

The Journal of Higher Education

ISSN: 0022-1546 (Print) 1538-4640 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/uhej20

Crossing Borders and Telling Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of Asian International Students' Engagement in U.S. Racial Justice Activism

Yuriko Sato

To cite this article: Yuriko Sato (21 Aug 2026): Crossing Borders and Telling Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of Asian International Students' Engagement in U.S. Racial Justice Activism, The Journal of Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2026.2722487

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2026.2722487

Published online: 21 Aug 2026.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=uhej20

THE JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2026.2722487

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Crossing Borders and Telling Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of Asian International Students' Engagement in U.S. Racial Justice Activism

Yuriko Sato

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

ABSTRACT

International students' engagement in racial justice activism remains understudied. Guided by International Student Critical Race Theory (IntlCrit) and using narrative inquiry, this study examines how transnational and institutional influences shaped Asian international students' engagement in U.S. racial justice activism. Drawing on five illustrative participant cases and a cross-case analysis, the findings reveal three themes. First, participants developed transnational racial consciousness by connecting U.S. racial injustice to histories and inequalities in their home countries, leading them to reconsider their positionalities. Second, their engagement was shaped by unfamiliar protest norms, peer relationships, emotional strain, and immigration-related risks. Third, participants perceived institutional power as limiting their recognition within equity efforts and weakening their trust in universities. These findings demonstrate how racial justice activism is interpreted and reshaped across borders, challenging assumptions about international students' political passivity. The study extends student activism and CRT scholarship and highlights universities' responsibility to recognize international students' racialized experiences and political agency.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 1 October 2025
Accepted 18 August 2026

KEYWORDS
International students; racial justice activism; critical race theory; narrative inquiry; transnational racial consciousness

Recent waves of U.S. campus protests have highlighted the unique roles and risks of international students engaged in political activism. Disciplinary actions and visa consequences have fueled debates about institutional accountability (Drenon & Levinson-King, 2025; Moody, 2025). In 2025, the U.S. Secretary of State remarked that student visas could be revoked for activism, stating, "We are not going to be importing activists into the United States. They're here to study. . . . they're not here to lead activist movements that are disruptive" (U.S. Department of State, 2025, para. 49). Such a statement reflects a climate of heightened scrutiny and positions international students as temporary "guests" rather than racialized members of campus communities. Despite this precarious legal position, some international students still choose to exercise agency through advocacy and activism.

CONTACT Yuriko Sato sato5@wisc.edu

© 2026 The Ohio State University

While scholarship has long documented the historical role of student activism in driving institutional change — including the civil rights and peace movements of the 1960s and contemporary diversity-related activism (Rhoads, 2016) — international students remain largely absent from this literature. Although studies highlight how marginalized identities motivate social justice engagement (e.g., Linder et al., 2019), a review of identity-based activism among U.S. college students from 2000 to 2020 (Quaye et al., 2022) found no explicit focus on international students.

A small body of scholarship has examined how international and immigrant students develop critical consciousness and agency through race-based activism (George Mwangi et al., 2019; Kim, 2025), but their roles as racial justice actors remain underexamined. This gap is particularly salient for Asian international students, who have often been portrayed as passive in deficit-oriented research (Liu et al., 2022). Examining their activism reveals how they navigate institutional environments that celebrate diversity while giving limited attention to race and racialization (Buckner et al., 2021), raising questions about institutional responsibility in a shifting political climate.

This study uses narrative inquiry to explore how Asian international students make sense of their activism within the power structures they navigate. While narrative inquiry centers participants' personal stories, I draw on International Student Critical Race Theory (IntlCrit; Yeo, 2023) to analyze how these accounts are shaped by the interplay of institutional power, U.S. racialization, and participants' transnational backgrounds. By moving beyond individual description, this approach examines how Asian international students navigate their roles and experiences within U.S. racial justice movements. Specifically, this study poses the following research question: How do transnational and institutional influences shape Asian international students' engagement in racial justice-related activism in U.S. higher education?

Literature review

Student activism in the U.S. and the role of institutions

Research on student activism in U.S. higher education suggests that political engagement is deeply shaped by students' experiences. For many minoritized students, activism is not merely civic participation but a necessary response to lived experiences of exclusion and injustice on campus (Linder et al., 2019). Students are also often driven to activism when institutions fail to acknowledge their needs or validate their experiences (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Linder et al., 2019). Institutional power therefore plays a significant role in shaping the trajectory of student protest. However, studies also show that institutions often respond to student activism through statements, listening

sessions, or diversity initiatives, without structural change (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Lange et al., 2022). This disconnect between institutional values and actions may either discourage activism or fuel further movement, depending on the support offered by institutional agents (Lange et al., 2022).

Despite these insights, international students remain largely absent from student activism scholarship. For instance, they were not explicitly represented in a review of identity-based student activism scholarship (Quaye et al., 2022). Even among domestic populations, some racial groups are underexamined; particularly, the model minority myth frames Asian American students as politically passive, limiting their representation in the literature (Museus, 2021). Asian international students have similarly been framed through deficit-oriented research that can reinforce stereotypes of passivity (Liu et al., 2022). These gaps limit understanding of Asian international students' racial justice activism and how institutional responses shape their engagement.

International students' experiences with race/racism in the United States

Research has documented international students' experiences of racism and discrimination in the United States (e.g., Koo et al., 2023; Lee & Rice, 2007) and their evolving understandings of race (e.g., Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2017; Ritter, 2016). Fries-Britt et al. (2014) found that encounters with U.S. racial diversity and racism prompted foreign-born students of color to reinterpret perspectives shaped in their home contexts within U.S. racial hierarchies. Extending this work, Yao et al. (2023) showed how international students of color renegotiated race and racialization following racialized encounters and a critical campus incident. Ritter (2016) found that some international students from the East Asian region brought preexisting racial hierarchies and stereotypes, while Bardhan and Zhang (2017) found that students from the Global South experienced discomfort with U.S.-centric racial categories and ambiguity around their own racial identities. At the institutional level, university internationalization strategies often frame international students as sources of diversity while giving limited attention to race and racialization (Buckner et al., 2021). This framing can obscure their racialized experiences and limit their recognition as legitimate racial justice actors.

