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Niggers no more: a critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities

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A methodological approach popularized by critical race theorists is used in this article to oppose dominant discourse concerning the social and educational status of Black men in America. Specifically, this counternarrative on student achievement was derived from face-to-face individual interviews with 143 Black male undergraduates at 30 predominantly White colleges and universities across the USA. Exemplified via five composites constructed from the overall sample are resistant responses to subordination and racist stereotyping; confrontations with the cyclical reproduction of low expectations for Black male leadership and achievement; and an industrious rejection of what I refer to throughout the article as 'niggering'. Also offered herein are implications for postsecondary faculty, administrators, and researchers.

Keywords: critical race theory; Black men; higher education

> The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies … If you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race, he will achieve and aspire to equality and justice without regard to race. (Woodson 1933, 2, 192)

The manufacturing of social, educational, economic, and political inferiority has managed to persist since the publication of Carter G. Woodson's epic book, *The mis-education of the negro*. It remains the case that Black men are continually reminded of our distress and subordination. In America, we have long been regarded as criminals, irresponsible fathers, descendants of dysfunctional families, self-destructive drug addicts, materialistic lovers of flashy possessions, and violent rapists of White women (Anderson 2008; Gadsden and Smith 1994; Gordon, Gordon, and Nembhard 1994; Jenkins 2006; Mandara 2006; White and Cones 1999). These attributes are typically used to render us collectively undeserving of trust, respect, equitable pay and workplace promotion, and fairness. Perceptions of us, unfortunately, are hardly better in schools and colleges. The typical Black boy in a K-12 educational setting is taught almost exclusively by White women who combine an insufficient anticipation for his academic achievement with high expectations for disruptive behavior, intellectual stupidity, and a dispassion for learning that will

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ultimately culminate with high school dropout (Davis 2003; Davis and Jordan 1994; Jackson and Moore 2008; Noguera 2003; Toldson 2008). His same-race male counterpart who makes it to postsecondary education encounters a different set of negative perceptions, which are later described in this article. Those who view and treat Black males in such troubled ways associate us, perhaps unconsciously, with one of the most racially offensive terms in American history: Niggers.

In the USA, the label Nigger (also referred to as 'the N-word') has been long assigned to a person of African ancestry who is thought to be of a lower social class and possesses a strong predisposition toward civil disobedience and failure, especially in comparison to White Americans (deCoy 1967). In his 2002 book, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, Harvard law professor Randall Kennedy offers etymology, examples of historical and present use, and attitudinal and behavioral characteristics commonly associated with the term. Derived from the Latin word for the color black, Nigger had become a familiar insult to enslaved Africans prior to the mid-1800s. Although the word has multiple meanings, it is used most often derogatorily by White supremacists to stigmatize what they view as a filthy, good-for-nothing cadre of hopeless Americans – Kennedy calls this *Nigger-as-insult*. He quotes the master of ceremonies at a White citizens' banquet in the 1960s who publicly proclaimed: 'Throughout the pages of history there is only one third-rate race which has been treated like a second-class race and complained about it – and that race is the American Nigger' (9). More than 40 years later, Blacks, especially Black men, continue to be caricatured as second- and third-rate citizens through the media, the preponderance of deficit-oriented discourse regarding our lives, and the inequitable distribution of resources, justice, and opportunity. Kennedy also notes that some Blacks use the term as 'a shorthand way of reminding themselves and everyone else precisely where they perceive themselves as standing in American society – the message being, "Always remember you's a Nigger"'(39).

While Kennedy (2002) cites several dozen examples of how Nigger has been used over time (including in over 4200 court opinions), he makes clear that the N-word is also a way of viewing a race of people – not just a racial epithet used to verbally insult them. Likewise, deCoy (1967) contends that beyond its insult function, Nigger is an actionable term employed to categorically subordinate Black persons. Put differently, a Black male student could be 'niggered' in various ways (e.g., being told that he is unlikely to accomplish much in life; that he is no good, just like the rest of them; and that being successful in school is an anomaly for people like him). Another example is how a White teacher responded to Malcolm X's articulation of his aspiration to pursue a career in law – she encouraged him to consider carpentry instead, a profession that was more realistically accessible by Niggers (Kennedy). Malcolm was niggered by his teacher's avowal of low expectations for his goals. A third example could be derived from Jenkins's (2006) article, 'Mr. Nigger: The Challenges of Educating Black Males within American Society', wherein she notes the following contradictions in education policy and practice:

