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# Black Internationalization for a Post-COVID Era 

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#### Abstract

As many of you have been doing over the last two years, I have been giving a lot of thought to the state of international education as we rebuild and reimagine it. My focus is on rebuilding and reimagining international education for the world we want to live in. I believe that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) offer important lessons on internationalization that have often been overlooked. There is a rich history of international engagement at HBCUs that has been ignored or excluded. Black Internationalism, a term into which I delve deeper in this essay, has been around for a long time; I use this term to guide this essay and to begin to rescue some of that history. The result is an alternative approach to internationalization.


## Keywords:

HBCUs, Black internationalism

## Introduction

As many of you have been doing over the last two years, I have also been giving a lot of thought to the state of international education as we rebuild and reimagine it. My focus is on rebuilding and reimagining international education for the world we want to live in. I believe that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) offer important lessons on internationalization that have often been overlooked and I want to highlight and celebrate the rich history of

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international engagement at HBCUs. Black Internationalism, a term I will delve deeper into later, has been around for a long time; I will use it to guide this essay to rescue some of that history and offer an alternative approach to internationalization.

My process of reimagination began years ago, prior to the arrival of COVID-19, as I continued to learn more about HBCUs and the scholarship around international education and internationalization. Since their creation, HBCUs have served as alternatives to the slow progress of equity and access in education in the United States. Throughout their history, these institutions have provided opportunities for Black people to excel in every field and discipline and their missions center the battle for social justice. It is from this intersection of Black excellence and social justice that I focus my work as the director of the Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center at Howard University, and as a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies at Minority Serving Institutions program at the same. Issues of diversity, equity and inclusion have always been central to any work that I do, but from my seat at Howard University as both administrator and student, I have a unique opportunity to affect change, leveraging the visibility of this storied institution. The focus of my "day job" and the focus of my research is internationalization at HBCUs.

In the spring 2020 volume of this journal, editor Amelia Dietrich, recapped 25 years of research contributions. As the world began to shut down and study abroad as we knew it was poised to shift significantly, she challenged us to "use this time to explore alternatives and seek improvement in the places where progress has been slow" (Dietrich, 2020). Progress towards justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) has been slow in our field of international education. The time has come for us to acknowledge the shortcomings and failures of our current system and to seek alternative frameworks. Dr. Dietrich laid out a challenge. I accept the challenge and submit that the time is now for us to consider the path forward that HBCUs offer us, that which centers justice and equity, and can begin to repair the errors of international education's past. For you to join me on this path, I must take us back to 2020.

## The Year of Perfect Vision

2020 was a notable year for a few reasons. A global health pandemic caused the near complete shutdown of the world in almost all ways. Those of us fortunate to have one, retreated into our homes. For those fortunate enough to be able to work from home, we set up our workspaces and tried to figure out how to separate work life from "life" within the same walls. As we moved inside and stopped driving, we watched the skies clear, water become cleaner, and air become easier to breathe. In the field of international education, we worked feverishly to get our students home safely. We watched and/or experienced job loss. Study abroad moved online and involved no airplanes. We were still.

On February $23^{\text {rd }}$, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was murdered but the world did not hear about it until months later. Then, Breonna Taylor was murdered on March 13, 2020, with the world not taking notice, again, until much later. Then, on May 25th, the pandemic of white supremacy that has plagued our country (and many others) for generations, reared its ugly head once more, when George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, MN, was murdered by a white police officer as other officers and bystanders watched...and recorded. It was hard to watch. It was impossible to deny. This time was different. The world watched as people across the U.S. took to the streets, again, to protest the treatment of Black people by the police. Protests in solidarity poured onto the streets of cities across the globe because police brutality, many learned, was not a phenomenon unique to the United States of America.