Emerging research offers insight into international and immigrant students' race-based activism, critical consciousness, and agency (George Mwangi et al., 2019; Kim, 2025). Using a critical consciousness framework, George Mwangi et al. (2019) found that Black immigrant college students' identities shaped their racial awareness and complicated their positioning within U.S.-based racial justice activism. As their consciousness deepened, they challenged stereotypes and linked U.S. racism to inequalities in their home countries. Kim (2025) illustrated how culturally mediated and transnational influences,

including values, prior experiences, and transnational role models, supported international students of color in developing agency in race-based advocacy. Although these studies illuminate the development of critical consciousness, identity, and agency across transnational contexts, they give less attention to how these processes interact with the institutional conditions surrounding activism. How transnational influences and institutional conditions shape international students' engagement in racial justice activism therefore remains underexamined.

Critical race theory and the transnational and racialized experiences of international students

Critical Race Theory (CRT), developed within the U.S. legal context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), has traditionally focused on domestic racial hierarchies, often overlooking international and foreign-born populations. Yet many international students are positioned as racial or ethnic minorities in the United States and face racism, nativism, and other forms of structural exclusion (Yao et al., 2019). While CRT provides a powerful framework for analyzing race and power in the United States, its U.S.-centered orientation limits its ability to fully capture how international students experience racialization across multiple national and sociopolitical contexts (Yao et al., 2019; Yeo, 2023).

Scholars have therefore proposed extending CRT beyond its original context. Christian (2019) advanced a global critical race and racism framework that conceptualizes race and racism as a global project rooted in global White supremacy. Similarly, Busey and Coleman-King (2023) argued that CRT must be reframed as a diasporic theory to address global conditions of anti-Blackness, colonialism, and White supremacy. In the context of higher education, Yao et al. (2019) integrated transnationalism and CRT in a critical review of scholarship on international student experiences, illustrating how institutional and transnational structures of power shape their racialization in U.S. higher education. Extending these transnational CRT perspectives, Yeo (2023) introduced the International Student Critical Race Theory (IntlCrit) framework to theorize international students' racialized experiences within structural and transnational contexts.

Yet, empirical applications of CRT in studies of international students remain limited. For example, studies have used CRT to examine international students of color's experiences of racism and exclusion in relation to mental health and microaggressions (Anandavalli et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2023). Notably, Liu et al. (2022) applied AsianCrit to examine Asian international students' racialized experiences during COVID-19, showing how students drew on cultural and community assets to resist racism through individual and collective strategies. While this work importantly advances CRT

applications in the study of international students, its analytic focus is resilience in response to racism. Less attention has been paid to how international students engage in racial justice activism under conditions of institutional power and transnational positionality.

Although prior scholarship has advanced understanding of student activism, international students' racialization, and transnational extensions of CRT, these strands of research have not been examined in relation to one another. This study addresses this gap by exploring how institutional power, immigration precarity, and transnational racial sensemaking shape Asian international students' racial justice activism.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on International Student Critical Race Theory (IntlCrit; Yeo, 2023) as its primary theoretical framework. Building on CRT and related frameworks such as AsianCrit, LatCrit, and MultiCrit, IntlCrit conceptualizes international students as a racialized student body and foregrounds the transnational, historical, sociocultural, and geopolitical contexts shaping their experiences. Unlike approaches focused on adjustment, acculturation, or mobility, IntlCrit centers race and racism within international students' experiential knowledge and recognizes that racialization occurs across and beyond national borders (Yeo, 2023).

Several IntlCrit tenets identified by Yeo (2023) are particularly relevant to this study. First, the tenet of *evolving international students' eyes* explains how international students' understandings of race are shaped by prior socialization in their home countries and evolve as they encounter U.S. racial contexts. This tenet informs the analysis of participants' transnational racial consciousness and evolving understandings of racism, activism, and solidarity.

Second, *acknowledging intersectional and transnational identities* emphasizes how international students navigate intersecting identities related to race, nationality, immigration status, language, and cultural background while also experiencing "transnational racialization," in which racial schemas, meanings, and hierarchies circulate across national contexts.

Third, the tenet of *using an expansive and inclusive historical approach* highlights how international students make sense of race, racism, and activism through the historical and sociopolitical contexts of both their home countries and the United States. This study also draws on anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016) to understand how whiteness and white supremacy operate as transnational and enduring structuring forces across national contexts.

Fourth, *centering race and racism within international students' experiential knowledge* foregrounds participants' lived experiences as legitimate evidence of racialization rather than merely issues of adjustment or acculturation. This tenet supports the use of narrative inquiry and counter-narratives (Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995) as forms of critical race praxis that challenge dominant assumptions about international students as passive observers of racial injustice.

In addition to participants' meaning-making processes, several IntlCrit tenets also inform the analysis of how participants understood institutional power and racialization within U.S. higher education. The tenet *recognizing and humanizing international students as a racialized student body* critiques the tendency to treat international students as monolithic groups or visa categories rather than individuals with complex racialized, historical, and sociopolitical identities. This tenet informs the analysis of participants' experiences with immigration precarity, marginalization, and perceptions of being positioned as "foreign" or "alien" within U.S. institutions.

Finally, IntlCrit's critique of color-evasiveness in the internationalization of higher education highlights how universities often promote diversity and global engagement while overlooking the global privileges and racialized hierarchies that shape international students' opportunities and experiences. In this study, this critique is considered alongside Whiteness as Property (Harris, 1993) and Interest Convergence (Bell, 1980) to examine how institutional responses to racial justice activism often protected organizational interests, dominant norms, and institutional legitimacy under the language of diversity and inclusion.

Methods

This qualitative study integrates narrative inquiry with latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine how international student activists construct their *landscape of action* (activism, goals, context) and *landscape of consciousness* (thoughts, emotions, sensemaking) through storytelling (Bruner, 1986, p. 14). Narrative inquiry, when applied through a critical lens, centers participants' meaning-making within social, cultural, and transnational contexts, offering insights to inform policy (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). While narrative inquiry centers individual cases, it also offers avenues for thematic exploration (Riessman, 2008). To examine underlying assumptions, social conditions, or ideological forces shaping participants' narratives across cases, I utilized latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This integrated approach centered participants' voices while critically examining sociopolitical and transnational forces, ensuring that both personal agency and structural conditions remained central to the study.

Data generation

I engaged in data generation rather than data collection to emphasize the relational process of co-constructing meaning between the researcher and

participants. This aligns with narrative inquiry, which foregrounds the collaborative nature of storytelling and prioritizes participants' sense-making of lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Mishler, 1995). In this study, data were generated through interviews and later used to reconstruct participants' stories during analysis.

