

Transitioning Identities in a Transitioning Landscape: Gentrification and the Social Class Identity Development of Working-Class Students of Color

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Abstract

While the literature on the experiences of working-class Students of Color at selective, historically White institutions has grown significantly over the past twenty-five years, how this student population is making sense of their social class identity as they gain access to dominant cultural and social capital at their institutions remains heavily understudied. To further complicate the experience of social class transitions or upward mobility for working-class Students of Color, this literature review will discuss the phenomenon of gentrification, a racial and class based process in which the inner city is redeveloped for the tastes of the middle-class while simultaneously displacing working-class populations. Through an analysis of past studies on working-class Students of Color and gentrification, I intend to tie these two threads of research together to examine what it means to be a college educated, upwardly mobile, native of a working-class gentrifying neighborhood. In doing so, this paper will bridge a gap in both working-class Students of Color and gentrification literature, highlighting the importance of race and class in both higher education and in urban life.

Introduction

Previous research indicates that working-class Students of Color experience a tense and complex balancing act between the collective identity of their home communities with the individualistic experience of attending a selective institution and becoming upwardly mobile (Aries & Berman, 2014; Guiffrida, 2006; Orbe, 2003). While the tension between home and school life for working-class Students of Color has been well-documented in higher education literature (Guiffrida, 2005; Orbe, 2003), there is still a lack of research on how this student population is making sense of their social class identity as they progress through their college education. For working-class Students of Color from inner cities, gentrification adds another layer of complexity to the negotiation of their racial and class identities. Just as working-class Students of Color are processing internal changes to their identities, the cities where they come from are also experiencing radical social, cultural, and economic shifts. The phenomenon of gentrification has received substantial attention from scholars that range across academic disciplines, including a critical understanding of the role middle-class People of Color play in the process (Ahrens, 2015; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2007; Medina, 2013; Patillo, 2007; Taylor, 1992). However, how Students of Color from working-class communities experience gentrification remains heavily understudied.

To begin addressing this gap, this literature review will examine the racial and class identities of working-class Students of Color as both distinctive and intersectional experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). I will begin by addressing the racialized experiences of Students of Color at Historically White Institutions (HWI), followed by a discussion on the current literature on working-class college students, and then examine how these two identities intersect for working-class Students of Color. In addition, while there is currently little research on how working-class Students of Color understand their social class identity in their gentrifying neighborhoods, I will incorporate literature on members of the Black and Latinx middle-class to examine the intersections of race, ethnicity, and social class in gentrifying Communities of Color. Ultimately, in tying these threads of research together, I seek to highlight the ways in which Whiteness and classism are upheld and reproduced in both higher education and in urban life.

Definitions

To address inequitable systems of race and class, I view the literature via a critical framework. In doing so, it is imperative to define terms that expose depth and power. For example, I utilize *historically White institution* rather than *predominantly White institution* because it highlights not just the numerical majority of White students, staff, and faculty on campus but also the “histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes that were all designed by whites, for whites, to reproduce whiteness via a white experience at the exclusion of others” (Brunnsma, Brown, & Placier, 2012, p. 719). I also capitalize terms that include *People of Color* such as Students and Communities of Color because it is important that when speaking of a group of people, particularly those who have historically been dehumanized, their identities are acknowledged and respected through capitalization (Lanham & Liu, 2019; Tharps, 2014). Finally, some words I use will depend upon the terms utilized by the original authors of the work I am referencing. For example, while some scholars utilize Latino/a to refer to students with ancestral ties to Latin America others have chosen to use Latinx as a gender-neutral term.