It was a perfect storm. White supremacy and racial injustice appeared directly on everyone's screen and there was nowhere to turn, nowhere to hide, nothing to distract us from confronting those two evils because we had nowhere to go and nowhere to be. The pandemic shutdown forced us to reflect on everything. The murder of George Floyd was the proverbial "last straw", and it forced us to confront the injustices faced by Black people daily, in the U.S. and around the world. 2020 was the year that everything came into focus. It was the year that many realized the vast distance between our romanticization of the United States of America as this inclusive and idyllic place, a promoter of diversity and equity, where if you work hard enough you can achieve anything, and where the color of your skin no longer holds you back and what America actually is. We had 20/20 vision in 2020 and were finally able to see the flaws,
deficiencies, and failures of the broken and incomplete experiment that is the United States of America.

In the months following the murder of George Floyd, organizations, institutions, and companies of every ilk began to reflect and consider how they might be perpetuating racial injustice, including many in the international education field. Myriad conversations were started, diversity statements issued, and, in some cases, actions taken to address whatever shortcomings were discovered in their reflections. Now, more than two years on, the fervor around JEDI issues has calmed and some changes have taken place, but it is critically important that the sense of urgency remains and continues to guide the practice of international education.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) also stopped to reflect on what was happening around them, but not in the same ways. HBCUs reflected on the social justice work they have always been doing and on what more needs to be done. HBCUs organized. Students, faculty, and staff protested...again. These are the moments HBCUs were built for. So, I pose the question, to address issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion in international education, in what other ways can we think about internationalization as we rebuild?

Since the pandemic and a racial justice movement provoked the shift, then we as educators must exploit this moment to dismantle the antiquated systems holding us back. HBCUs can no longer be invisible partners but instead, their long, rich histories can offer us an alternative framework, a framework that I am building through my research and one that I think will offer us a more just, more equitable internationalization practice.

## HBCUS and Social Justice

HBCUs represent a unique type of institution of higher learning in the United States. Officially receiving designation by the U.S. government in the Higher Education Act of 1965 that declared HBCUs to be "...any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency..." (Higher Education Act, 1965). Black institutions that eventually became HBCUs were born well before that, however,
out of a determination among African Americans to be educated. Anderson's (1988) seminal piece, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935, traces the establishment of what would eventually become HBCUs, to the insistence by the formerly enslaved to be educated. Anderson (1988, p. 5) writes: "Virtually every account by historians... stresses the ex-slaves' demand for universal schooling." An understanding of the depth of the commitment to education in the Black community before and after the Civil War, when it was forbidden, is fundamental to understanding the establishment and evolution of HBCUs as arbiters of social justice. Through their commitment to social mobility and empowerment, Black people increased the size and expanded the number of these institutions over the years, diversifying the curricula and developing these institutions into exceptional ones that served and continue to serve those least well served.

As institutions that were founded out of an ongoing battle for social justice, HBCUs have social justice woven into their very fabric. As the current dean of the Howard University School of Social Work states, "... for HBCUs, the emphasis of the teaching, research, and practice is grounded in the philosophy of "racial uplift" (Crewe, 2017, p. 361). Racial uplift is an important concept that was common in the late 19th and early $20^{\text {th }}$ century. It refers to the idea that educated Blacks are responsible for the welfare of the majority of the race (Gaines, n.d.). The historical legacy of HBCUs were as sites of resistance, empowerment, and social uplift. (Albritton, 2012). HBCUs not only provided a quality education to Black students, but they also "preserve the richness of Black history and culture" (Albritton, 2012).