Conducting interviews

This study received approval from the author's institutional review board (IRB). After IRB approval, I conducted semi-structured interviews to allow in-depth storytelling while maintaining flexibility for emerging ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview prompts addressed participants' experiences with race, evolving identities, engagement in racial justice activism, and reflections. Example questions included: "What motivated you to join U.S. racial justice activities?" and "How familiar were you with activist movements in your home country before coming to the United States?" Prepared questions guided conversations without dictating their flow, enabling me to embrace the *narrative impulse* (Riessman, 2008, p. 24), a natural urge participants have to share stories. I used follow-up questions to expand and clarify participants' responses (e.g., "Can you tell me more about what happened?" or "How did that experience shape your feelings or actions?"). When culturally specific expressions emerged, participants were invited to elaborate to ensure accurate interpretation during transcription and analysis.

Participants and sampling

Participants were international student activists involved in U.S. racial justice activism. Purposeful sampling recruited F-1 or J-1 visa holders with prior engagement in such activism, as their direct involvement enabled in-depth reflection on the phenomenon under study. Recruitment occurred through personal networks and snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Eligibility was confirmed through initial screening, where participants self-identified as having engaged in racial justice-related advocacy or activism.

The sample comprised nine international students from varied national, institutional, and disciplinary backgrounds (see Table 1). Eight participants were positioned as Asian within U.S. racial classifications and one as White/ethnically Arab, though several expressed ambivalences toward these labels. The predominance of participants categorized as Asian reflects recruitment networks and voluntary participation rather than race-based selection. As a result, the analysis primarily centered Asian international students' narratives to examine how they navigated racial justice activism within U.S. racial structures. Additional details are omitted to protect participant safety and confidentiality.

Table 1. Participant background information.

Pseudonym	Home Country	Degree	Fields of study	Institution type	Region
Benjie	Philippines	Graduate	Journalism	Public	Midwest
Chufei	China	Undergraduate	Journalism	Public	Midwest
Dalia	Egypt	Undergraduate	Education	Private	West Coast
Ethan	Canada	Graduate	Journalism	Public	Midwest
Hao	China	Graduate	Journalism	Public	Midwest
Mimi	Japan	Undergraduate	Social Science	Private	West Coast
Naomi	Japan	Undergraduate	Social Science	Private	West Coast
Rakim	Indonesia	Graduate	Education	Public	Midwest
Seiko	Japan	Undergraduate	Social Science	Private	West Coast

All interviews were conducted in English via Zoom and lasted 50–80 minutes. Five participants provided supplemental materials, including protest documents, photos, or social media posts. With consent, interviews were recorded for transcription and analysis. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and removal of identifying information. After each interview, I engaged in memoing for initial reflections.

Narrative reconstruction

Following transcription, I read each transcript multiple times to become familiar with participants' narratives. Narrators may share experiences non-linearly, emphasizing certain events and omitting others as they construct representations of themselves (Mishler, 1995). Thus, I prioritized contextualizing and sequencing experiences over objective reporting. Using excerpts, memos, and supplemental materials, I reconstructed cohesive narratives, preserving participants' voices through attention to their word choices and emotional tone (Riessman, 2008).

Supplemental materials enriched this process. For instance, one participant shared a coauthored protest demand document that helped illuminate their use of collective framing ("we"), relationship to institutional policy, and evolving agency in the situation. These materials clarified sequences and provided contextual insight into participants' accounts. During this phase, I remained close to participants' meanings by prioritizing their language and avoiding premature theoretical interpretation. This approach preserved narrative integrity while preparing stories for thematic analysis.

Data analysis procedure

After narrative reconstruction, I conducted latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover underlying meanings. Beginning with open inductive coding and in vivo coding, I captured participants' language and perspectives. Codes were grouped into thematic categories and iteratively refined by revisiting narratives across cases to examine recurring tensions and divergences.

I then incorporated IntlCrit tenets and related CRT concepts (e.g., interest convergence and anti-Blackness) to interpret thematic categories and the underlying assumptions and power dynamics shaping participants' narratives. For example, when participants described delayed institutional responses to incidents of campus racism, these accounts were interpreted through the CRT concept of interest convergence to examine how actions aligned with institutional interests. The analysis also focused on how stories were told: language, tone, and narrative structure. Analytical memos documented coding decisions, theme refinement, and interpretation.

Informed by narrative inquiry's three-dimensional framework (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), I also analyzed stories across time (e.g., pre-arrival experiences, evolving political awareness), place (home and host country contexts), and sociality (interactions with peers, faculty, and communities). For example, witnessing U.S. protests reshaped one participant's later critique of racism in their home country. Analysis was iterative, resulting in a set of cross-case interpretive themes related to racial consciousness, transnational meaning-making, activism, and institutional power.

To enhance trustworthiness, I used three strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, member-checking involved sharing reconstructed narratives and clarifying details via follow-up e-mails when needed. Second, triangulation across transcripts, participant-provided supplemental materials, and publicly available sources (e.g., news articles and online petitions) strengthened contextual interpretation. Third, regular debriefing with mentors and peers refined the analysis. For example, early interpretations framed participants' hesitation toward activism mainly as unfamiliarity with protest. Through debriefing, the analysis shifted to consider how participants were also negotiating solidarity, belonging, and institutional vulnerability, informing refinement of the thematic structure.

Researcher positionality

Narrative inquiry requires reflexivity regarding how meaning is co-constructed not only between researcher and participant but also between text and reader (Riessman, 2008). My role involved co-constructing meaning while balancing participants' voices with my own reflective understanding. I invite readers to consider how my positionality influences the research narrative.

My research is shaped by my experiences as an international student from Japan. Growing up as part of the ethnic majority, I had limited engagement with discussions of race and racism and benefited from certain privileges. Moving to the United States positioned me as an Asian international student and a foreigner. Experiences with racism deepened my awareness of racial diversity and systemic inequality in

both the United States and Japan. Initially hesitant, I later engaged in conversations about race with U.S. peers, shaping my interest in how international and immigrant students navigate race and act as agents of change.

My shared background with participants likely helped build rapport and trust during interviews. Yet, it was crucial to ensure that my experiences did not overshadow theirs. I used follow-up questions to avoid assuming shared understanding. Through reflexive journaling, I also reflected on how my supportive views of activism and admiration for participants' courage might influence my interpretations. Following Riessman's (2008) emphasis on reflexive narrative interpretation, I attended to tensions, hesitation, contradictions, and moments of unresolved thinking, ensuring activism was not framed solely in celebratory terms and that the analysis reflected participants' complex and evolving transnational experiences.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, recruiting self-identified activists may have excluded students who remained silent due to fear or immigration precarity. Second, participants' geopolitical and racial backgrounds introduced complexity that could not be fully explored. Differences in political, racial, historical, and sociocultural contexts may shape how students interpret activism and "rethinking home." Third, as this study focused on four-year universities, students in community colleges or vocational programs remain underexplored. Finally, data generation during a U.S. presidential election may have influenced participants' willingness to speak candidly.