Blooming Racial and Ethnic Pride at HWIs

Scholars have argued that campus culture is a powerful force that has the ability to fundamentally shape the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and local community members (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Museus, 2008; Renn & Patton, 2017). Defined as “persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions” campus cultures “provide a frame of reference” to develop meaning to both tangible (mascots) and intangible (mottos) aspects of college life (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. iv). Research has shown that “traditional” students, who tend to be White and have parents who graduated from college, have little to no difficulty assimilating and maintaining campus cultures; however, working-class Students of Color struggle profoundly to align their values and backgrounds to the cultural fabric of the institution (Aries & Berman, 2014; Yosso, et al., 2009)

The stark difference in ease and struggle for students is best represented at selective HWIs, which historically have served White, affluent, propertied Christian men, and continue to uphold social and cultural structures that prioritize and reinforce White, upper-class values and norms (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011). Although the 1964 Civil Rights Act mandated colleges and universities to enroll qualified students regardless of race, the historical legacy of Whiteness and racial exclusion remains deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of HWIs (McDonald, 2011). Research demonstrates that Students of Color who attend HWIs often experience racial microaggressions from professors and peers, which are indirect and subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination, in addition to direct and targeted incidents of racism on their college campuses (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Students of Color also struggle to see their racial and ethnic backgrounds reflected in the faculty, staff, and curriculum of the institution (Gonzalez, 2002), and believe that their college or university is not doing enough to support their retention and graduation (Hurtado, Milem, & Allen, 1998). For some, the emotional toll of these burdens results in their withdrawal from school (Guiffrida, 2003), while other Students of Color develop a rich cultural network based on their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds to survive and resist the alienating and hostile environment of an HWI (Gonzalez, 2002; Museus, 2008; Nuñez, 2009).

Gonzalez’s (2002) study on the experiences of two Chicano students attending a large, predominantly White public university near the U.S. and Mexican border provides a notable example of how racial and ethnic minoritized students utilize their cultural heritage as a means to resist an overwhelmingly White environment. Gonzalez identified three cultural worlds within the university that produced the alienation his participants felt: the social, the physical, and the epistemological. Each world centered and valued White American norms, which while invisible to White students, caused great conflict and hostility for the Students of Color in the study (Gonzalez, 2002). The lack of Chicano students and professors, the European-centric style of buildings and statues celebrating White men, and the limited classes on Chicano studies left a deep hunger for cultural representation among the study’s

participants. In both protest and in celebration, the students in the study turned their dorm room into an informal cultural center, by hanging Chicano art, listening to Mexican music, and sharing stories from home.

In addition to Gonzalez's (2002) study, other scholars have highlighted the importance of formalized cultural centers and ethnic student organizations as safe spaces for Students of Color to come together, find a sense of belonging, and celebrate their cultural heritages (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Nuñez, 2009). In his research on the experiences of Black students at a predominantly White institution, Guiffrida (2003) found that African American student organizations were a critical component to the social integration of Black students on their college campus. Students in the study shared how engaging in these student organizations enabled them to build connections with faculty outside of the classroom, give back to members of the Black community both on and off campus, organize events to educate others about racial and ethnic identity, and find comfort in other Black students who share their same cultural values and norms.

These studies show that Students of Color congregate to nourish themselves and each other because they are culturally and emotionally starved in institutions that do not reflect, accept, and value their cultural backgrounds. In doing so, Students of Color politicize their racial and ethnic identities to advocate for institutional validation and the acknowledgement of their community's needs while also creating spaces of resistance to White hegemony within their institutions (Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Nuñez, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). This strategy, employed by Students of Color to survive at HWIs, aligns with Tierney's (1999) argument on college student retention. While foundational theories in student affairs argued that marginalized students must learn to sever ties to their cultural backgrounds in order to succeed academically at their institutions (Tinto, 1994); Tierney (1999) argued that institutions should develop cultural congruity by affirming the cultural capital of minoritized students and incorporating their cultural backgrounds into the curricula.

Tierney's argument has been praised by scholars interested in validating the values and norms of marginalized student populations on campus cultures; however, studies show that Students of Color must still learn how to navigate the White, upper-class culture of their HWI in order to succeed in college (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Yosso et al., 2009). As Yosso et al., (2009) state in their study ten years after Tierney's recommendations, Latino/a students had "to learn, participate in, and accept the White campus subculture, even while it seemed that White students made little or no effort to learn about, participate in, and show respect for Latina/o culture, epistemologies, and ontologies" (p.677). Therefore, while the literature on the importance of cultural congruity for marginalized students has provided strong arguments for its effect on student retention, Students of Color are still struggling to find institutional support and validation from their HWIs. As a result, they turn to their racial and ethnic groups for comfort, support, and solidarity (Yosso, et al., 2009).