HBCUs and the Black community are one in the same: "...stakeholders and students who sojourn through the halls of HBCUs are not just connected to and a reflection of the peoples, cultures, and institutions in Black communities, they make up the very fabric of [the external] Black communities (Davidson, 2001). Douglas (2012, p. 385) states that "organizational culture at HCBUs... is a microcosm of the larger Black community and Western culture in general" and that what makes HBCUs unique is "their mission of social uplift for Black people". This mission of social uplift, Douglas continues, "demand[s] that stakeholders of HBCUs are intentional about resisting the negative effects of Western culture, policy, and history that have consistently conspired against people of color in this nation" (p. 385). Many students intentionally choose to
attend HBCUs to immerse themselves in a community that reflects their culture. So, when students choose to attend HBCUs and then to participate in a study abroad program not designed and implemented by their institution, they effectively leave the environment they specifically sought and must navigate a new country, possibly a new language, and they must adapt to the norms and traditions of study abroad organizations and host country institutions that resemble those of traditionally white institutions (TWIs), which are modeled off of European universities. These are important points to keep in mind as we rebuild for greater inclusion in study abroad.

## HBCUs and Internationalization

Increasingly, higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United States have identified internationalization as a strategic priority, and not just a desirable bonus (Hudzik \& Stohl, 2012). Internationalization is defined by Knight (2004) as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education." Recently, scholars like Sharon Stein (2017), Tatiana Suspitsyna (2021), and Kumari Beck (2021) have begun to dissect, closely examine, and critique higher education internationalization, leading Stein to establish the Critical Internationalization Studies Network in 2018. According to Stein, the network seeks to reimagine "dominant patterns of relationship, representation and resource distribution in the internationalization of education." Articles from critical internationalization scholars regularly ask us to consider the power dynamics between scholars from the Minority World, which refers to economically privileged countries, vs scholars from the Majority World, which refers to the largest land mass and the areas in which most of the world's population, who are mostly Black and Brown, are located (Alam, 2008). The power dynamics between institutions from the Minority world and the Majority world regarding international partnerships should also be considered. The imbalance is due in large part to vestiges of colonialism and perpetuation of settler colonialism.

The critical internationalization scholars also challenge us to further explore the neo-liberal agendas that have become the norm in the higher education space in the U.S. and beyond. The rationale for current university approaches prioritizing an entrepreneurial nature that elevates institutional financial gain (Glass \& Lee, 2018) and increases prestige seeking behaviors
(Knight, 2004) falls short of centering the university as an engine for global social justice, and instead induces a consumer driven student behavior (Bolen, 2003) for individual wealth creation (Stein, 2017). In class with my fellow PhD students, we regularly discussed the ways in which HBCUs have, to some extent, adopted some neo-liberal agenda items. However, the history and missions of HBCUs require that social justice and service remain the centerpiece of an HBCU education.

As I read and process this literature, it is always through the lens of the history and legacy of HBCUs, and I struggle to successfully apply critiques of Minority World institutions to HBCUs as institutions that operate within the Minority World. While HBCUs exist in the Minority World and in some cases were created and supported by the Minority World, they belong in and to the Majority world. Or as international education scholar Dr. Keshia Abraham has declared, they represent the "Vast Majority." So, while the frameworks designed to guide internationalization processes are rooted in the norms and traditions of TWIs, the critiques of these frameworks also assume that all institutions in the United States of America are TWIs. There has been little nuance in the literature that acknowledges the unique histories of HBCUs or other minority serving institutions. This omission robs the international education field of the rich history of these institutions and the lessons that their international engagement can provide today.

There is a dearth of literature on HBCUs generally, but even more so regarding HBCUs and internationalization. In 2012, Dr. Anthony Pinder, currently the Vice President for International Programs and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Emerson College, completed his doctoral dissertation Internationalizing the Black College: An Investigation of the Stage of Readiness of Private Black Colleges as it Relates to Select Benchmarks for Comprehensive Internationalization. Pinder utilized the American Council on Education's (ACE) Model for Comprehensive Internationalization to explore the state of readiness of select private HBCUs. He concluded that private HBCUs were not adequately engaging in the internationalization process and would need to strengthen their efforts to remain relevant in the higher education landscape. (Pinder, 2012).