> On one hand, the society espouses rhetoric of concern and desire to elevate Black males, but on the other hand, practices a policy of oppression, prejudice, and disregard. Put differently, the experience of the Black man in America seems to be one in which he is called 'mister', but is treated with a 'niggardly' regard. And the result is the positioning of Black males at the lower rungs of society and their experiencing underachievement in almost all aspects of life. (127)

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Continuing to claim an ethic of care for Black males without tending to racism and structural barriers to achievement and justice constitutes niggering.

deCoy (1967) predicted a certain group of educated Blacks would eventually proclaim they are 'Niggers no more' (95). Offered in this article is a critical race counternarrative on Black men who do just that – those who reject the ways they are niggered in scholarship produced about them and by educators who continually stigmatize them. My counternarrative is situated in the postsecondary educational context for three reasons. First, as evidenced in the next section, almost everything published about Black male collegians negatively portrays them as underachieving and unlikely to succeed. Second, young Black men who are not enrolled in college are probably thought to be more susceptible to niggering, while college matriculation is likely presumed to offer some sort of immunity to those who enroll. But, numerous examples confirm that niggering occurs in similar ways at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) higher education. And third, insufficient insights into how Black men productively refuse to be niggered have been offered in previous higher education research. Thus, little is known about psychological resistance and the sociopolitical strategies employed by those who consciously decide to defy racist stereotypes, exceed expectations, and offer more affirming views of their individual selves and the Black male collective.

Using Nigger instead of the euphemistic N-word was not compelled by some desperate attempt to add shock value to this article. Instead, being called a Nigger, especially by a White person, usually incites emotional hurt and a range of other injurious feelings within the insulted Black person (Kennedy 2002). It is possible that being continually treated like a Nigger engenders a stronger, more cumulatively aggravating series of responses than simply being called one. Protecting readers from the penetration of this word and all that is associated with it (historically and presently) seemed unfair to those of us who are persistently harmed by it in schools, colleges, and society. To understand, even partially, how Black men are niggered on college and university campuses requires some grappling with the very word that characterizes their experiential realities.

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Niggered males in college: a literature review

> The images created of Black men in our society often confine them to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure. In education, we have contributed to this negative portrait by the disproportionate amount of research that emphasizes remediation and disadvantage. (Fries-Britt 1997, 65)

Jackson and Moore (2008) similarly assert that most discourse on Black male school achievement focuses on deficits and advances a 'doom and gloom trajectory for these individuals in the educational enterprise … In the research literature, there has been little attention given to solving educational problems for [Black] males, but more emphasis placed on documenting it' (847–8). Although most of the scholarship Jackson and Moore cite is published in the K-12 domain, research on Black male college students has an analogous orientation. On its own, the almost exclusive fascination with problems encountered by this population reflects the act of niggering described earlier in this article. Specifically, anyone who takes time to read about them could confidently conclude that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their future is bleak, they all do poorly, and there is little that can be done to reverse longstanding

outcomes disparities that render them among the least likely to succeed in college. Presented in this section is a synthesis of what is presently known about these students at PWIs.

Black male collegians, like many other students of color on predominantly White campuses, are expected to experience psychological stress and have tumultuous college adjustment experiences (Hinderlie and Kenny 2002; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993). Low-expectations from their K-12 teachers follow them into college (Bonner and Bailey 2006), thus they often find themselves overwhelmed by the academic rigor of their courses and insufficiently prepared to meet their professors' expectations. In their study of the enablers of college student retention, Berger and Milem discovered that 'being Black [was] the third largest negative predictor of persistence' (1999, 657). Their inability to integrate into the campus because it is often so unlike their home environments is one of the main factors commonly used to explain Black student attrition. This college dropout dilemma is exacerbated by gender, as more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper 2006a).