Defining the Working-Class

In addition to being a racially exclusive environment, most institutions of higher education have historically served the needs of the country's most affluent (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011). The norms, practices, and behaviors of the upper-class still regulate many of today's campus cultures, which results in the cultural incongruity experienced by students from working-class backgrounds (Aries & Berman, 2014; Torres, 2009). While the number of low-income students attending college has increased significantly over the past four decades (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017), social class remains heavily understudied in the fields of student affairs and higher education, and particularly its impact on the identity development of college students (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Many scholars attribute the lack of research on social class as a result of it being an "invisible and taboo" identity (Ardoin, 2018; Martin, Williams, & Young, 2018, p. 16). However, a number of scholars in the fields of counseling, sociology, and student affairs have developed an understanding of

social class, specifically in the context of higher education (Ardoin, 2018; Hurst, 2012; Liu, 2011). An important distinction they make is between social class and socioeconomic status (SES). Whereas SES focuses solely on income and parental education, social class is defined as the “network of values and beliefs an individual uses to understand their socioeconomic and sociocultural experiences” (Martin, Williams, & Young, 2018, p. 12). These experiences are often rooted in the kind of work one produces, either non-salaried manual labor that is directed by others or salaried mental labor that can be creative and self-directed (Hurst, 2012). The labor one produces is stratified into the oppressive system of classism, which assigns value and prestige to people according to their class, and normalizes wealth inequality (Liu, 2011; Yeskel & Leondar-Wright, 1997). Hurst (2012) highlights the impact of classism in her study on working-class college students. She finds that academic success is a burden for working-class students because it forces them to accept that the labor of their working-class families and communities is less worthy than middle-class work. Social class, therefore, encompasses not only the importance of economic capital (i.e. monetary income), but also of cultural capital, which structures our tastes, behaviors, and knowledge in a system that values certain types of behaviors and expertise over others (Ardoin, 2018; Liu, 2011).

Because class is more comprehensive, some scholars have utilized the term *working-class* instead of *low-income* to describe students from families that work in low-skilled jobs, earn little pay, and do not have college educations (Ardoin, 2018; Hurst, 2012; Martin, Williams, & Young, 2018). By this definition, all working-class college students are also first-generation. However, not all first-generation students come from low-income backgrounds, as some families may have entered the middle-class without attending college (Hurst, 2012). The following section will include literature written on students who identify as first-generation, low-income, or as working-class to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of working-class students in higher education. I will utilize first-generation, low-income, or working-class depending on what term was utilized by the original authors of the work I am referencing.

The Working-Class College Student Experience

Historically, expensive college tuition in the United States was only accessible to the wealthy elite; working-class students were barred from attending due to the high cost of attendance (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011). It was only after World War II that higher education became widely affordable to working-class people. The passing of the G.I. Bill in 1944 made attending college possible, specifically for returning White, male veterans (Hurst, 2012). However, college was still out of reach for many. In 1975, only 31.2% of low-income high school students entered college. By the start of the 21st century, this number more than doubled due to the recent availability of student loans and Pell grants. In 2016, 65.4% of low-income high school students enrolled into a two-year or four-year institution (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). However, low-income students are half as likely to graduate from a four-year institution and take longer to obtain a degree as their wealthier peers (Bowen et al., 2005). Several scholars have sought to examine this discrepancy, highlighting the many difficulties working-class students experience in pursuit of a higher education (Ardoin, 2018; Aries & Berman, 2014; Hurst, 2012; Lee & Kramer, 2013; Orbe, 2003).