In 2017, Dr. Dafina Diabate, formerly the Senior International Officer at Lincoln University, an HBCU in Pennsylvania, and guest editor for this edition of Frontiers, completed her dissertation Internationalization on HBCU Campuses
and the Role of Presidential Leadership. Her research focused on how senior leadership at HBCUs engage in the internationalization process. She conducted interviews with leaders at three HBCUs to explore their commitment to internationalization. Her research revealed that the senior leaders she interviewed were committed to racial uplift and that it was an important element in their international engagement activities (Diabate, 2017). These two dissertations provide the most recent and in-depth examination of internationalization at HBCUs available. These two shining examples of the value of HBCUs to this conversation are rare in a sea of studies that implicitly or explicitly center whiteness through their research design and citations.

ACE released an updated model for comprehensive internationalization in 2020 which, like many organizations, now includes a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens. The ACE website states that the model was developed "based on scholarship, work with a variety of institutional types in and outside the United States, and collaboration with colleges and universities through the ACE Internationalization Laboratory" (ACE, 2022). Upon review of the past participants in the ACE Internationalization Laboratory, Southern University was the first HBCU to participate and that was in the 12th cohort of the Lab in 2014. In total, since 2003 when they launched the Lab, only five HBCUs have participated. The current cost for an institution to participate in the Lab is $\$ 40,000$, payable over two years.

If ACE is cost prohibitive and simply re-heating a new take on the same old recipe, then I further Pinder's call. It is not time for us, HBCUs, to step in but to call out, reflect, re-educate, and lead a new critical vision for the future. And for that, I turn to Black Internationalism.

## Black Internationalism

Black Internationalism has a long history of providing a framework to untangle us from the holds of white supremacy by aligning African-descended people into a collective global political, intellectual, and artistic movement to envision a new world (Blain \& Gill, 2019). Black Internationalism can also be defined as a field of study, particularly within the field of international relations. Both interpretations are important to understand the ways in which HBCUs have engaged with the world.

Black Internationalism explores the history of Black people's connection across and throughout the African Diaspora and among other marginalized groups in the world. Relationships with other marginalized peoples of the world are key. The history of European colonialism and imperialism coupled with the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent racism and discrimination against Black people in the Americas, compelled Black people in the U.S. and in colonized places globally, to act collectively towards liberation and justice.

HBCUs play a vital role infacilitating connections between African liberation and Black power through their financial, cultural, and architectural resources and their function in the African American community as builders of group consciousness (Hayes, 2007). "Former participants in the Black Panther Party, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), American Committee on Africa (ACOA) and Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), explained how they learned about African independence movements at HBCUs"; "information influenced the ideas and tactics of their organizations (Hayes, 2007, p. 225). "HBCUs create physical and discursive environments which discredit dominant narratives of Black inferiority, and instead deploy curriculum and practices that emphasize the heritage of communities of African descent and their successful struggles against racism" (Hayes, 2007, p. 225). These institutions fostered networks that facilitate transnational interactions between social movements (Hayes, 2007). Global connections at HBCUs play an important role in promoting a sense of pride among people of African descent despite the racism and discrimination directed at them.

The movements that HBCU students were learning about and active in, were also present in the minds of their professors at HBCUs. Black intellectuals like Rayford Logan, W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph J. Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, Alain Locke, and Merz Tate, were essential to international understanding, understanding US foreign policy, decolonization, and anti-imperialism in the early-mid 20th century (Vitalis, 2015) and these conversations have re-emerged in the global learning process. Precisely because of their vocal advocacy for equality, liberation and an end to colonization and imperialism, they were purposely excluded from foreign policy spaces. The intellectuals, all affiliated with Howard University at some point in their careers and overlapping with each other for most of that time, make up what Vitalis calls the "Howard University School of International Relations Theory (Vitalis, 2015)." While the story of these intellectuals is rarely mentioned in the conversation on
international education, their scholarship and their global engagement certainly qualify and should be a part of the narrative on HBCUs and international education. Decolonization and anti-imperialism were and are cornerstones of Black internationalism and it blossomed at HBUCs. As we reimagine internationalization it will be important to consider how these reemerging conversations are acknowledged and addressed and whose voices are being marginalized.

