



Widening Participation and the Experiences of Students of African descent studying in Higher Education: A study of Students at a Post-1992 University in England.



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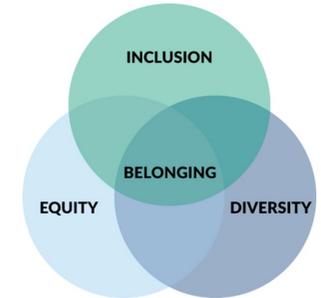
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Social justice, Equality, Inclusion, Social mobility



Background & Motivations

- Higher education (HE) has the potential to improve the lives of the disadvantaged by enhancing social mobility (Vignoles and Murray, 2016).
- Key reformers: Wilhelm von Humboldt (1810); Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852)
- BAME award gap (Miller, 2016)
- The 1963 Lord Robbins report
- The 1997 Lord Dearing Report
- The 2021 Sewell report: Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities
- The 2022 Augar report (The Post-18 Education and Funding Review)
- Substantial inequalities still persist throughout the student lifecycle



A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain

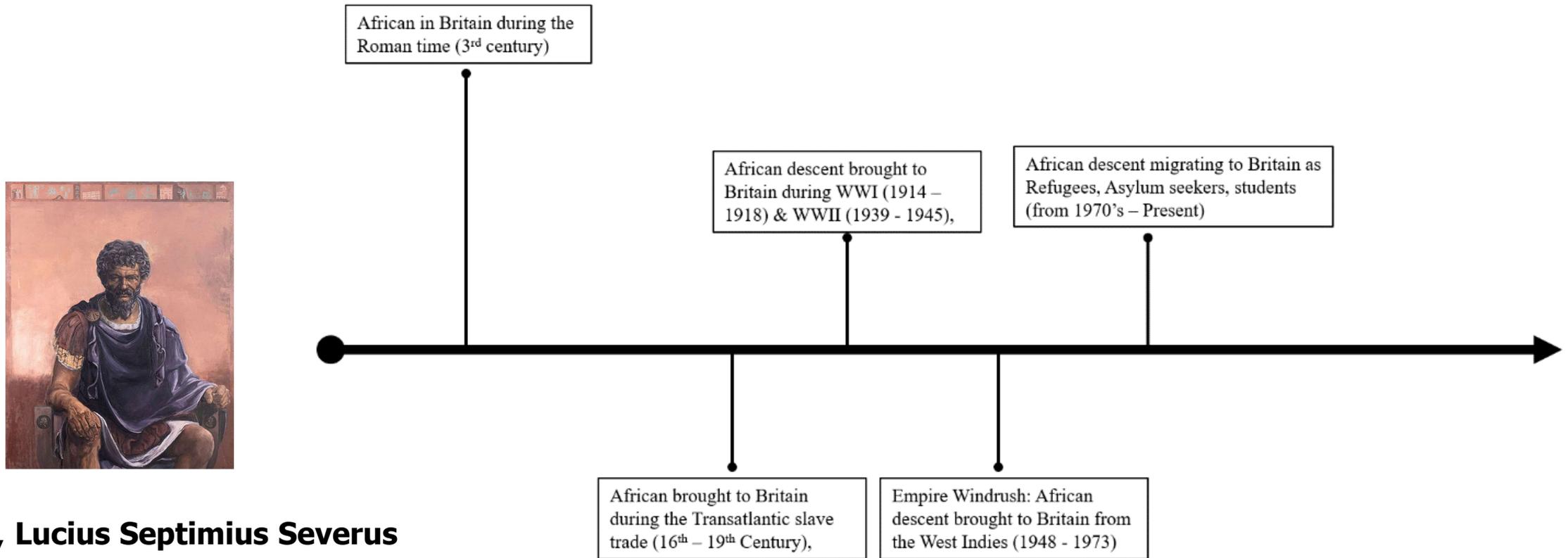


Fig. 1 A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain (Seuwou and Ajani, 2022)

Research Aims & Objectives

- The main objectives of this investigations are as follows:
 1. To identify the **challenges faced as African descent** students in higher education, including racism and other forms of discrimination.
 2. To examine students' potential experiences of educational, cultural adjustments (“**Third culture identity**”) and transitioning while pursuing their studies in higher education
 3. To explore their **strategies for coping** with the challenges in Higher Education
 4. To make policy **recommendations**, at the micro, meso and macro levels, on how to effectively achieve the objectives of WP in UK HEI for students of African descent and BAME community in general.