Findings

The findings demonstrate how transnational experiences and institutional influences shaped participants' evolving understandings of race, positionalities within U.S. racial structures, and forms of engagement in racial justice activism. Their activism ranged from protest participation to institutional advocacy, often extending beyond issues directly affecting their own identity groups. Findings are presented through five participant cases to retain the complexity of participants' lived experiences, followed by a cross-case thematic analysis. These five participants were selected because their narratives reflect the central themes identified across the full dataset while also representing differences in experiences and contexts. The cross-case analysis incorporates perspectives from other participants to further illustrate these themes and capture a broader range of experiences.

Case 1: Benjie

Benjie, a graduate student from the Philippines, described his engagement in racial justice activism as a gradual and nonlinear "learning curve." Although he arrived with some prior knowledge of U.S. racial history, he quickly realized that "it will really take years to really understand how the U.S. actually deals with racial tension." Through coursework in political science and dialogue with peers, Benjie began to develop a deeper understanding of racial hierarchies and systemic inequality.

This growing racial consciousness was closely tied to his transnational perspective. Reflecting on his upbringing, Benjie critically examined the "white colonial mentality" in the Philippines, such as beauty standards privileging lighter skin. He explained:

> I have to be very mindful about my own biases as well, because like the Philippines was colonized by Spain and the U.S., . . . a lot of the biases exist in the Philippines, same with the U.S. . . . I had to unlearn a lot here.

Through this process of learning and unlearning, Benjie came to understand racial hierarchy and anti-Blackness as interconnected global systems, noting, "we can't just be blind and say the issues of Black people don't necessarily involve Southeast Asia."

These cross-national reflections also influenced how Benjie understood power within academic spaces, particularly the dominance of White scholars in knowledge production. This shaped his everyday practices, including how he approached academic work: "I need to cite sources from non-White scholars, . . . I need to find a lot of sources. So that's one way to rebalance the power, the academic power structure is specifically academic citation."

Inspired by the observance of Black History Month, he challenged anti-Black racism in Southeast Asian studies by submitting an article to the department's newsletter critiquing whiteness and colonial mentality in the field. However, his initiative faced pushback. A senior White faculty member opposed his submission, and even a staff member who had initially supported him withdrew that support, cautioning against moving forward. Benjie described:

> One of the officers . . . actually backpedalled and, because he's White as well and they're like, 'Oh no, we shouldn't do this.' . . . Apparently, that hit some of the nerves in that center. I was very careful that all my statements were cited. . . . But there was still pushback. It's hard to push the boundaries in terms of discussing racial whiteness in this field.

Benjie noted that the opposing faculty members were "White, older males." He perceived this as a defense of institutional power: "I had a feeling that, okay, he was protecting whatever the faculty [stood for]." In response, Benjie chose to put his name on the article as a statement of ownership: "I said, I'm willing to

put my name as a byline, just to say, okay, this is not an institutional view, this is my view." Inspired by his stance, other students joined him, and the article was eventually published. Benjie described the emotional toll of the situation. He shared, "It was so traumatic for me . . . this is what racial aggression really feels like." This experience led him to seek therapy to process the trauma.

Case 2: Chufei

Chufei, an undergraduate student from China, recalled being "not that sensitive to this [racial justice] topic" before entering college in the United States. Her awareness began to shift through exposure to a diverse student environment where she heard "stories about . . . microaggression or nonverbal discrimination." This shift became pronounced during the COVID-19 period, when news of anti-Asian violence, including the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings, left her feeling "terrified and really sad," deepening her awareness of racial violence targeting Asian communities.

This evolving awareness shaped how she interpreted a later incident on campus where a Chinese international student was attacked. In response, Chufei decided to join a protest rally against anti-Asian hate. Despite eventually taking a leadership role, she initially felt apprehensive: "I was very afraid to do it initially because I've never been in a protest before." Her hesitation reflected not only inexperience but also the sociopolitical context of her upbringing:

> . . . because of the policy and then just the social background, it's kind of hard to do, like a real protest or real activism [in China] . . . I feel like we are taught, if they grow up in China and they're probably taught to not really fight against power. Just, it's kind of just the culture.

Her reflection highlights how political restrictions and sociopolitical norms shaped her expectations of activism. Notably, she initially said "we are taught" but immediately corrected herself to "they're probably taught," a subtle shift that reflects her distancing from those expectations and an emerging sense of agency. Although this sociopolitical background initially contributed to her hesitation, the quick response of the Asian American community provided a sense of belonging. As Chufei described, "the Asian American community and international students came together," creating a safe and empowering space where solidarity helped her move beyond fear.

Chufei's engagement was further shaped by institutional responses. She recalled the administration's initial silence following the attack: "The university did not respond very quickly. No message and even [university's emergency alert system] were not sent to students." Faced with this delayed and limited institutional response, Chufei and her peers took matters into their own hands: "we [were] discussing how should we

protect ourselves." Her use of "protect ourselves" reflects her perception that the university's duty of care did not extend to Asian international students during a time of rising anti-Asian sentiment. She further explained that "we also had a petition to the university administration like they should have training and care more about the safety of students and address this kind of issues more quickly." Publicly available reports and an open letter corroborated Chufei's account that students questioned the timeliness and adequacy of the university's response and called for further action.

Case 3: Naomi

Naomi, an undergraduate student from Japan, developed her awareness of racial injustice through campus protests following an incident involving anti-Black slurs. She recalled:

> I knew about the basic issue of Black discrimination in the U.S., but I didn't really know … how deep-rooted or … how much historical trauma has been passed down generations. Like, as an Asian in this country, I could somewhat relate during COVID when I felt 'I can't breathe,' but I don't experience the daily fear of having my life threatened.

Realizing her initial understanding was "so shallow," Naomi reflected deeply on her positionality and the limits of fully grasping others' experiences:

> No matter how much I studied, I realized that I could never fully see things from the perspective of someone who is different race. There's always some part of their pain that I just never fully get. … This gap can never really fill, and it's painful.

Despite her sense of solidarity, Naomi struggled with confrontational protest tactics such as public disruptions and die-ins, recalling, "I really wanted to support them at first. But as things got more extreme, I started to feel like, 'This isn't gonna work out.'" She described feeling culturally distant from the protest styles and social norms surrounding the movement:

> People were super disruptive, people were outside the room and shouting. Or like, when administrators walk by, protesters would lie down on the ground on their path. It was really difficult for me to understand. I understand they really wanted to change the university … but I guess the way they went about, it was very, I don't know, very 'American' in a way? It was so intense, so I had mixed feelings.