Before entering college, working-class students are less likely to be deemed as “college ready” (Hurst, 2012, p. 30). Attending under-resourced high schools and being the first in their families to pursue a college education, working-class students often do not have access to or the background knowledge of which classes and examinations would prepare them for college (Hurst, 2012). These experiences are often characteristic of first-generation students. Although there are various definitions of “first-generation” in higher education literature, this paper defines first-generation students as those whose parents did not receive an education beyond high school (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Parents who have never been exposed to the specific requirements, rigors, or norms of applying to and

attending college have difficulty providing the same level of support as parents who have had experience in higher education (Terenzini et al., 1994). From knowing the appropriate dress code for a college interview, to the etiquette one should use when writing an email to a professor, parents with college degrees have obtained a series of cultural assets that support their social class position. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) coined the term *cultural capital* to conceptualize the resources dominant groups utilize to reinforce social class norms. Bourdieu referred to the social networks and connections that maintain class differentiation as *social capital*. The literature on the experience of first-generation college students argues that a lack of cultural and social capital, such as one's way of speech and dress, is what distinguishes first-generation students from their continuing-generation peers (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

In addition, scholars on first-generation students argue that while this student population is not homogenous, there are a common set of characteristics these students share (Darling & Smith, 2007). First-generation students tend to come from low-income households, are mostly racial and ethnic minorities, and tend to identify as women, which exposes them to class, gender, and racial discrimination, and places them at a further disadvantage when they arrive on college campuses that have historically catered to White upper-class men (Darling & Smith, 2007). Moreover, first-generation students report receiving less academic, emotional, and financial support from family members and struggle with the academic rigor of college due to lower math, reading, and critical thinking skills - a result of attending typically lower-funded public K-12 education (Darling & Smith, 2007). Already behind academically, first-generation students enter college and struggle to keep up with the academic rigor of their institutions and with new expectations of their education, such as navigating a syllabus and understanding the purpose of faculty office hours (Darling & Smith, 2007).

In addition to low-income students feeling academically underprepared, the literature shows that their participation in the social life of campus can also be an isolating and stressful experience (Aries & Berman, 2014). Working more extensive hours than their wealthier peers, and unable to afford leisurely activities such as frequently dining out at restaurants, traveling during school breaks, and purchasing name-brand clothing, low-income students are routinely reminded of their social class status (Aries & Berman, 2014; Torres 2009). As a result, low-income students struggle to find a sense of belonging on a campus that often feels alienating and exclusively geared towards their wealthier peers. Scholars argue that these experiences can invoke feelings of inferiority for working-class students who may not be educated in the unspoken codes and rules of the academy (Patton, Renn, Guido & Quaye, 2016).

A study on the cultural norms of universities found that these subtle codes often center the independent values of the upper-class (Stephens, Frysberg, Markus, Johnson & Covarrubias, 2012). Challenging authority, working independently and creatively, and having a 'go-out-and-get-yours' confidence can contradict working-class norms of collectivism, teamwork, and adherence to rules (Stephens, et al., 2012). In his study that sought to complicate the narrative on low-income, first-generation Black college students, Jack (2015) demonstrates how working-class Black students who attended college preparatory schools learned how to internalize and utilize independent behaviors in college. Jack (2015) explains that these students advocate for themselves, comfortably communicate with authority figures on campus such as professors and staff members, and exude confidence both inside and outside the classroom. In contrast, students who did not attend preparatory schools, felt ashamed and anxious to speak with authority figures and lacked the confidence to advocate for their needs. When participating in academic and social environments with norms different than their own, working-class students typically struggle with their grades and are less likely to interact with their professors, utilize campus resources, be involved on campus, and ultimately, obtain a college degree (Parks-Yancy, 2012; Walpole, 2008).

Scholars have highlighted that class, like all social identities, is socially constructed and has a

“fluid, dynamic, and performative nature” (Martin, Williams, & Young, 2018, p. 11). According to Barrett (2011), individuals typically carry three social class identities: the class they were born into, the class they currently identify with, and the class that others perceive them as having. Navigating these three identities, especially as one becomes upwardly mobile, can often be a conflicting endeavor (Ardoin, 2018). Hurst (2012) finds that as working-class students adjust to their college environments, they are faced with the choice of maintaining their allegiance to their working-class home community, assimilating into the upper-class values of their institutions, or navigating both simultaneously. Other studies have highlighted this tension, showing that one of the most important challenges working-class students face is the often strenuous task of navigating between the two worlds of their affluent institutions and their working-class communities (Aries & Berman, 2014; Hurst, 2012; Lee & Kramer, 2013).