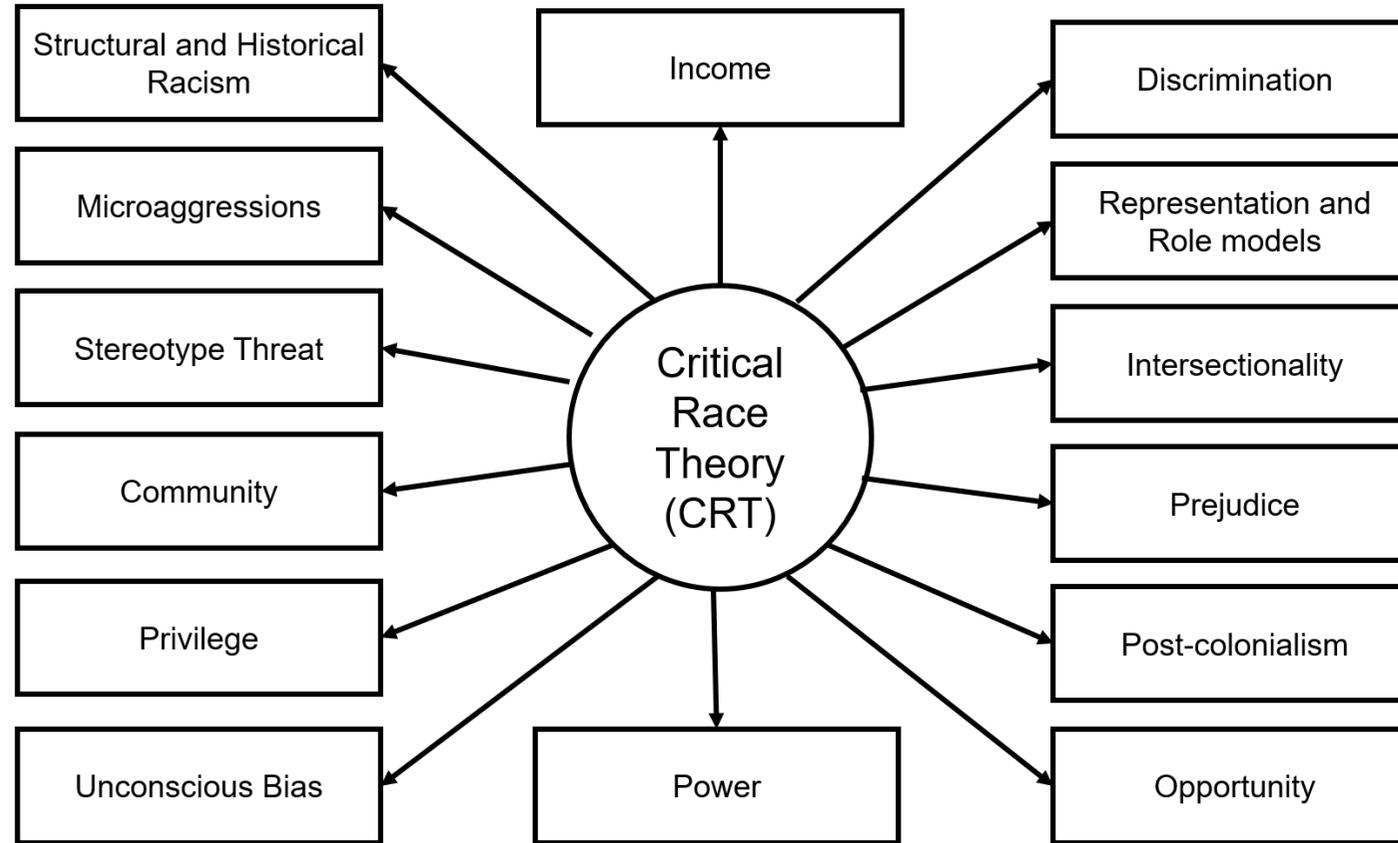
Stuart Hall (cultural theorist)

Jamaican-born British Marxist sociologist,
cultural theorist and political activist

Methodology Overview

- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**
- Concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience and the meaning of that experience as expressed by the individual in his or her own terms, without any pre-defined categories (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). – Borrowed from Psychology
- **Ontological position:** Social Constructivism
- **Epistemological position:** Interpretivism
- **Qualitative**
- **Sample Selection**
 - Purposive: African descent students (Post 92 Uni)
 - Homogenous - sharing similar characteristics
 - Size - 14 participants: data collection
- **Data Collection Method**
 - In-depth interviews with participants at all level (Undergraduate & Postgraduate level)
- **Ethical issues**

