

Issue Brief: Immigrant Status and Discrimination

Key Words

African American, immigrant, tension, competition

Description

This issue brief will focus on the discrimination imposed upon people regarding their immigrant status in the United States. It will show how African American born citizens reacts to immigrants, as well as how that reaction changes among the different racial boundaries.

Key Points

- * There are about 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, with a majority, over 80%, of those people coming from Mexico or other Latin American countries.¹
- * Although discrimination against immigrants has been more widely known in the United States, discrimination amongst immigrants based on their legal status is also prominent, and varies with race.
- * African Americans that have less interaction with immigrant poverty driven areas are less likely to favor stricter border control than those that have more of an everyday interaction.
- * African Americans are more likely to oppose immigrants, especially illegal Latinos, because of competition in the work force.

Issue Brief

Immigration is indisputably the founding foundation of the United States. While this fact was once an accepted part of society, as time progressed and nationalism became stronger, the new native-born American became an ideal. Consequently, hierarchies established along the basis of immigration status, with legal citizens being on the top, parallel to undocumented persons on the bottom. This reaction to immigrants changes within the different racial groups. African Americans are in total more likely to have a more

¹ <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem>

negative opinion regarding immigration, even when those immigrants would fall into the black category. Nonetheless, when it comes to African Americans and Latino Americans, the immigration debate serves as one part of the greater spectrum of the struggle between the two minority groups.

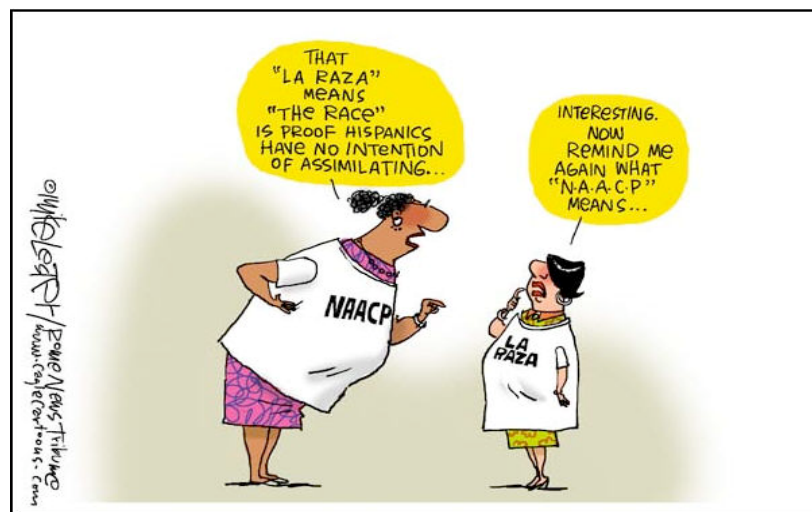


African Americans are in a difficult position when it comes to their identity and black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. The proliferation of the presence of these black immigrants has separated black Americans from their African roots, forcing them to establish themselves as a separate group. “The tensions can be especially raw and violent in urban communities struggling with poverty, she said, as black Americans who feel economically trapped clash culturally with immigrant Africans who have escaped turmoil worse than Hurricane Katrina and may have stereotypical views of black Americans as being lazy or glorifiers of gangster life.” For many reasons, African Americans and their African counterparts have clashed over a wide array of areas. In many areas, African immigrants are apparently being targeted and attacked by Black Americans.

Discrimination exists from black Americans towards Africans because their

² <http://www.roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/159336>

immigrant status, as well as Africans towards African American because of their citizenship status. The idea of being “black” does not dawn upon many immigrants until they enter the United States. As a result, their inability to conform to mainstream black culture makes it seem as if they are separating themselves from blacks, a trend that has ultimately produced a great deal of the tension between the two groups. Black Americans desire to separate themselves from being African has appeared to be quite discriminatory. The offensive term “African booty scratcher” started in black communities.



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The relationship between African Americans and immigrant Latinos is also quite dynamic. Compared to that of Africans and blacks from the Caribbean, African Americans are most worried about the political and economical effects that immigrant Latino Americans can have. African Americans have adopted the idea that Latinos will just be the next in line to reap the benefits of slavery’s hard work. This sentiment was portrayed in an article in the *Amsterdam News* in 2001. “The cartoon portrayed a downtrodden black figure crouched on the ground, labeled “US Folks,” a double entendre for “us folks” and “U.S.

³ <http://www.theipinionsjournal.com/index.php/2006/07/blacks-resent-rise-of-hispanics-as-americas-new-favorite-minority-group/>

folks." A chain of other figures, representing Spanish Americans and the foreign born, climb on the back of the crouched black figure, to pluck fruit off the tree of opportunity." ⁴ As a result, the strife between black and Latino gangs is undeniable, with an Anti-Latino sentiment being strongest in the areas where blacks and Latinos' have high levels of interaction. African Americans are very likely to discriminate against Latinos because of the intense competition that illegal immigrants add to the job market. "The signs that illegal immigration touched a sore nerve in many blacks have been there all along. The first big warning sign of black frustration with illegal immigration came during the battle over Proposition 187 in California in 1994. White voters supported by big margins the proposition that denied public services to undocumented immigrants. But nearly 50 percent of blacks also backed the measure."⁵ The tension between the two minority groups will only continue as immigration continues to be a major

The position of the African American is currently in a transitory phase. As their standing as the most dominant minority group has dissipated, their relationship with immigrant populations have been increasingly negative. The discrimination, however, is not one sided. Just as African Americans often have low opinions of the immigrant groups, each of these countries own history and interaction with blacks in general make many Latinos and even Africans have unfavorable opinions of blacks. Hate has been fought with hate in this case.

General References

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⁴ <http://www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue39/Steinberg39.htm>

⁵ http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=bedb04d502d6a7af148fd569fa2247fb

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