HBCUs played a critical role in decolonizing the Atlantic world. Institutions like Howard and Lincoln University engaged the race revolution around the Atlantic world influenced by decolonization abroad and the civil rights struggle at home (Parker, 2009). Studies of the impact abroad of U.S.-based Black higher education thus enrich the literature on race as an intersection of domestic and foreign affairs, exploring an "American" institution that was simultaneously a consequential global one (Parker, 2009, p. 270). Students from Africa and the Caribbean in particular, enrolled and attended HBCUs where they were influenced by great thinkers like Alain Locke, Ralph Bunche, William Hansberry, and Kelly Miller among many others (Parker, 2009). At the suggestion of Eric Williams, history professor at Howard University and eventual Premier of Trinidad and Tobago, earned and honorary degrees were given to nationalist leaders from the developing world including Norman Manley of Jamaica, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Tom Mboya of Kenya, and Vijaya Pandit and Jawaharlal Nehru both of India and other HBCUs followed suit (Parker, 2009). The interactions between and among US and international scholars, students and activists were made possible in large part, because of HBCUs and the missions and philosophies of HBCUs to educate for liberation, equality, and justice for people of African descent. Today, neo-colonial forces emerge via financial and power dynamics, but these connections and networks, born years ago, continue to exist and should be valued assets as we rethink internationalization.

The enrollment at Howard University in the middle of the $20^{\text {th }}$ century provides one example of international student enrollment. By 1960, 13\% of enrolled students at Howard University were international students, the highest percentage of any institution in the U.S. (Parker, 2009). By the mid 1960's their enrollment had grown to $26 \%$ of the student body (Parker, 2009). Today, high international student enrollment is a data point that is shared and celebrated widely by many higher education institutions, but as access to more institutions
in the U.S. has increased, international student populations at HBCUs has decreased. The fact that Howard, an HBCU, was the top institution for international students in the 50's and 60's is not commonly known and is rarely mentionedin current internationalization conversations. At the time, international students from the developing world were largely not permitted to attend TWIs so, it is understandable that an HBCU could be the top school for international students. But international students were drawn to HBCUs not only because they were not permitted to attend most other schools, but also because of the solidarity HBCUs expressed with many of them and their countries' independence struggle (Poloma \& Szelenyi, 2018).

Because Black internationalism is concerned with marginalized and persecuted people globally, it should be acknowledged that at a time when many institutions refused to receive Jewish people, HBCUs welcomed Jewish refugeescholars fleeing Nazi persecution. Between 1939 -1945, eight Jewish refugee scholars were faculty members at Howard University (Muse, 2002). Many other scholars were received at Lincoln, Fisk, Xavier, and North Carolina Central, among others, and they actively worked alongside Black faculty and students to oppose Jim Crow laws (Jewell, 2002). The legacy of HBCUs is inclusion. Over time, HBCUs have figured out how to operate across race, religion, and dominant practice and have much to offer as we reimagine internationalization postCOVID.

Black internationalism has been an integral aspect of the struggle for Black equality and thus "to restrict Black political participation to the confines of the American borders limits an understanding of the global initiatives, linkages, and accomplishments of African American actors" (Clemons \& Jones, 1999, p. 178). The Black Panther Party was significantly influenced by global social movements. Fanon's Wretched of the Earth was of significant relevance for Huey Newton and other Panther leaders, as they believed that the experience of Black people in America paralleled that of colonialized people under the traditional colonialism. For them, the Black community in America was an internal colony (Clemons \& Jones, 1999). And, if the experience of Black people could be considered parallel to that of colonized people, then HBCUs could be considered similarly marginalized institutions and therefore uniquely dissimilar to traditionally White institutions.