Although they are unlikely to find supportive relationships outside their same-race peer groups at PWIs, Black men need them to achieve high levels of satisfaction with their college experiences (Strayhorn 2008a); those who are satisfied stand the best chance of persisting toward baccalaureate degree attainment. Also essential to retention is active engagement in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom. But unfortunately, Black men have come to be known as one of the most disengaged populations on college and university campuses. For instance, in his analysis of data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire, Cuyjet (1997) found that Black men devoted less time to studying, took notes in class less often, spent significantly less time writing and revising papers, and participated less often in class-related collaborative experiences than did Black female respondents to the national survey. Furthermore, Black women in comparison to their same-race male peers were more engaged in campus activities, served on more campus committees, and held more leadership positions at their institutions. For nearly a decade now, the Black male engagement problem has been a topic of discussion among administrators at national higher education conferences (Cuyjet 2006; Roach 2001; Schmidt 2008). Although there are many explanatory factors for these disengagement trends, one thing is known for sure: An insufficient sense of belonging at the institution stifles engagement and diminishes one's inclination to persist toward baccalaureate degree attainment (Bean 2005).

Black male students' sense of belonging at PWIs hinges in large part upon interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic groups (Strayhorn 2008b). Yet, their individual and collective belongingness at PWIs is threatened by the constant reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, Black male criminals from the local community who do not belong on campus, affirmative action beneficiaries who were undeserving of admission, and underprepared 'at-risk' students who all emerged from low-income families and urban ghettos (Cuyjet 2006; Fries-Britt and Turner 2001; Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007; Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). Even high-achieving Black male collegians are met with suspicion from professors who doubt their intellectual competence as well as White peers who pass them over in selecting group members for collaborative work (Fries-Britt 1997). Moreover, there is an erroneous assumption that

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Black male college achievers are socially disconnected from their same-race male peers and thus accused of 'acting White' (Harper 2006b), a hypothesis that has been repeatedly disproven in the K-12 education literature (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; Spencer et al. 2001).

At PWIs, niggering is also evidenced by the misperception that all Black men are the same and the inability of White persons on these campuses to recognize the different cultural backgrounds of Black male students. Harper and Nichols (2008) found tremendous within-group heterogeneity among the Black male undergraduates in their study. But a lack of institutional acknowledgment of these important differences led to a series of problems, including the transference of racist stereotypes about themselves onto each other; unproductive competition among them; and social distance in environments where same-race peer support was needed most. Harper and Nichols also found that two groups in particular, Black fraternity members and Black male student-athletes, were especially vulnerable to stereotypes and misperceptions. Despite their historical significance, the five national Black fraternities have become increasingly niggered over that past two decades by those who portray their members as violent murderers who beat Black male pledges to death (Jones 2004). Similarly, Black men who participate in intercollegiate sports (especially football and men's basketball, the two most financially lucrative sports on campus) are commonly thought to be intellectually inferior to their non-athletic peers and more interested in athletic accomplishment than academic achievement (Beamon 2008; Donnor 2005). One could easily summarize their status as Niggers with balls who enroll to advance their sports careers and generate considerable revenue for the institution without learning much or seriously endeavoring to earn their college degrees.

For the most part, the dominant narrative concerning Black men at PWIs is the same as in other sectors. As noted here, a niggered view of these students is continually perpetuated on campuses as well as in published research regarding their experiences. In light of what the literature reports, insights into the following questions are warranted: (1) Is there an overlooked population of Black male students who are not disengaged and academically underperforming; (2) if so, what are their experiential realities and navigational approaches at PWIs; and (3) how do these Black men resist niggering in its various forms on their campuses? The critical race counter-narrative presented later in this article was derived from a qualitative exploration of these questions.