In their home communities, working-class students employ a great deal of emotional labor trying to explain their collegiate experiences to family members and friends who do not understand or cannot empathize with their experiences (Orbe, 2003). Attempts to discuss what they have learned may result in family members and friends labeling them as a “know it all,” “snob,” or, for Students of Color, as “acting White” (Lee & Kramer, 2013; Orbe, 2003). Castillo (2009) identified these behaviors by family members and friends as *intragroup marginalization*. Individuals pursuing upward mobility through formal education are ostracized by members of their own cultural group because they exhibit values and norms outside of the group’s culture. Feeling marginalized by both their upper-class peers and their co-ethnic group members, the comments made by family and friends can result in physical and mental distress (Castillo, 2009; Lee & Kramer, 2013). Other negative experiences reported by working-class students are the various pressures and demands they encounter from family members. For example, students may be in charge of paying bills, taking care of younger siblings or elderly relatives, and providing emotional support to their parents (Guiffrida, 2005; London, 1989).

In his study on low-income African American students at an HWI, Guiffrida (2005) found that those who held important head of household roles were often the ones who dropped out from college or were struggling academically. However, for students who were performing well in Guiffrida's study, their families provided a better balance of challenge and support. Although unable to understand entirely what their children were going through, students noted how parents emphasized academics because they were unable to pursue a formal education of their own (p. 55). Additional studies also show that working-class families and communities often held students who attended college in high regard and as exceptional examples of those who “made it out” of the neighborhood and their financial situations (Orbe, 2008). Working-class students, therefore, utilized family and community stories of hardship as one of their greatest sources of motivation (Orbe, 2008). They internalized the values and ethics of their working-class backgrounds to emphasize the importance of hard work and to pursue the dreams of academic and financial prosperity that their family members were unable to achieve (Aries & Berman, 2014; Guiffrida, 2006; Lubrano, 2004; Matos, 2015; Orbe, 2003).

Working-Class Students of Color

The intersections of race and class in the pursuit of upward mobility are documented by scholars in the fields of sociology and education (Cole & Amari, 2003; Cookson & Persell, 1991; Neckerman, Carter, & Lee, 1999). Many of these scholars sought to understand the subjective experiences of African Americans in elite high schools and colleges and found that Black students experience the double burden of having to assimilate into both the White and upper-class cultures of their institutions while also navigating between the distinct cultures of their academic environments and that of their Black community. Cookson and Persell (1991) argued that because racial differences were often compounded by class differences at their institutions, Black students would never gain full social acceptance into the White, upper-class worlds represented by their institutions.

These scholars also found that there were “hidden costs” (Cole & Amari, 2003, p. 794) in Black students’ attempts to become upwardly mobile, such as the state of their psychological well-being, which can take a serious toll as they experience rejection and marginalization from both the upper-class White world and their lower-income Black communities. Peteet, Montgomery, and Weekes (2015) show that working-class Students of Color who experience the culture shock of attending a selective and rigorous HWI, often struggle with imposter syndrome. Students who experience imposter syndrome believe that they are unqualified for college because they doubt their intellectual capacity and ability. For working-class Students of Color, these feelings are compounded by the negative experiences they have with White professors, staff, and peers and the tension they experience between home and school life. This sense of imposter syndrome can result in poorer academic performance, lower self-esteem, depression, and feeling guilty for their educational achievements (Peteet et al., 2015).