## Where Do We Go Next?

For years, the international education field has had a diversity problem. There are not enough students of color studying abroad (IIE, 2021). There is not enough diversity among university faculty and staff involved in the internationalization process (Lopez-McGee, 2022). Attempts have been made to connect with HBCUs and other majority-serving institutions. Take note, while we reimagine international education, I am flipping the script on terminology, too. As I mentioned earlier in this piece, most of the world's population is Black and Brown so, HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and the institutions that currently fall under Minority-Serving Institutions, really serve people of the global majority, not the minority. So, I invite you to choose a more accurate term when discussing these institutions moving forward to begin to address the diversity problem.

Study abroad has significant benefits for those who participate. As a practitioner, I regularly discuss with my students the transformative effect that their time abroad has had on them. They feel challenged, empowered, and more independent, among other things. A recent study by the Consortium for Analysis of Student Success through International Education (CASSIE), shows that students from underrepresented minority groups who study abroad are 11.6\% more likely to graduate in 4 years than similar students who do not study abroad (Bell et al., 2022). Unfortunately, study abroad among students of color has been relatively stagnant over the years. In the 2020 Open Doors report, the participation rate of African American students in study abroad dropped to 5.5\% as the pandemic set in, but it has never been more than $6.4 \%$ (IIE, 2021). At the 2022 White House Initiative on HBCU Conference, Julie Baer of the Institute for International Education (IIE), shared data that she pulled from the annual Open Doors report. The data demonstrated that of the 5.5-6\% of Black/African American students that studied abroad in 2019/2020, 94\% of them came from HBCUs (IIE, 2021). Clearly, HBCUs are doing their part to get Black students abroad. These institutions can help solve the seemingly unsolvable issue of diversifying study abroad, but only if the soul of HBCUs is understood by those truly seeking change.

HBCUs are internationally engaged. HBCUs have international relationships and partnerships. They send students abroad. The curriculum incorporates international perspectives. All these things are happening at

HBCUs. What is missing? A large staff to support the internationalization process, in most cases, and a communications strategy to let us know about it. The general assumption that HBCUs are not doing anything, or are not prioritizing internationalization, may be valid if we use the ACE model as the measuring stick, but if we create a new measure and an alternative framework that considers other elements and motivations for international engagement, we might see that HBCUs do value and prioritize international engagement with social justice as the primary end goal.

## Think With Me

My doctoral research will continue to explore the themes I have discussed in this piece. I believe there is a new framework that centers the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of HBCUs specifically, and Black, Brown, and marginalized people more broadly. I believe that framework is Black Internationalization, and I will be working for the next few months to flesh it out. Currently, Black Internationalization's five key pillars are Collaborative Program Design; Equitable Partnerships; Diverse Destinations; Accessible Pathways for International Students; \& Curriculum Centering Marginalized Voices. The Black Internationalization framework will provide an alternative guide to the field of international education as it re-envisions global student mobility and strengthens transnational collaborations, in response to the dominant internationalization strategy carried out by TWIs. My hope is that by looking to the past to understand and acknowledge what has come before, we might better be able to support and strengthen what comes next. I seek to develop this framework not in the darkness but in a way that calls us to reflect and helps us dismantle what has not worked and allows us to build an alternative world, a world we want to live in. I call on all international educators to join me in this quest to examine our practices and allegiances to create a new path. Together we can influence the connections, ideas and practices that more equitably address the future we seek for our world.

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Ms. Tonija Hope serves as the Director of the RJ Bunche International Affairs Center at Howard University where she oversees the strategic vision for the Center and all programming. She is committed to facilitating relationships between and among people of different cultures, and particularly to exposing young people from underserved communities, domestically and internationally, to opportunities for travel and education abroad. She received her BA in Latin American Studies/Spanish from Macalester College and her Master’s in Tourism Administration/International Education from George Washington University. She is currently completing her PhD at Howard University.