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Methodology and methods

Methodology

Honoring a scholarly tradition exceptionally executed by eminent critical race theorist Derrick Bell (see Bell 1987, 1992), Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduce counter-storytelling as a useful approach to education research. They define this as a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter majoritarian stories (or master narratives) composed about people of color. Master narratives are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Blacks are hopeless and helpless) – such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways. Solórzano and Yosso note that research and theoretical models that seek to explain outcomes inequities and achievement differences in education often support majoritarian viewpoints through the constant amplification of deficiency

among students of color. As such, a counterstory 'exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color. Although social scientists tell stories under the guise of "objective" research, these stories actually uphold deficit, racialized notions about people of color' (23).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify three different types of counternarratives: Personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. The third was selected for use in this article, as it entails relying on data collected from multiple persons of color who have experienced a particular context or similar phenomena. Accordingly, composite stories are useful for representing the often disregarded experiences of a larger group through a smaller subset of 'characters' who represent the group. Solórzano and Yosso differentiate critical race storytelling from fiction in the following ways: 'We are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the "composite" characters we develop are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data' (36). Hence, data collected from persons of color are juxtaposed with research published about them by others to identify contradistinctions and offer insights into overlooked experiential realities. Additionally, to qualify as a counternarrative, various elements of critical race theory must be incorporated.

The counternarrative presented in this article is derived from a large, multi-campus qualitative research study focused on Black male college achievement. It challenges the master narrative that has been constructed for this group – the story of Niggers that is often reinforced through literature such as that reviewed in the previous section. Composite characters in the story reject commonly held assumptions regarding their limited potential for leadership and college success by describing resistant responses to niggering and their politically effective navigation of predominantly White educational environments. Theirs is not a story of deficits. Furthermore, the counternarrative offered herein advances the following elements of critical race theory summarized by Solórzano and Yosso (2002): *The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination* (namely gender stigmatization); *the challenge to dominant ideology* (meaning, Black men as Niggers); *the centrality of experiential knowledge* (as reflected in descriptions of their postsecondary navigational journeys); and *the commitment to social justice* (demonstrated through the empowerment of achievers – a subordinated and often overlooked racial group).

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Data source and research design

This article is based on findings from the National Black Male College Achievement Study, the largest-ever empirical research study of Black male undergraduates. Data were collected from 219 students at 42 colleges and universities in 20 states across the USA. Six different institution types were represented in the study. Only data collected from the 143 participants attending the 30 predominantly White colleges and universities were included in analyses for this article C.

This study was guided by the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry, which focuses on understanding and describing the 'lived experiences' of people who have experienced a similar phenomenon or been exposed to a common set of conditions (Creswell 2007; Holstein and Gubrium 1998). In this study, the phenomenon was being an actively engaged Black male college achiever (as opposed to a troubled, low-achieving Nigger) at a PWI. A phenomenological account gets inside the experience of a person or group of people and describes what participants have experienced,

Table 1. Participating institutions in the National Black Male College Achievement Study.

Institution type	College/University
Public research universities	University of Illinois Indiana University University of Michigan Michigan State University The Ohio State University Purdue University
Highly-selective private research universities	Brown University Columbia University Harvard University University of Pennsylvania Princeton University Stanford University
Private Historically Black colleges and Universities[a]	Clark Atlanta University Fisk University Hampton University Howard University Morehouse College Tuskegee University
Public Historically Black Universities[a]	Albany State University Cheyney University Florida A&M University Norfolk State University North Carolina Central University Tennessee State University
Liberal arts colleges	Amherst College Claremont-McKenna College DePauw University Haverford College Lafayette College Occidental College Pomona College Saint John's University (MN) Swarthmore College Vassar College Wabash College Williams College
Comprehensive state universities	Brooklyn College, City University of New York California State Polytechnic University, Pomona California State University, Long Beach Lock Haven University Towson University Valdosta State University

[a]The 12 Historically Black Colleges and Universities were not included in analyses for this article.

how they have experienced it, and their sensemaking regarding various effects relative to the phenomenon (Moustakas 1994). The researcher and readers of a phenomenological study should be able to say, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that' (Polkinghorne 1989, 46). Given that the master narrative on Black male undergraduates focuses almost exclusively on disengagement and deficits,

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understanding better what it is like to succeed in higher education was the aim of the National Black Male College Achievement Study.