The Importance of Giving Back

While the experiences of working-class Students of Color are often marked by difficult challenges, several studies have shown that their participation in giving back to historically under-resourced communities has been an integral and positive component of their upward mobility (Cohen, 1998; Delgado Bernal, Aleman, & Garavito, 2009; Guiffrida, 2003; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992). Engaging in the practice of “uplift” (Cole & Amari, 2003, p. 788), can result in working-class Students of Color developing a stronger sense of self and belonging, and can dispel the psychological distress of imposter syndrome. Delgado-Bernal, Aleman, and Garavito (2009) found that first-year Latino/a students participating in an ethnic studies service-learning course at a large predominantly White university were able to critically reflect and discuss the various intersections of their identities while also developing leadership skills as mentors for low-income Latino/a children in a local after school program. Although they often felt powerless at their HWI, the connections Latino/a college students made with their younger co-ethnics, enabled them to reclaim themselves as proud student leaders both on campus and in the Latino/a community.

Cohen’s (1998) study on first-generation, low-income women at a selective liberal arts college found that although the study participants initially struggled with imposter syndrome, they gained a sense of critical class consciousness in their sociology courses and from uncomfortable interactions with faculty and peers. The negative experiences they had interacting with upper-class students, coupled with an education that gave them the tools to articulate their experiences, enabled the women in the study to value their working-class and non-traditional backgrounds and redefine success not in monetary terms but in uplifting communities in need. Cultural theorist bell hooks (2000) lays similar claims in her book *Class Matters*. Her political solidarity and allegiance, as well as a large part of her sense of self are all deeply rooted in the working-class life she grew up in. hooks (2000) states, “I knew that I would never have finished without the ongoing support of the working class world I came from” (p. 146). As a result, she felt compelled to give back to the working-class world, and to “honor and remain in solidarity” (p. 146) with her community through her work as a cultural theorist and academic. Similar to the students in Cohen’s study (1998), hooks (2000) learned how to incorporate aspects of the privileged class into her life not as a means to build her own ego, but to support others from her working-class community. As exemplified here, working-class Students of Color often develop significant meaning and purpose from serving communities that reflect their own racial and class backgrounds.

Although past studies have highlighted the racialized and class-based experiences of working-class Students of Color, how this student population is making sense of their social class identity as they become upwardly mobile remains heavily understudied. For working-class Students of Color from inner cities, the process of gentrification can deeply complicate their class identity formation. As cities become more marketable to young, educated, and middle-class individuals and less affordable for working-class Communities of Color, how working-class Students of Color make sense of their social class identity in

this process must be critically examined.

Transitioning Landscapes

Coined by British sociologist Ruth Glass (1964), *gentrification* is defined as a class-based process in which the physical, social, and economic qualities of working-class neighborhoods are revalued and reinvested in by larger political and economic entities for the tastes and desires of middle and upper-class people. As a result of this large flow of public and private capital, the spatial, social, political, and economic components of the city have been restructured (Logan & Molotch, 1987). The supply of new jobs and cultural spaces have enticed a younger, educated, and more affluent class of gentrifiers into the city who are bringing their own cultural preferences and leisurely lifestyles (Zukin, 2010).

This deliberate investment into urban environments for the tastes of affluent residents comes at a great cost for the city's most vulnerable populations, who are experiencing exorbitant increases in rent, landlord harassment, and physical and cultural displacement (Cahill, 2005; Newman & Wyly, 2006). In short, gentrification is creating two landscapes in one: crumbling homes rest across from new condos, check cashing businesses sit next to art galleries, and working-class Families of Color are increasingly replaced by younger, wealthier White individuals (Newman & Wyly, 2006). However, while the racial narrative on gentrification has focused mostly on the implications of White gentrifiers moving into low-income Communities of Color, it is important to recognize that because gentrification is defined as a class-based process, middle and upper-class People of Color can also participate in the gentrification of working-class Communities of Color (Patillo, 2007, Taylor, 1992).