Theoretical Framework



a cross-disciplinary intellectual and social movement of civil-rights scholars and activists who seek to examine the intersection of race, society, and law

Fig. 2 An Illustration of the key building blocks of the Critical Race Theory
Adapted from Adrienne et al, 2017)

Theoretical Framework

(Habitus * Capital) + Field = Practice

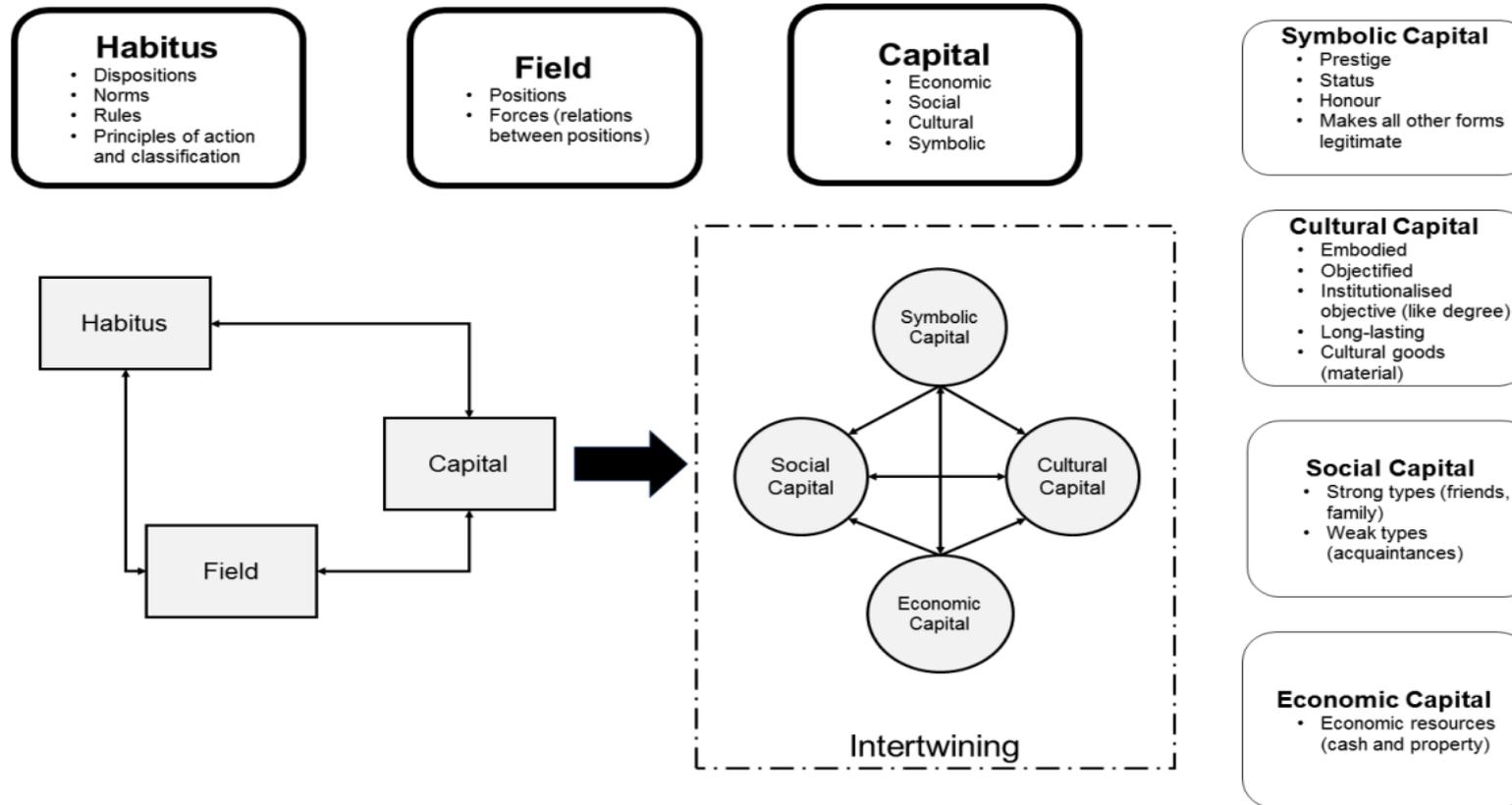


Fig. 3 Pierre Bourdieu Key concepts Adapted from Greenfell (2014)