Sampling and data collection

Criterion sampling methods were used in this study (Patton 2002). Administrators such as presidents, provosts, and deans of students nominated and senior student leaders (e.g., student government association presidents) helped identify Black male undergraduates who had earned cumulative GPAs above 3.0; established lengthy records of leadership and engagement in multiple student organizations; developed meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom; participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and summer research programs); and earned numerous merit-based scholarships and honors in recognition of their college achievements. These criteria were used because decades of research on undergraduate students clearly indicate that those who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities on college and university campuses are more satisfied with their experiences, have a higher likelihood of navigating institutional obstacles with success, and come to enjoy a more robust set of educational outcomes than do their peers who approach the college experience more passively (Bean 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Assuming these claims are true, it is then conceivable that much can be learned from accessing the narratives of actively engaged Black male student leaders on predominantly White campuses, a population about whom very little has been written in education research.

Each Black male achiever participated in a two–three-hour face-to-face individual interview on his campus; when necessary, some follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone. A semi-structured interview technique was used, which simultaneously permitted data collection and participant reflection (Patton 2002). Although standard questions and interview protocol were used, discussions often became conversational, thus allowing participants to reflect on their racialized experiences. Some interview questions pertained directly to resistant responses to racism and stereotypes, as well as participants' reactions to the niggering of Black men in society and on their campuses.

Data analysis

Several techniques prescribed by Moustakas (1994) were systematically employed to analyze data collected from interviews with all 219 participants. I first bracketed my thoughts and assumptions as I read each line of the participants' transcripts. Margins of the transcripts were marked with reflective comments regarding my initial reactions and interpretations. After bracketing, 166 recurring topics were identified and reduced to simple code words. Using the NVivo® qualitative data analysis software program, these code words were applied to sentences, concepts, and passages of text in each participant's transcript. This process resulted in the production of 166 code reports that captured insights into various aspects of the participants' shared experiences. An additional step included a written trajectory analysis statement (Harper 2007) for each of the 219 participants – how he navigated his way to higher education, what the critical moments were during his first-year adjustment period, strategies that proved most effective in responding to racist situations, and so on. These statements were

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comprehensive versions of what Moustakas calls textural summaries (*what* the participant experienced) and structural summaries (*how* he experienced the phenomenon), which are essential components of the phenomenological data analysis process.

For the purposes of this article, I consulted each participant's trajectory statement and highlighted relevant examples of educational experiences that counter the master narrative on Black male college students – anything concerning his academic achievement, the impetus for his leadership and engagement, his negotiation of support from peers and professors, and his productive handling of racist stereotypes was highlighted. In addition, I printed and read code reports on the following topics: Perspectives regarding the social condition of Black men, views on the status of Black male collegians, reactions to the representation of Black males in the media, the positive aspects of Black fraternity membership, the positive outcomes associated with intercollegiate sports participation (which only included perspectives from student-athletes in the study), and 11 separate reports pertaining to lived experiences with and responses crafted to specific types of stereotypes encountered on campus. The 16 code reports each included statements from participants across the 30 predominantly White colleges and universities represented in the study. These reports, along with highlighted text from the 143 trajectory statements, were used to craft a dialog between five composite characters in my critical race counternarrative.

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Researcher's positionality and trustworthiness

I am a Black man. Like others described thus far in this article, I have been niggered in schools, professional work settings, and various social milieus. For example, in tenth grade, a White male educator told me the following: 'You ain't ever gonna be shit'. While that statement was hurtful (and obviously inaccurate), his low expectations for my success were consistent with those possessed by most other White teachers who saw in me limited educational potential throughout my K-12 schooling experience. Moreover, I feel niggered whenever someone labels me exceptional (meaning, I am not like 'the rest of *those* Niggers'), when White people are visibly shocked to hear I am a faculty member at an Ivy League university, and each time I synthesize the deficit-laden scholarship that has been published on Black men in the USA. Given these and countless other lived experiences, I make no claims of objectivity in composing the critical race counternarrative that is offered in the next section.