Black and Latinx Middle-Class Communities in Gentrifying Neighborhoods

There is a gap in the research exploring how working-class Students of Color experience their gentrifying neighborhoods. However, a few studies on the intersections between race, ethnicity, and gentrification highlight the complexities in the relationships that formally educated middle-class People of Color have with gentrifying low-income neighborhoods. Studies on gentrification in historically Black communities such as Harlem in New York City and North Kenwood-Oakland in Chicago show that some members of the Black middle-class are enticed by the sense of racial pride and camaraderie in Black neighborhoods (Patillo, 2007, Taylor, 1992). They connect on an emotional level to the businesses and services that symbolize Blackness, which provides them with an important sense of belonging. This cultural connection is critical for Black professionals who suffer from the psychological distress of microaggressions, overtly racist incidents, and a glass ceiling that limits their potential in work environments that are predominantly White (Cole & Omari, 2003; Moore, 2005; Taylor, 1992).

These studies also suggest that while members of the Black middle-class often felt an obligation to uplift their lower income co-ethnics by advocating for safer and cleaner neighborhoods with better resources, their actions often conflicted with the values and behaviors of low-income Black community members (Moore, 2005; Taylor, 1992). These contentions are often found in the social and political arenas. In their desire to clean up the neighborhood, middle-class Black individuals enacted potentially damaging plans such as advocating for an increased police presence in the neighborhood or denying services (such as an HIV/AIDS clinic in a Harlem community) if such initiatives resulted in their property values declining (Taylor, 1992). With their professional and educational backgrounds, middle-class Blacks were often better equipped to navigate the terrain of city politics, and while their intentions were indeed to support the Black community, a particular class agenda served to be counterproductive to the livelihoods of low-income Black people (Moore, 2005; Taylor, 1992). Therefore, despite sharing similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, class distinctions often set the two groups apart.

Similar conclusions were found in a study on educated, middle-class Latinos moving back to their historically Latino neighborhood of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles (Ahrens, 2015). Coining the term *gentrification*, middle-class Latinos chose to differentiate themselves from gentrifiers through their

outward support of their *gente*, or people. By investing back into their neighborhoods, *gentefiers* saw themselves as part of the solution, not the problem. However, this study showed that the desire of gentefiers to reinvest into their neighborhoods aligned to outside real estate developers looking to find an ethnic niche in the market (Ahrens, 2015). The new businesses that middle-class Latinos were creating, such as bars, coffee shops, and bookstores appealed to younger crowds with greater disposable incomes. As a result, older community members and low-income families were struggling to stay in a neighborhood that, although still looked and felt Mexican, was increasingly unaffordable (Medina, 2013).

These studies highlight the importance of a strong racial and ethnic identity for formally educated, middle-class Blacks and Latinxs, many of whom seek cultural connections in Communities of Color because of the hostility and alienation they experience in their predominantly White working environments. However, their social class is still a significant marker of differentiation between themselves and their low-income co-ethnics. In her book on the significance of class, bell hooks (2000) argues that members of the Black middle-class must recognize their class privilege if they are truly dedicated to uplifting all Blacks from oppression. In her observations of the trajectory of the Black middle-class since the 1960s, she states that "many Black people seeking success in the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy embrace white supremacist thoughts and actions" (p. 90). Therefore, to work towards the dismantling of racial and class inequities, hooks argues that class-privileged Blacks must align themselves with their working-class co-ethnics, and not with the White elite.

Conclusion

The experiences of Black and Latinx middle-class communities closely align to the research that was previously outlined about working-class Students of Color. This student population develops a rich and sophisticated sense of racial and ethnic pride in a racially hostile White college environment, yet are marked as different by their home communities due to differences in speech, dress, and other markers of social class. As exemplified in the work on gentrification and the Black and Latinx middle-class, these differing behaviors and values can have potentially damaging impacts for the well-being of low-income Communities of Color. Without proper investigation into the social class identity development of working-class Students of Color in their gentrifying home communities, there is still a gap in both research and practice on how working-class Students of Color can work to develop a critical class consciousness and mitigate class differences. Supporting the social class identity development of students will enable them to align themselves with their working-class co-ethnics, as cultural theorist bell hooks suggested. Therefore, the results of this research can serve as an important foundation for scholars, practitioners, and students who are interested in disrupting the internalization and reproduction of dominant ideologies in higher education, particularly the ways that classism and Whiteness function and uphold institutional knowledge, norms, and values.

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