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**Mwangi, C. A. G., & Onyewuenyi, A. C. (2025). *Hidden in Blackness: Being Black and being an immigrant in U.S. schools and colleges*. Teachers College Press.**

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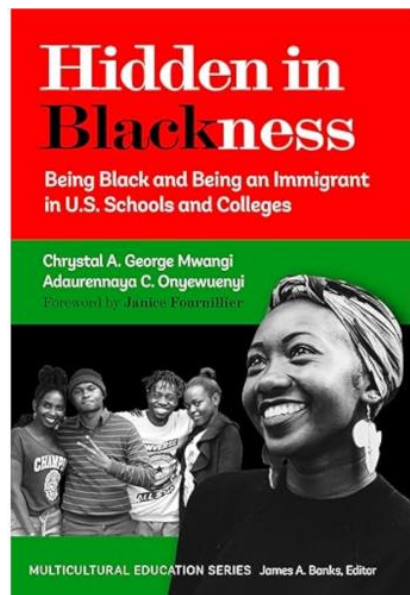
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In *Hidden in Blackness: Being Black and Being an Immigrant in U.S. Schools and Colleges*, Crystal A. George Mwangi and Adaurenaya C.

Onyewuenyi establish the knowledge on Black immigrants (e.g., African-Caribbeans, Africans) as marginalized groups that face significant hurdles (e.g., racial discrimination, cultural differences, cross-cultural, and transnational issues). All of these challenges are influences that contribute to the high attritions rate remaining an issue that affects different races and ethnicities, particularly Black immigrants, through mental health issues (African Caribbeans) in universities in the United States (Sanchez & Awad, 2016; White, 2022). Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991, 2016) found that universities in Canada and the U.S., are places where race affects Indigenous people, particularly those with low academic achievement (e.g., poor retention, high attrition, weak persistence), and the like. Despite the unique characteristics of Black immigrants, educational statistics often merge racial and ethnic groups to homogenize Black identity (Hamilton, 2020; White, 2022).

The authors of *Hidden in Blackness* call for the disaggregation of data. According to NSC Research Center (2021) statistics, Black students who enrolled in the 2019 cohort had a lower retention rate than that of any other race or ethnicity, with 64.9 % for Blacks, while Asian students had a retention rate of 86.5%, Hispanic students had a retention rate of 68.6%, and White students had a retention rate of 79.3%. In a comparison between Asians and Blacks enrolled in cohort 2019, there was a 22-point difference. Thus, the narrative of *Hidden Blackness* is structured to foster visibility of Black immigrants in the U.S. education system by recommending a Black diasporic illuminative (BDI) framework.



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*Hidden in Blackness* is the most recent addition to the Multicultural Education Series edited by James A. Banks. The book breaks down structurally so that educational stakeholders and policymakers can understand the different needs of the diverse population. Each chapter of the book addresses specific educational issues that are identified by headings and subheadings that help readers to understand the narrative in an educational context. All chapters draw on the works of other scholars, the U.S. Census, government reports, and previous scholarly works by the authors.

From the book's title forward, the authors hold the readers' attention by providing knowledge that may not be available everywhere due to the lack of research in the study of Black immigrants. They critically analyze existing studies through a process of inclusion and exclusion to find studies that match the aim of understanding the unique characteristics of African and African-Caribbean students in U.S. universities. The authors provide significant data about Black immigrants living in the U.S., and as experts in the field, provided recommendations to address hurdles that impede the progress of African and Caribbean students in the U.S. education system.

The misunderstanding of the characteristics of Black immigrants, which has grown tremendously, impedes their academic achievement. Scholars recommended addressing the cultural backgrounds of African Caribbean students in the curriculum to avoid their psychological negative well-being (Hunter-Johnson & Niu, 2019; White, 2022). In this context, Ladson-Billings (2021) called for new combination theories as culturally relevant theories (CRT) to hip hop, to tackle the confronting deficit perspectives of Black students. CRT is designed to catch all students through their asset perspectives to respond to global world issues.

The book comprises nine narrative chapters. In the introductory chapter, the authors explain the demographics of the African-Caribbean and African populations. From their descriptions, the acts and policies regarding Black immigrants highlight the heterogeneity of the U.S., as supported by statistics from U.S. government reports. Nevertheless, the U.S. dominant system considers African-Caribbean students and Black immigrant students as a minority myth of meritocracy, and this myth hides the struggles that many face in navigating the U.S. school system (Chapter 1, p. 19).