Similar to the five composite characters, I too am continually insulted by the one-sided depiction of Black men as Niggers in the media, in research, and in the minds of Whites who have been afforded only one view of us. But unlike the 143 participants upon whom the counternarrative is based, my postsecondary education occurred at a Historically Black University. Thus, many of the navigational approaches and resistant responses they describe were unnecessary in the context I encountered 16 years ago. Notwithstanding this important difference and my rigorous execution of systematic analytical procedures, I recognize myself as one who also rejects the ongoing niggering of Black men. As an attempt to establish a reasonable level of trustworthiness, I emailed the counternarrative to 25 participants in the study who attended different PWIs. Nineteen responded (13.3% of the sample) to confirm my accurate characterization of their lived experiences, viewpoints, responses to racism, and navigational strategies; their suggestions for revision (all of which were minor) are reflected in the version presented in the next section.

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The counternarrative

Following the release of Professor Harper's book, *Black male student success in college*, an important convening was held in Philadelphia for the 219 men upon whom the book is based. The achievers, now all college graduates, were brought together to consider ways they could pool their social and political capital to collectively advance Black communities and strengthen Black male representation at the highest levels of leadership and policymaking in various sectors. Of the 219 who were invited, 158 were able to attend – Tyson, Corey, Khaseem, Michael, and DeSean were among them. Each of these men graduated with honors from five different PWIs just a few months prior to the event. They had not met each other prior to being assigned to sit at the same table during the opening luncheon.

Michael was the first to comment on how empowering it was to be in the same room with so many accomplished young Black men. 'Yeah, this is something that could've happened on our campus when I was in college, but never did', Corey remarked. Khaseem asked, 'Why do you think that is?' While Corey was taking a moment to reflect, Khaseem suggested that it was because the university Corey attended failed to even recognize there were smart, talented Black male achievers on the campus. 'Exactly', Corey confirmed. 'No one ever asked me or other Black male student leaders what enabled us to get good grades or what compelled us to take on leadership positions. Instead, they were spending all their time trying to figure out why brothas' were struggling'. Khaseem followed up by asking, 'You know that is racist, right?' Tyson jumped in and agreed with Khaseem's analysis. He too felt a unidirectional placement of institutional emphasis on failure only exacerbated the racist culture of low expectation that had long existed for Black male students. Tyson asked if anyone had been consulted by an administrator or professor on campus who attempted to pursue insights into what enabled him to be successful at the institution – no one could recall such inquiries.

DeSean made an important statement that steered the lunchtime discussion in a different direction. 'I refused to let them nigger me', he boldly proclaimed. Intrigued by this remark, Khaseem invited DeSean to elaborate. He told his tablemates that he felt Black men were all viewed as Niggers on his campus, but he refused to be treated as such. Thus, he immediately became involved in the Student Government Association and the Residence Hall Council during his freshman year. It was through these student organizations that he deliberately went about presenting a more positive view of Black men. DeSean offered additional examples of how he used his memberships and leadership in mainstream clubs and organizations to foster relationships with White administrators who had grown accustomed to viewing Black men as disengaged. Tyson confessed to using a similar approach and added that he purposely sought to engage younger cohorts of Black male students (usually freshmen), in hopes that the collective Black male image on campus would improve. Just before he graduated, Tyson even started a magazine similar to *Remix*, which is published by the Harvard University Black Men's Forum. Like *Remix*, Tyson's publication presented Black men as thoughtful, politically engaged, and socially conscious.

Khaseem didn't like the approach that Tyson and DeSean described. He asked, 'Do you really think that by you holding leadership positions on campus, publishing a men's magazine, and getting a few other Black dudes involved, that White administrators began to see you differently?' Before they could respond, Khaseem started

talking about his approach. 'I like what you said, DeSean, about not letting them nigger you. I had the same refusal'. But Khaseem went on the tell how he used the Black Student Union, the NAACP chapter on campus, and other activist groups to disrupt stereotypical views Whites held about Black men and other students of color at his institution. 'I was one of those dudes who called attention to racism whenever I saw, heard about, or experienced it firsthand on campus', he said. 'I wasn't interested in trying to show *them* some differentiated representation of Blackness. Instead, I sought to awaken their consciousness regarding their own racist miscategorization of me'.