Over time, Naomi also began questioning her level of involvement, explaining that "as a Japanese … [who] wasn't the primary victim of all this, I started feeling less motivated." Despite these reservations, she still participated in a die-in protest, partly due to social expectations: "there was this sense that if you didn't participate, you were the enemy." Participation thus became tied not only to solidarity but also to pressures to belong.

Naomi also perceived the institutional response as limited and ineffective. She noted, "I don't remember much support [from the institution]." Although the university initially "seemed very willing to listen," she ultimately felt that "nothing really changed, and things even got worse." From her perspective, racial justice concerns were "just suppressed and ignored." As the movement ended without a clear outcome, she was left with unresolved feelings.

Case 4: Ethan

Ethan, a graduate student from Canada, explained how his transnational background and the constraints of his international student status shaped his racial justice engagement. Having previously participated in protests in Canada, he explained, "I was fortunate that I came to the U.S. from Canada . . . it made me more familiar and maybe more comfortable . . . engaging in those kinds of activities [compared to some of his international peers]." At the same time, he recognized that "particularly in the U.S., the stakes [of engagement] feel a little heightened."

Moreover, Ethan initially struggled with what he called "imposter syndrome" regarding his place in U.S. racial justice conversations. Feeling a lack of confidence and fearing that he might make mistakes, he recalled: "I did have a lot of . . . maybe like inadequacy or like imposter syndrome around not understanding race . . . it took me a while to figure out what was the difference between race and ethnicity." As an Asian Canadian with South Indian immigrant parents, he felt like an outsider to the distinct U.S. racial dynamic, reflecting, "when I came to the U.S. . . . race feels different, so affectively, like the way in which my . . . body moves, how it's being perceived, I felt difference, more so than in Canada." Over time, Ethan developed a more nuanced understanding of race and inequality in the United States through coursework and conversations with activist peers.

Concerns surrounding academic and immigration precarity, however, shaped Ethan's engagement in activism. Reflecting on his participation in activism, he explained that "before I would have been a little more nervous or like unsure [about participating in protests] . . . now I feel more confident in my own rights." When participating, he now takes "roles that weren't very high risk" and "wouldn't engage in a direct action that would lead [him] to being arrested." He further elaborated on the precarity of his situation:

> Being a grad student here is a precarious experience. . . . if you piss off anyone at the university, you may not get hired, or you may not get the scholarships . . . If you lose your visa status, you have to leave the country.

These concerns led Ethan to approach activism cautiously, balancing engagement with the risks tied to his academic and immigration status.

Case 5: Hao

Hao, a doctoral student from China, described how his understanding of race developed after arriving in the United States. Although he had experienced exclusion as a queer person and as someone from mainland China studying in Hong Kong, he explained that race itself was "something like I only learned and only experienced having that direct experience after I came to the States." In the United States, witnessing residential segregation and hearing others' experiences with race exposed him to "what racial hierarchy, what racial relationships . . . look like." Reflecting on this, Hao described racial justice as "an analytical tool to understand what's actually going on in my mind," helping him recognize and unlearn "[his] own prejudices" and "racist conceptions" he carried growing up in China and later living in the United States.

These understandings shaped Hao's involvement in racial justice advocacy. However, he often felt emotionally isolated within these spaces. Reflecting on his upbringing, Hao noted that "Chinese people . . . we are educated to be apolitical," and because his advocacy work would be viewed at home as "a very dangerous thing," he never told his parents about his activism. Within activist spaces, he frequently found himself as "the only person with that particular set of intersectional identity": international, Chinese, queer, and a non-native English speaker. He also noted that he was often "the only or one of the very few international students" involved in these movements. Concerns surrounding immigration status further heightened this isolation. Hao explained, "I need to constantly worry about my visa and hostile policy against international students . . . [which] would not be a consideration for domestic students or anyone with a citizenship."

Although Hao participated actively behind the scenes as a publicity chair and campaign organizer, he intentionally avoided public visibility. He explained, "I told [other organizers] explicitly I can't be the spokesperson for you like, I can't get my face out of there because basically the university holds my immigration papers." Expressing his limited confidence in institutional support for international students, Hao added:

> I am less confident in any university's goodwill towards international students. . . . they do hold our immigration papers hostage. They would revoke our immigration papers if they think we participated in some form of protest that does not align with their vision.

He further critiqued institutional systems that obscured the racialized experiences of international students by categorizing them not by race but as "alien," making it seem that "our race does not matter. . . . [This is] basically describing your capacity to participate in social change, in institutional social change." Hao also argued that international students "don't really have this institutional qualification . . . or we are not recognized in certain ways."

Over time, Hao became emotionally exhausted by both institutional inequities and the dynamics within U.S. activist spaces. Reflecting on organizing culture "especially in the United States," he described "such a big emphasis on injustice and suffering . . . It's almost like a competition over who suffered the most. . . . I don't get any energy from that." His deep involvement also made him increasingly aware of the limits of change: "I know too much, I see too much. It's really disheartening." Faced with this exhaustion, Hao pivoted toward a self-protective stance: "I don't like fighting. . . . my strategy for now is like I need to pick my battles."

Cross-case analysis

While each participant's narrative reflected distinct experiences, their accounts revealed shared patterns and tensions related to racial consciousness, transnational influences, and institutional power. Drawing on IntlCrit (Yeo, 2023), the following cross-case analysis examines how these dynamics shaped participants' understandings of racism, activism, and the role of universities.

Evolving racial consciousness across transnational contexts

Participants' racial consciousness evolved as they increasingly understood racism as a structural, historical, and transnational phenomenon. Institutional experiences — such as coursework, campus incidents, and peer dialogue — reshaped their understandings of race and inequality in the United States. Participants interpreted these encounters through their evolving positionalities within U.S. racial contexts and sociocultural understandings shaped in their home countries, contributing to processes of transnational racialization and deeper reflections on race, identity, and inequality across national contexts.