### **Chapter Summaries**

In Chapter 1, the authors analyze the complexities, nationality, ethnicity, race, and nativity in Preschool – 20 showing how the supposed homogeneity of the U.S. population actually hides the heterogeneity of Blackness from research. Often, these subgroups of ethnicities have been overlooked, as the authors point out in Chapter 2. The authors explain the Black identity development model, including Black immigrants, in Chapter 3. The authors focus on K-12 based on structural and institutional policies through the trajectories of Black immigrants regarding outcomes. Chapter 4 is focused on K-12 through Black immigrant children in the environmental context, navigating based on strategies fostered by social support. The focus of Chapter 5 is factors that may constitute supports or barriers for Black immigrants to navigate college. Chapter 6 deals with Black immigrants' navigation of

the campus climate. Chapter 7 addresses the questions: How do Black immigrants' education outcomes relate to the workforce, and does the U.S. education system boost these outcomes? In the concluding Chapter, 9, the authors provide recommendations for future research. The authors emphasize the themes they used from the previous chapters to enhance the Black Diasporic Illumination framework.

This framework offers understanding and support to Black immigrant students in the U.S. education system. On a personal note, it also supports the reviewer, an African-Caribbean scholar and diversity, equity, and inclusion student representative, a lawyer experienced in education as faculty and administration in both the United States and Haiti, and who studied abroad in South Africa and Greece. I have also attended graduate schools to study education, culture, and society and higher education leadership in the United States. For me, this book serves as a repository, a library with its vast number of resources for my dissertation on African-Caribbean students in U.S. universities who have been viewed through a monolithic diversity lens.

The strengths of the book start with the title: Being Black and an immigrant is a unique experience lived by the authors themselves. Their narrative touches on multiple intersecting barriers in U.S. colleges. The authors mentioned all those barriers in Chapter 5, the four major ones being a) cost, b) lack of college knowledge, c) under sourced or unsupportive K-12 environments, and d) the challenges in the familial home environment. The authors are prominent among Black immigrant scholars whose research and studies contribute to the multicultural education framework. Ladson-Billings (1995) previously addressed the culturally relevant framework approach that supports all students' equitable and just educational experiences. Later, she (2021) questioned the new ways of teaching children about their own culture, such as hip hop, as a culturally relevant framework to engage African American students. Thus, the culturally relevant framework can apply to issues that Black immigrants face when confronted by the cultural backlash in U.S. universities. However, a Black diasporic perspective addresses the multiple challenges faced by Black immigrant students in the U.S. school system.

Opong-Wadie's (2024) study supports the need for a framework to understand the phenomena of Black immigrants' cultural practices and values to foster inclusivity in the U.S. education system. Yosso (2005) initially offered a cultural community wealth (CCW) framework for students of color. Nevertheless, CCW and other critical theories as well as the retention model, have not fully explored the complex identities of Black immigrants with their backgrounds (culture, language, migration; Mwangi, 2017). Regarding the existing frameworks in addressing Blackness through a homogeneous lens, Mwangi and Onyewuenyi (2025) offer the concept of "Black diasporic illuminati," addressing the intersectional barriers and challenges to avoid the hidden issues of Black immigrants. The authors address a large spectrum that includes (e.g., African and Caribbean) diasporas.

Desir (2011) and African-Caribbean scholars use the diasporic framework to explain the complexity of their narratives, such as those in the concept of Lakou and the practice of Vodou. Lakou is a sacred family space that connects individuals to their ancestors and is a cultural way of knowing. Lakou is a collective concept where people live in a central community and work on projects together. The Lakou

concept may be used in the U.S. education system to understand Haitian ways of knowing (e.g., group studies, peer mentoring). Vodou is the religion that connects Haitians to their beliefs based on their resiliency, a heritage from their ancestors, who are the fathers of freedom in humanity by overcoming slavery. From the Vodou ceremony before Haiti's independence, the ancestors became resilient enough to defeat the French army. Thus, Desir emphasized the Haitian cultural lenses as a theoretical and social framework for the social fabric of Haiti.