Key Observations

- Black students find it **difficult to relate to the large proportion of course** content and references used on some programmes.
- Students sighted examples of what they considered as intentional and unintentional **'microaggressions' prior to coming to university** and during their time at the university.
- A noticeable **lack of Black staff representation** in most departments
- Academic support services **not diverse in staff**, however, very helpful to those who see them.
- Links between **family responsibilities, socio-economic background** and effects of **commuting** on attainment

Prior educational experiences affect their knowledge base

- Negative learning **experience** during their **primary** and **secondary** education impact on learning
- Not academically challenged enough compare to White pupils
- Low expectations of their academic abilities
- **Low aspiration**
- **Lack role models**
- Constantly **treated unfairly** by teaching staff and other white students – *White Privilege*
- Consistently experienced racism, **discrimination**, **micro-aggression**

Discrimination, racism and Self doubt

- Black students continuously experience, fight against and bear emotional scars from racism, which can lead to increased anxiety and poor mental health outcomes.
- Less favourable treatment due to ethnicity
- No perception of overt racism (note of caution)
- Modification of personal behaviour to 'fit' in
- White students or staffs talking over you.
- **Code-switching**



Socio-cultural needs unmet

Participants identified barriers that they believed impacted upon their ability to engage fully with the rigours of university study

All three barriers or factors can be explained through relatedness and autonomy.

1. Experiencing **dissatisfaction** with the **module and course content**,
2. Having **caring responsibilities** Engaging in **part-time employment**.
3. The mainstream **media narratives**

Links between family responsibilities, socio-economic background (“**black tax**”)



Effect of long Commuting

- Lack of accommodation locally
- Cost of accommodation
- Need to live with family member
- Care responsibilities

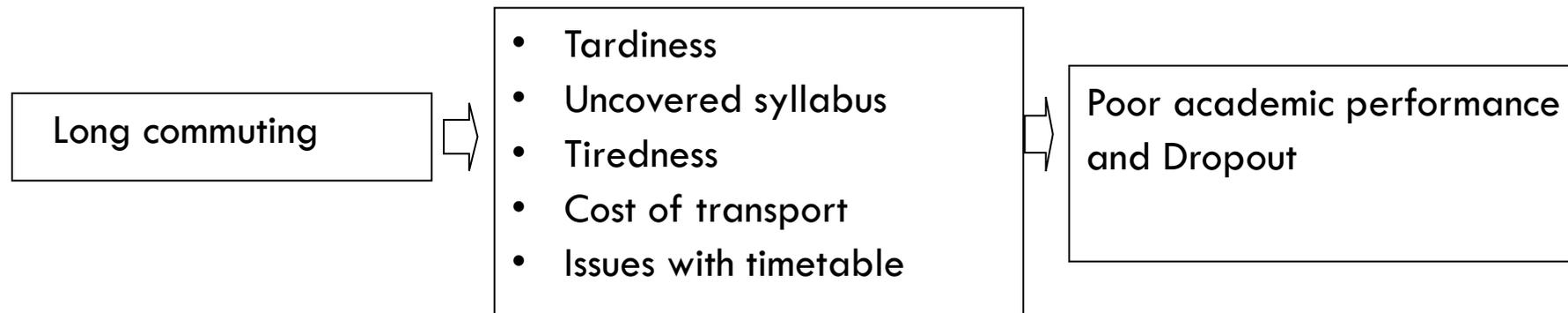


Fig. 5 Effect of long Commuting

Curriculum is not inclusive

- Bame students find it difficult to relate to a large proportion of course content and references used on some programmes.
- We all have some connection to the colonial legacy of the UK
- The need for decolonising the UK curriculum



*"If we were able to resolve **BREXIT** then we should be able to decolonise the British curriculum too" ~P Seuwo*

Rhodes Must Fall: [Cecil Rhodes](#)
Oxford University

Positive Action

- The research project and findings have been well received **across the institution**
- **Staff development** around Diversity, Equality and Inclusion
- Further **Investigation** of more specific groups within the '**BAME**'.
- Decolonisation and internationalisation of the **curriculum**
- Inform **University policies** and procedures
- Recommendation to join the **RACE Equality Charter**
- Opportunities for staff self-reflection and **open dialogue**
- Encourage **audit of module content** by curriculum teams where necessary

In Conclusion

- In order for us to move forward as British institutions, it begins with **acknowledgement** from all changemakers that **there is a problem**, then embracing the strategies for the implementation of effective solutions.
- We are an educational institution after all, let us begin by **educating ourselves**, understanding our **past**, thus we can better shape our **present** and **future**.

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*Thank you
for listening*

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