Chufei, who initially described herself as "not that sensitive" to racial dynamics, explained how exposure to conversations about race in college and anti-Asian violence during COVID-19 led her to recognize her positionality as a racialized individual in the United States. While Chufei's awareness emerged through anti-Asian violence that felt personal, Naomi described how campus racial justice protests revealed the historical roots of anti-Black racism. She reflected on "how [her] understanding was so shallow" and the difficulty of fully understanding experiences outside her own positionality. Ethan also described feeling "imposter syndrome" and uncertainty about discussing race in U.S. contexts. As an Asian Canadian, he reflected on how race "feels different" in the United States, leading him to reconsider how racialization operated across national contexts. A distinct yet parallel process emerged for Dalia, a student from Egypt and the only non-Asian participant in the study. Becoming "the minority of minorities" as the only Arab Muslim student in many classrooms, Dalia reflected on how arriving in the United States

reshaped her understanding of race and identity. She explained, "Before coming to the U.S., the idea of race was not important for me. Because in Egypt, . . . we're just human," illustrating how race became more salient in everyday life after moving to the United States.

Some participants connected U.S. racial dynamics to broader global and colonial histories. Hao described racial justice as "an analytical tool" that helped him recognize racial hierarchies in the United States and "racist conceptions" shaped by his upbringing in China. Similarly, Benjie became more aware of the "white colonial mentality" embedded in the Philippines, realizing that "a lot of the biases exist in the Philippines, same with the U.S. . . . I had to unlearn a lot here." Through this process of learning and unlearning, participants came to understand racial inequality as not confined to the United States but part of interconnected global structures.

Outside of the five presented cases, Rakim, a graduate student from Indonesia, also described how seminars on race and colonialism helped him reinterpret racial stereotypes he had learned in his home context. Reflecting on anti-Black stereotypes in Indonesia, he connected them to "many White men heroes in American pop culture and white centric media" that reinforced racialized stereotypes globally. Rakim came to understand racism as "a product of the consequences of the historical oppression, something that affects both the U.S. and other countries," framing racism as a transnational and historically rooted system. Another participant, Mimi, an undergraduate student from Japan, described how a campus racial incident and peer dialogue reshaped her understanding of racism beyond interpersonal "misunderstanding," revealing what she described as a "whole hidden side to American history." Upon returning to Japan, however, she realized that anti-Black narratives also circulated there. After seeing distorted portrayals of Black Lives Matter protests in Japan, she explained that she "felt like a strong responsibility to share what [she has] learned" about systemic racism with her family and friends. Participants' narratives illustrate IntlCrit's tenet of *evolving international students' eyes*, as they reinterpreted U.S. racial encounters through transnational and historical lenses. For some, this evolving consciousness also prompted a growing sense of responsibility to address racial injustice across national contexts.

Negotiating engagement in racial justice activism

While participants developed growing awareness of racial injustice, this consciousness did not translate straightforwardly into activism. Instead, participants described navigating hesitation, uncertainty, and emotional strain as they negotiated whether and how to participate in racial justice activism within unfamiliar cultural, institutional, and political contexts.

For several participants, activism initially felt culturally unfamiliar and emotionally uncomfortable. For instance, Chufei connected her initial fear

of protesting to Chinese sociopolitical norms, explaining that people are often "taught to not really fight against power," a sentiment similarly echoed by Hao, who reflected that "we are educated to be apolitical." Naomi, meanwhile, felt culturally distant from confrontational, "very American" protest tactics, while navigating pressures to demonstrate solidarity. Seiko, another participant from Japan, similarly felt that public disruption conflicted with her value of social harmony and desire to avoid "chaos." Yet, facing "really intense pressure" from domestic peers, she joined the silent march with unresolved ambivalence: "When we were marching, there was a part of me that was wondering, if what we were doing was really the right thing." The pressure experienced by Naomi and Seiko highlights tensions between unfamiliar protest norms and prior social expectations surrounding harmony, conflict avoidance, and community belonging.

Beyond initial hesitation about activism, participants also described the emotional and structural challenges of sustaining engagement over time. For Benjie, activism involved difficult negotiations surrounding visibility, institutional support, and emotional exhaustion. Despite facing institutional pushback, he publicly claimed ownership of his critique, a process that became emotionally draining over time. Benjie's experience reflects racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004), illustrating how international students may also experience emotional exhaustion when confronting institutional whiteness and systemic inequities. Hao similarly described sustained activism as emotionally exhausting, shaped by transnational political pressures, cultural isolation, and immigration precarity. Over time, this exhaustion led him toward a more self-protective approach to activism: "I need to pick my battles." Ethan's narrative also shows how vulnerabilities related to immigration status shaped the boundaries of his engagement. Although familiar with activism in Canada, Ethan explained that the "stakes feel a little heightened" in the United States, leading him to avoid any "direct action that would lead to [him] being arrested." For participants like Ethan and Hao, activism became an ongoing negotiation between activist commitments and the structural vulnerabilities associated with international student status.

These moments of hesitation and strain should not be understood simply as a lack of commitment to racial justice. Institutional environments, peer relationships, transnational socialization, cultural understandings of protest, and the immigration-related precarity associated with international student status all influenced whether and how participants engaged in activism. Consistent with IntlCrit's emphasis on intersectional and transnational identities, participants' approaches to activism were not fixed but continually shaped as they negotiated responsibility, belonging, solidarity, and risk within U.S. higher education.

Perceptions of institutional power: whiteness, interest convergence, and belonging

Participants offered diverse views of their universities' roles within racial justice movements and campus responses to racism. For international students, immigration precarity compounded these dynamics. Across narratives, institutional power shaped participants' sense of safety and belonging, their trust in universities, and their approaches to activism.

Chufei and Naomi both described growing distrust toward university responses during moments of racial tension and crisis. Following an attack on a Chinese international student that raised broader concerns about anti-Asian violence, Chufei recalled how students were left to "protect ourselves" in the absence of a timely institutional response, leading them to organize a petition demanding greater institutional attention to Asian student safety. Amid student organizing and growing media coverage, the university expanded its response as the incident gained public visibility. The timing and limited nature of this response reflect interest convergence. Institutional attention increased when student demands aligned with the university's reputational interests, suggesting that the response was shaped not solely by a commitment to the immediate safety of marginalized students. Naomi similarly described feeling unsupported during a campus racial conflict involving anti-Black slurs. Although the university initially "seemed very willing to listen," Naomi ultimately felt that "nothing really changed," contributing to distrust and a campus climate where racial justice concerns were "suppressed and ignored." Their experiences illustrate how racialized campus tensions and limited institutional support contributed to insecurity and weakened trust among international students navigating racial justice movements.