Mwangi and Onyewuenyi also offer students the resources needed to research further the field of Black immigrants (Africans, African-Caribbeans). In previous studies, Mwangi et al. (2019) and Mwangi and Yao (2021) tackled a concept called neo-racist discrimination in the context of the intersection of different influences (e.g., race, country of origin, culture, accent, or English-language fluency) that include microaggressions, exclusion in classrooms by faculty and peers, or social stings. The same phenomenon appears in *Hidden in Blackness*. However, African and African-Caribbean students have found the opportunities to improve their social mobility in the U.S., as may not be possible in their own countries through different social norms and marginalization (Bailey, 2017; Sanchez & Award, 2016).

From a critical analysis perspective, the authors provide incredible knowledge to educational stakeholders and policy makers who must understand the diversity of the U.S. population in order to provide a safe campus climate for all students. *Hidden in Blackness* can help educational stakeholders develop student support programs that address the attrition rate crisis faced by the nation's universities. The authors repeatedly remind readers that a multicultural lens is necessary when educating a diverse population like U.S. universities which house different races, ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Previously, Mwangi et al. (2019) urged policymakers and researchers to understand the path Black immigrant college students navigate and what drives them to succeed.

Mwangi and Onyewuenyi highlight the impact of Caribbean and African students' struggles in navigating the racial realities in the US. Two legislative advances were pertinent in this regard: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. These acts increased U.S. diversity, particularly with Black immigrants from the Caribbean. The authors' narrative explains that the Caribbean groups are Black and Hispanophone (Spanish-speaking). Moreover, 42% reported single race as Black, with 90% monoracial Black people coming from Haiti and Jamaica. The U.S. is the top receiver of Caribbean immigrants, with five countries accounting for 90%: Cuba, 28%; Dominican Republic, 25%; Jamaica, 17%; Haiti, 12%; and Trinidad and Tobago, 5%. Africans make up 6% of the total immigrant population of the U.S. Among the 4.2 million Africans, 2.7 million are first-generation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The authors pinpoint the uniqueness of Black immigrants' ontology, rejecting the deficit-based perspective that views them as lacking prior knowledge that would help them persist and succeed in higher education. However, Yosso's (2005) community wealth capital framework suggests that students of color need to persist in U.S. universities. The authors drew on multiple existing theories (e.g., CRT, Black Crit, intersectionality, Crit walking, Black Crit, critical theory, criticality, and postcolonial theories) to advocate for a Black illuminative framework. Oppong-

Wadie (2024) pinpointed the contribution of Black immigrant cultural values and practices in a similar framework.

In future editions of *Hidden in Blackness*, one hopes to encounter additional potential challenges to existing frameworks, despite the development of the Black Diasporic Illuminati framework and its implications in the last chapter. Thus, scholars, educational stakeholders, and policymakers can be helped by the Black Diasporic Illuminati framework to see the impact of not addressing the characteristics of Black immigrant students on their psychological well-being.

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### About the Reviewer

**Jean Edouard** is a doctoral candidate in higher education leadership at Abraham S Fischer College of Education and School of Criminal Justice at Nova Southeastern University. His research interests center on Black immigrants (e.g., African-Caribbeans) and their retention in universities in the US. Major foci in his research include intersectionality (e.g., race, culture, ethnicity, identity) among African Caribbean students and its impact on their psychological well-being in U.S. universities. He has studied abroad in South Africa and Greece to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures.



### About the Book Authors

**Crystal A. George Mwangi** is an associate professor in the Higher Education Program at George Mason University. She received the 2018 Innovative Research in International Education Award from NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Dr. Mwangi is a graduate of Rollins College. She holds a master's degree from Florida State University and a PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Mwangi is an associate editor for the *Review of Higher Education* and has served on multiple editorial boards including the *Journal of College Student Development* and *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.



**Adaurennaya C. Onyewuenyi** is a second-generation Nigerian of the Igbo tribe. She is an associate professor of psychology and affiliate faculty of African American studies at The College of New Jersey. Her research focuses on social inequity in educational attainment, access, and mental health of Black youth and young adults (Black American, African, Afro-Latinx/e, and Caribbean), examining racial and ethnic identity construction, the impact of racial stressors on psychoeducational outcomes, and the influence of culture and peer relationships on conflict management. Dr. Onyewuenyi's work has been featured in *The Urban Review*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *School Psychology Review*.



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