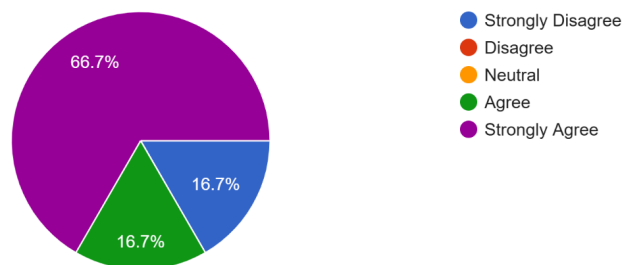
Note. Racism, sexism, racial battle fatigue, and/or anti-DEI policies have mostly a negative impact on the sense of belonging and/or academic performance of Black and Latina women students.

Figure 5

*Experiences of Emotional Fatigue, Frustration, or Stress*

I experience emotional fatigue, frustration, or stress due to encounters with racism or microaggressions on campus

6 responses



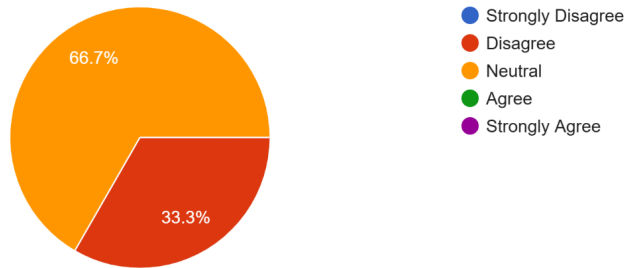
Note. Black and Latina women students significantly experience emotional fatigue, frustration, or stress due to encounters with racism or microaggressions on campus.

Figure 6

*The Availability of Adequate Resources to Support Racial Battle Fatigue*

The institution provides adequate resources (e.g., mental health services, and cultural centers) to address the mental and emotional toll of racial battle fatigue.

6 responses



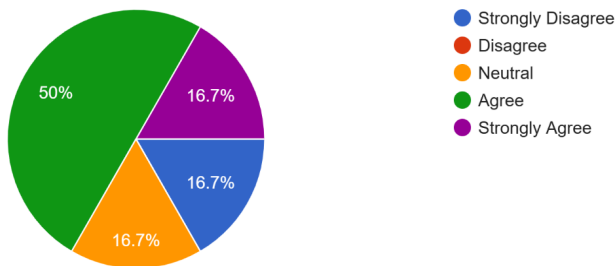
Note. The institutions' resources do not provide significant enough support to address the mental and emotional toll of racial battle fatigue. Institutions could improve their resources to better address the mental and emotional toll of racial battle fatigue.

Figure 7

*The Negative Impact of Racial and Gender Bias on Sense of Belonging/Academic Performance*

Experiences with racial or gender bias negatively impact my sense of belonging and/or ability to focus on my academic responsibilities

6 responses



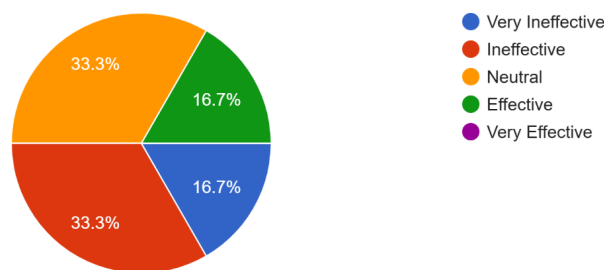
Note. Racial and/or gender bias mostly negatively impact Black and Latina women students' sense of belonging and/or ability to focus on academic responsibilities.

Figure 8

*The Effectiveness of College/University Anti-Racism Initiatives*

How effective do you feel the institution's anti-racist initiatives have been in improving the campus climate and/or addressing the issues that impact Black and Latina women students?

6 responses



Note. Institutions' anti-racism initiatives have been mostly ineffective in improving campus climate and/or addressing the issues that impact Black and Latina women students

Discussion/Conclusion

The results of this study support the literature on the experiences of Black and Latina women students on college campuses, as well as the theoretical frameworks used to understand the participants' experiences at historically predominantly white colleges and universities. The findings align with the research on the negative impact of racism, sexism, and anti-DEI legislation on students' academic performance and emotional/mental well-being. For example, the results align with Massey and Probasco's (2013) findings in *Divergent Streams: Race-Gender Achievement Gaps at Selective Colleges and Universities - PMC*, which highlight how racist climates and microaggressions undermine the academic success of Black and Latina students. Through these results, it is evident that racism and sexism negatively impact a student's sense of

belonging and academic performance. In addition, the experiences of racial battle fatigue, emotional stress and frustration encountered by students in the study align with Kimberle Crenshaw's (1996) *In Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, which discusses how the intersection of race and gender exacerbates the marginalization of women of color.

Furthermore, the results of this study highlight the ineffectiveness of anti-racism and diversity initiatives by demonstrating the gap between institutional commitments and the impact on students' lived experiences. The findings show that the anti-racism initiatives at U.S. Midwest College, U.S. Midwest University and U.S. Northeast College have overall not improved the campus climate for Black and Latina students. Black and Latina students continue to report negative sense of belonging and academic performance due to racism, sexism and anti-DEI legislation. The research by Connors and McCoy in 2020, *Performing Anti-racism: Universities Respond to Anti-black Violence* and Bilge's (2020) assertions in *We've Joined the Table but We're Still on the Menu; Clickbaiting Diversity in Today's University* emphasize how colleges and universities use performative anti-racist and DEI rhetoric but fail to generate substantive change on their campus. Despite making public statements and developing action plans, the institutions in this study have not sufficiently addressed the issues faced by Black and Latina women-identifying students.