Benjie and Hao both described how institutional structures shaped whose perspectives were recognized as legitimate within racial justice and equity efforts. Benjie's "traumatic" encounter with departmental resistance occurred after critiquing anti-Black racism within Southeast Asian studies. Cautioned against moving forward, he publicly separated his critique from the institution, emphasizing, "this is not an institutional view, this is my view." His experience reflects how advocacy can be constrained by dominant White epistemologies. Likewise, Hao critiqued institutional data systems that categorized international students not by race but as "alien," making it seem that "[international students'] race does not matter." He argued that international students consequently lack "institutional qualification" and are "not recognized in certain ways." Hao's reflections illustrate IntlCrit's critique of color-evasiveness and its emphasis on recognizing international students as a racialized student body, showing how treating them primarily through visa categories may not only obscure their racialized experiences but also influence whether they are recognized as legitimate participants in institutional equity efforts and racial justice advocacy.

Hao's and Ethan's narratives further revealed how immigration precarity shaped perceptions of university power and the risks associated with activism. Ethan described the "precarious experience" of being an international student, explaining that "if you lose your visa status, you have to leave the country." Similarly, Hao's description that the university "holds [his] immigration papers hostage" reflected his perception of institutional control over his legal presence. The concerns described by Ethan and Hao resonate with incidents on U.S. campuses where international students reportedly faced visa revocations for participating in protests (Drenon & Levinson-King, 2025). Although universities do not directly control visa decisions, participants perceived them as holding significant power over students' legal and social presence in the United States.

Participants' narratives reveal complex perceptions of universities' roles in addressing racial justice and shaping student engagement. Across narratives, whiteness, interest convergence, and perceived institutional power influenced whether activism was supported, ignored, or constrained. Their experiences also reveal tensions between universities' stated commitments to racial justice and practices that at times left international students feeling vulnerable, unsupported, or unrecognized within institutional equity efforts.

Discussion

This study offers a transnational analysis of how Asian international students in U.S. higher education engaged in racial justice activism and interpreted institutions' roles within these movements. Using narrative inquiry, it demonstrates that participants in the present study were not passive observers but active interpreters of such movements. This challenges deficit-oriented stereotypes of Asian international students as passive (Liu et al., 2022).

Participants arrived in the United States with existing cultural frameworks and transnational understandings that shaped how they interpreted U.S. racial realities. This process aligns with prior scholarship on how international students' existing cultural and transnational understandings shape their racial learning, sensemaking, and negotiation of racialization in the United States (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2017; Yao et al., 2023). Further, building on research examining immigrant and international students' evolving critical consciousness and agency (George Mwangi et al., 2019; Kim, 2025), the present study suggests that Asian international students may translate such understandings into varied forms of advocacy and activism while navigating transnational positionalities, cultural expectations, emotional strain, and immigration precarity. In doing so, this study contributes to student activism scholarship by centering international students' experiences, a focus that has received limited attention, as reflected in Quaye et al.'s (2022) review of identity-based student activism scholarship.

This study also contributes to empirical applications of CRT and IntlCrit (Yeo, 2023) in international higher education. Prior research using CRT and related frameworks has examined international students' racialized experiences (Anandavalli et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2023) and resilience (Liu et al., 2022). In contrast, the present study centers how participants engaged in racial justice activism under conditions of institutional power and transnational positionality. Consistent with IntlCrit, participants interpreted their advocacy through intersectional and transnational identities, illustrating that their engagement in activism cannot be understood apart from their legal and sociocultural positions. These findings further demonstrate how their activism was shaped not only by racialized experiences but also by the ways they negotiated belonging, vulnerability, and commitments to racial justice within institutional and transnational systems of power.

For international students, universities can serve as important sites where U.S. racial dynamics are encountered and interpreted (Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2017; Yao et al., 2023) and imposed racial categories are negotiated and resisted (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017). The present study builds on this work by showing how participants also contested racial and institutional power through activism. Even when institutions expressed support for racial justice, participants often perceived their responses as delayed, limited, or shaped by organizational interests rather than oriented toward structural change, consistent with prior scholarship on the limitations and complexities of institutional responses to student activism (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Lange et al., 2022). However, participants' temporary legal status and immigration precarity added another layer to these institutional dynamics, as universities were often perceived not only as educational spaces but also as central actors connected to broader systems of state control and surveillance. While prior research highlights a disconnect between institutional portrayals of diversity and attention to international students' racialization (Buckner et al., 2021), the present study extends these insights by revealing how such institutional positioning shaped participants' engagement in activism and constrained their trust in universities.

Implications

These findings have several implications for institutional practice and policy. Participants' engagement in activism reflected identity negotiation and transnational reflection while also contributing to campus conversations about race and inequality, demonstrating that international students are already participants in campus racial justice efforts. Yet, when international students are viewed primarily as temporary visitors or through administrative and immigration categories (e.g., "aliens"), their racialized experiences and activism can become obscured within institutional equity frameworks. Institutional leaders

must therefore recognize international students' racialized experiences and political agency and include them as key stakeholders in decisions concerning equity and civic engagement.

Moments of racialized crisis shaped students' trust in institutional responses. Delayed or limited communication may be experienced as minimizing racialized harm. University leaders should establish transparent response protocols clarifying investigative processes, communication strategies, and available support. Responsibility for responding to racialized crises affecting international students should not rest solely with international student offices. Effective responses require campus-wide coordination across student affairs, academic units, and senior leadership.

Faculty and academic units also play a critical role. Coursework addressing race, inequality, and broader social and political issues, along with peer discussions, supported participants' capacity to engage by providing language, confidence, and relational space. Such learning environments can foster critical consciousness and social justice commitments (Museus, 2021). Integrating global perspectives may deepen this engagement. Student affairs and international student offices should consider programming that acknowledges the intersection of immigration status and racial identity. Structured dialogue spaces, critical consciousness workshops, mentorship opportunities, and advocacy education can support international students in navigating both U.S.-specific and transnational dimensions of social justice. Intentional spaces for cross-cultural dialogue, especially between international students and domestic students of color, may promote reciprocal learning and counter-storytelling while deepening collective understanding of structural oppression.

Finally, the broader policy climate presents growing challenges. Reported cases of visa revocation associated with protest participation and broader changes in immigration policy have created a precarious environment for civic and political engagement in U.S. higher education (Drenon & Levinson-King, 2025; Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration [Presidents' Alliance], 2025). These developments highlight the urgent need for institutional accountability and proactive measures to support international students. Although universities do not control immigration law, they shape international students' perceived safety and participation. Institutions should protect international students' freedom of speech by advocating for policies that safeguard their rights and legal status and adopting internal protections against retaliation or surveillance. Doing so requires institutions to move beyond viewing activism solely as disruption and recognize it as a form of engagement and an expression of critical agency (Linder et al., 2019; Museus, 2021). Such engagement can serve as a powerful site of learning that shapes students' global perspectives and, in turn, contributes to knowledge exchange and social transformation in both host and

home societies. Institutional leaders should also consider how disciplinary actions may affect students' immigration status and create a chilling effect on their political engagement. Such a climate may weaken institutions' ability to attract international students, with lasting consequences for U.S. higher education and surrounding communities (Presidents' Alliance, 2025).