'Right on my brotha', Corey exclaimed. He too immediately confronted racist stereotyping whenever it occurred. For example, he recalled an instance when a White faculty member was offensively shocked by a thoughtful contribution he made to a class discussion. Instead of leaving class with the psychological burden of wondering if the professor was so surprised because he didn't expect a Black man to have anything smart to contribute, Corey said he asked the faculty member right then and there why he was so visibly astonished. 'I used to do the same thing', Michael added:

> Whenever White students would say something that was even remotely racist or stereotypical, I would call 'em on it immediately. I refused to let them get away with it. I was also unwilling to be stuck with the emotional internalization of their stupidity. As a self-protective strategy, I confronted *it* without making it seem like I was confronting *them*, per se. I did this by asking questions like, 'why did you assume I would know where to buy weed? Or what made you think I was an athlete?' This was an effective approach that forced them to examine their own misconceptions about Black men; but more importantly, it protected me.

Michael went on to describe an event that Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity hosted annually that illuminated racist stereotypes experienced by Black men on campus. In addition to naming the stereotypes they had encountered, Michael and his fraternity brothers also shared strategies with the audience (which was primarily Black) about how to productively respond to White people who attempted to caricature them in racist ways. 'Oh, you were in a fraternity?', Khaseem asked. 'You sound surprised', Michael replied. 'Unlike the headlines you read about Black fraternities, mine added considerable value to my undergraduate experience.' He then elaborated on the educational benefits conferred to him vis-à-vis meaningful community service endeavors in which his fraternity was engaged; the social support he received from his chapter brothers, which was often very necessary given the extreme Whiteness of the campus environment; how his fellow fraternity brothers were role models for him because they were among the most actively engaged student leaders at the institution; and the sense of peer-imposed accountability he felt to make good grades. Regarding the last point, Michael noted:

> To be in my chapter, you had to earn good grades. If you got bad grades, it brought the whole chapter's academic profile down. The brothers in leadership weren't having that, which actually forced many of us to strive for the highest grades. Consistent with our fraternity's mission, we were a group of Black male achievers.

As a member of Omega Psi Phi, Tyson shared similar reflections on the numerous benefits associated with fraternity membership that have been overshadowed by negative press in recent years. He indicated that he and his chapter brothers were intentional about ensuring campus administrators, faculty, and other students understood

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that 'Omega men weren't a bunch of rowdy, violent Niggas'. DeSean jumped in to offer a similar perspective, but situated it in a different context. He was a college student-athlete, a football player to be exact. Reportedly, he refused to be mislabeled as a Nigga who came to the university only to play ball. Thus, he committed himself firmly to academic achievement and making the most of college beyond athletics. Although the majority of his teammates (including Whites) were not engaged in clubs and organizations on campus, DeSean saw this as an important way to protect himself from many of the negative outcomes that are often reported about student-athletes in general and Black male football players in particular.

'I'm impressed that you guys were so committed to positive representations of us as Black men', Khaseem remarked:

> I am just so sick of the way we are portrayed in the media and how we're niggered on college campuses. It is so tragic that we are continually oppressed by a discourse of deficit. Like you guys, I challenge this in various ways because I know there are smart, talented Black men all across America – in fact, look around … there are over 150 here in this room right now.

Khaseem's perspective was shared by Corey who also conveyed his disdain for the lack of visibility given to Black men like him and others seated at the table:

> Wherever I go, I make them see me. Not as the 'magical Negro' who stands out from the rest of them. But instead, as the Black male achiever who others attempt to hide in plain sight. I made sure they knew I had a 3.7 GPA – not because I sought to brag about it, but I wanted to contradict the widely held belief that Niggers don't get good grades. I agreed to speak publicly whenever I was asked to do so because they needed to know that Barack Obama isn't the only Black man who can talk intelligently. I didn't do this alone. I empowered other Black men on campus to rise up – we collectively decided we would be Niggers no more.

Discussion and implications

There are Black men like Tyson, Corey, Khaseem, Michael, and DeSean on every college and university campus. But as indicated in the counternarrative, their experiences are often overshadowed by the master narrative that amplifies Black male underachievement, disengagement, and attrition. Continuing to focus exclusively on the problems encountered by Black men and our deficits is racist – it only niggers us further. Each of the 143 participants represented through the composite characters agreed that solutions to some of the most vexing problems concerning educational achievement, fatherhood, and leadership in Black communities are possessed by those who achieve in schools and colleges, are responsible and loving fathers, and are impactful leaders in their respective domains. But yet, solutions are rarely sought from these Black men. Likewise, those who are members confirmed that Black fraternities continue to do much good for individuals and communities, despite the now dominant discourse regarding their negative attributes. Study participants who played on intercollegiate sports teams made clear there is no universal disregard for learning and bachelor's degree attainment among Black male student-athletes.