The relevance of critical race theory and interest convergence, as described by Derrick Bell (1996) in *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma* is demonstrated by the performativity of the U.S. Northeast College's anti-racism initiatives. U.S. Northeast College was the most public about their anti-racism initiatives but their Black and Latina students had the most negative experience amongst all the participants in this study. This

discrepancy demonstrates that the College prioritizes the socioeconomic gain described by Elias (2023) and not BIPOC students need: “...pursuit of racial equity differs from a focus on anti-racism to facilitate profit-making and from approaches that focus on promoting diversity and inclusion” (Elias, 2023 p. 24). A positive sense of belonging and academic performance could mean that the institution prioritizes the experience of BIPOC students because a strong sense of belonging signals that the institution is committed to centering their experience, identities and wellbeing. On the other hand, a negative sense of belonging and academic performance can be a result of performative DEI and signal that the institution prioritizes profit and capital over the experience of BIPOC students (Bilge, 2020). Public statements and display of DEI policies and practices do not necessarily indicate that BIPOC student experiences are centered. U.S. Northeast College, for example, frequently promoted its DEI initiatives and commitment to anti-racism, but study participants revealed a stark difference between their rhetoric and the experience of Black and Latina students. Despite the College’s public efforts, participants reported some of the most negative experiences on campus including racist incidents and ongoing social segregation. This contradiction shows how institutional branding overlooks the lived experience of students and instead paints a false reality that meets the public's expectations (Wesley, 2021).

Moreover, U.S. Midwest University removed DEI related content from their website—seemingly stepping back from formal DEI initiatives—but had students who reported a slightly better experience compared to the other campuses in the study. Participants shared fewer overtly harmful instances and a more neutral campus climate. This suggests that performative DEI initiatives are not effective and campuses should therefore, prioritize improving student experiences.

Anti-DEI legislation, as described in *The Multitudinous Racial Harms Caused by Florida's Anti-DEI and 'Stop WOKE' Laws* (2023) by Russell-Brown and *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Era of Hostility: A Plea for Action and a Roadmap for Moving Forward* (2024) by Landry-Thomas, has further prevented institutions from prioritizing racial justice and therefore hindered efforts to create equitable and inclusive campus environments. The intersection of state and federal scrutiny with institutional priorities has a detrimental impact on the sense of belonging and well-being of Black and Latina women students and further exacerbates racial and gender disparities.

Although the results of this study significantly align with the literature on the negative impact racism, sexism, and anti-DEI legislation have on the experience of Black and Latina women students at historically predominantly white institutions, it also highlights the limitations of institutional anti-racism initiatives, therefore highlighting the need for a real commitment to racial justice by colleges and universities. However, per interest convergence this will only happen when student needs meet institutional priorities.

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## Appendix

### A. Interview Questions

#### Section 1: Demographic Information

1. **Racial/Ethnic Background** (Select all that apply):
  - Black/African American
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Asian/Asian American
  - White
  - Native American/Indigenous
  - Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Year in School:**
  - First-Year
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
  - Graduated in \_\_\_\_\_
3. **College/University:**
  - U.S. Midwest College
  - U.S. Midwest University
  - U.S. Northeast College
4. **Gender:**
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. **Age:** Are you 18 years or older?
  - Yes
  - No

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#### Section 2: Open-Ended Questions

1. In what ways have racism, sexism, racial battle fatigue or anti-DEI policies impacted your sense of belonging or academic performance on campus?
2. After the murder of George Floyd, colleges and universities committed to anti-racist missions, goals, and agendas. In what ways, if any, have the institution's anti-racist initiatives supported or failed to support your unique experiences as a Black or Latina woman?
3. Do you feel that the campus culture, resources, and leadership adequately acknowledge the unique challenges Black and Latina women face regarding racism, sexism, and mental health (i.e. racial battle fatigue)? Why or why not?
4. What additional steps could the institution take to support Black and Latina women students' academic success and sense of belonging?

5. Please share any other experiences, thoughts, or concerns you have regarding a sense of belonging and academic achievement at your institution.
- 

### Section 3: Follow-Up Questions

For the following sections, answer questions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree/Very Ineffective and 5 = Strongly Agree/Very Effective, to indicate your level of agreement with the statements:

1. Racism, sexism, racial battle fatigue, and/or anti-DEI policies have negatively impacted my sense of belonging and/or academic performance at my institution.
  - a. [1] Strongly Disagree
  - b. [2] Disagree
  - c. [3] Neutral
  - d. [4] Agree
  - e. [5] Strongly Agree
2. I experience emotional fatigue, frustration, or stress due to encounters with racism or microaggressions on campus
  - a. [1] Strongly Disagree
  - b. [2] Disagree
  - c. [3] Neutral
  - d. [4] Agree
  - e. [5] Strongly Agree
3. The institution provides adequate resources (e.g., mental health services, and cultural centers) to address the mental and emotional toll of racial battle fatigue.
  - a. [1] Strongly Disagree
  - b. [2] Disagree
  - c. [3] Neutral
  - d. [4] Agree
  - e. [5] Strongly Agree
4. Experiences with racial or gender bias negatively impact my sense of belonging and/or ability to focus on my academic responsibilities
  - a. [1] Strongly Disagree
  - b. [2] Disagree
  - c. [3] Neutral
  - d. [4] Agree
  - e. [5] Strongly Agree
5. How effective do you feel the institution's anti-racist initiatives have been in improving the campus climate and/or addressing the issues that impact Black and Latina women students?
  - a. [1] Very Ineffective
  - b. [2] Ineffective
  - c. [3] Neutral
  - d. [4] Effective
  - e. [5] Very Effective