Data collected from Black male undergraduates at 30 PWIs in the national study offer these insights into the previously stated research questions: (1) There is an overlooked population of Black males on college campuses – they are academic achievers and student leaders who thrive inside and outside the classroom; (2) they

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often simultaneously experience both racism and success, which calls for a multifaceted navigational strategy that includes engagement in student organizations, meaningful interactions with supportive same-race peers, and the strategic publicity of their educational achievements to White persons who possess deficit views of Black men; and (3) these achievers resist niggering in its various forms through positive self-representation in campus leadership positions and the immediate confrontation of racist stereotyping whenever it occurs on campus.

Many perspectives offered in this study are consistent with Harper and Nichols's (2008) most salient finding that not all Black men are the same. Nevertheless, our experiences are often presented as the same in the literature – as troubled, oppressed, and hopeless. Scholars who undertake future research projects concerning Black men must deliberately counterbalance popular negative dispositions with achievement-oriented pursuits. In almost all the interviews, each participant indicated that no one had endeavored to understand how he was productively navigating the institution, what compelled him to be actively engaged and take advantage of institutional resources, which personal and institutional factors led to his placement on the Dean's List, and how he developed resistance to racist stereotypes that are often internalized in dispiriting ways by his same-race peers. These are important questions that are urgently worthy of further exploration. Educational responses to the problems that Cuyjet (2006) and others describe are likely to be half-baked, at best, if experiential insights are only derived from Black men who do not achieve. As long as educational disparities that disadvantage Black men (such as those reported by Harper 2006a) exist, studies that reveal their undercurrents and perpetuation remain necessary. But equally important and largely missing in social science and education research are published insights that also reveal enablers of equitable outcomes and Black male student achievement.

In the final chapter of his book, Kennedy (2002) discusses contemporary condemnation of those who use Nigger to insult Black persons. Regarding public exclamation of the N-word, he notes 'political prudence counsels strict avoidance' (136). Despite the fashionable disapproval of *Nigger-as-insult* in many contexts, acts of niggering remain commonplace in education and society, as reported by participants in this study and documented elsewhere in the social science literature. Necessary is greater castigation of educators who persistently stereotype and hold low expectations for Black male students in schools and colleges. Contributing to the cyclical reproduction of marginalization, disengagement, and outcomes inequities that disadvantage Black male collegians should bring about the same shame and consequences as being caught calling them Niggers. Meaning, those who *do* racist things to Black males and other students of color should be subjected to the same social scrutiny as those who publicly *say* racist things. Similarly, there should be something embarrassing about publishing only deficit-laden scholarship that depicts Black men as 'at risk', disengaged Niggers.

Acts of resistance participants described in the interviews would be unnecessary if White educators and administrators stopped stereotyping and stigmatizing Black men. That is, Black male undergraduates could focus more on achieving academically if they did not constantly encounter racist assumptions in college classrooms regarding their intellectual inferiority (Bonner and Bailey 2006; Fries-Britt 1997; Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano 2007). Likewise, the time and energy these students devote to recovering from what Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) call 'racial battle fatigue' can be more profitably invested into outcomes productive educational activities offered outside the classroom. While I agree with Bell's (1992) perspectives on the permanence of racism

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in the USA, I still wish to see oppressive stereotypes that distract Black male collegians from their academics replaced with higher expectations for their achievement, less shock when they do well or say something thoughtful, and lower tolerance for racist caricaturing of them by their White classmates. This is unlikely to occur if White faculty and administrators possess only one view of Black men – the view that is repeatedly presented in the literature, media, and public discourse. It would be unnecessary to proclaim we are Niggers no more if we were not niggered in almost every social domain, academic publication, and in the minds of many Whites with whom we interact.

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