Implications for future research

Future studies could examine variation by students' education level, gender identity, academic field (e.g., STEM), and length of stay in the United States to better understand differences in racial consciousness and political engagement. Comparative studies and institutional case studies across different institution types (e.g., two- or four-year institutions and public or private institutions) and different geographic regions may deepen understanding of how campus environments shape international student engagement. Researchers could also examine how international students navigate political engagement after returning home and whether transnational racial consciousness informs their civic roles or career choices.

Conclusion

Although international students are often positioned as temporary guests within U.S. higher education, this study highlights how participants exercised political agency by engaging in racial justice activism. Their engagement was shaped by the interplay of transnational experiences, encounters with U.S. racial structures, and institutional contexts, influencing how they understood race, negotiated their positionalities, and acted in solidarity beyond their own identity groups. These narratives challenge deficit-oriented assumptions by demonstrating how Asian international students in this study acted as active contributors to and key stakeholders in racial justice efforts on U.S. campuses. Their stories ultimately illustrate how racial justice activism crosses borders and is continually interpreted and reshaped through students' transnational lives.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Weijia Li for his unwavering support, encouragement, and mentorship during the development of this study. I also appreciate the JHE editorial team and the anonymous reviewers for their patience, thoughtful engagement, and constructive feedback in strengthening this manuscript. Most importantly, I am deeply grateful to the participants for trusting me with their stories and openly sharing their experiences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Yuriko Sato http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1298-9894

References

Anandavalli, S., Borders, L. D., & Kniffin, L. E. (2021). "Because here, White is right": Mental health experiences of international graduate students of color from a critical race perspective. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *43*(3), 283–301. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-021-09437-x

Bardhan, N., & Zhang, B. (2017). A post/decolonial view of race and identity through the narratives of U.S. international students from the Global South. *Communication Quarterly*, *65*(3), 285–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1237981

Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, *93*(3), 518–533. https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.

Buckner, E., Lumb, P., Jafarova, Z., Kang, P., Marroquin, A., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Diversity without race: How university internationalization strategies discuss international students. *Journal of International Students*, *11*(S1), 32–49. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11iS1.3842

Busey, C. L., & Coleman-King, C. (2023). All around the world same song: Transnational anti-Black racism and new (and old) directions for critical race theory in educational research. *Urban Education*, *58*(6), 1327–1354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920927770

Christian, M. (2019). A global critical race and racism framework: Racial entanglements and deep and malleable whiteness. *Sociology of Race & Ethnicity*, *5*(2), 169–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218783220

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor & E. Graue (Eds.), *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp. 166–179). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203813324

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ggjjn3

Drenon, B., & Levinson-King, R. (2025, April 18). *Anxiety at US colleges as foreign students are detained and visas revoked*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20xq5nd8jeo

Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory into Practice*, *55*(1), 11–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1116852

Fries-Britt, S., George Mwangi, C. A., & Peralta, A. M. (2014). Learning race in a U.S. context: An emergent framework on the perceptions of race among foreign-born students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *7*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035636

George Mwangi, C. A., Daoud, N., Peralta, A., & Fries-Britt, S. (2019). Waking from the American dream: Conceptualizing racial activism and critical consciousness among black immigrant college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *60*(4), 401–420. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0037

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, *106*(8), 1707–1791. https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787

Hoffman, G. D., & Mitchell, T. D. (2016). Making diversity "everyone's business": A discourse analysis of institutional responses to student activism for equity and inclusion. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *9*(3), 277–289. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000037

Kim, S. (2025). Transnational resilience: Exploring international students' agency in response to systemic racism in U.S. higher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *38*(6), 810–825. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2024.2416709

Koo, K. K., Yao, C. W., & Gong, H. J. (2023). "It is not my fault": Exploring experiences and perceptions of racism among international students of color during COVID-19. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 284–296. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000343

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *97*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104

Lange, A. C., Quaye, S. J., Linder, C., & Evans, M. E. (2022). Relationships between institutional agents and student activists. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *97*(5), 616–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2022.2125761

Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, *53*(3), 381–409. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Linder, C., Quaye, S. J., Stewart, T. J., Okello, W. K., & Roberts, R. E. (2019). "The whole weight of the world on my shoulders": Power, identity, and student activism. *Journal of College Student Development*, *60*(5), 527–542. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0048

Liu, K., Miller, R., Pollard-Durodola, S. D., & Ping, L. (2022). Racism and resilience: Counter-narratives of Asian international college students in the age of COVID-19. *The Qualitative Report*, *27*(12), 2977–3009. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5297

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative & Life History*, *5*(2), 87–123. https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.5.2.01mod

Mitchell, D., Jr., Steele, T., Marie, J., & Timm, K. (2017). Learning race and racism while learning: Experiences of international students pursuing higher education in the Midwestern United States. *AERA Open*, *3*(3), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417720402

Moody, J. (2025, July 22). *Columbia expels, suspends student protesters*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/07/22/columbia-expels-suspends-student-protesters

Museus, S. D. (2021). The centrality of critical agency: How Asian American college students develop commitments to social justice. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *123*(1), 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300102

Pino Gavidia, L. A., & Adu, J. (2022). Critical narrative inquiry: An examination of a methodological approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221081594

Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. (2025, June 24). *Toolkit for colleges and universities: Trump administration's actions targeting international students and scholars*. https://www.presidentsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Int-Student_Admin-Actions_Toolkit.pdf

Quaye, S. J., Linder, C., Stewart, T. J., & Satterwhite, E. M. (2022). A review of scholarship on college student activism from 2000 to 2020. In L. W. Perna (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 37, pp. 81–131). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76660-3_5

Rhoads, R. A. (2016). Student activism, diversity, and the struggle for a just society. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *9*(3), 189–202. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000039

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.

Ritter, Z. S. (2016). International students' perceptions of race and socio-economic status in an American higher education landscape. *Journal of International Students*, *6*(2), 367–393. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i2.362

Rodriguez, M. A., Mohamed, M., & Barthelemy, R. S. (2023). Microaggressions faced by international students in the US with a discussion on critical race theory. *Journal of International Students*, *13*(3), 236–253. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v13i3.4620

Smith, W. A. (2004). Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), *A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students* (pp. 171–190). Peter Lang.

U.S. Department of State. (2025, March 28). *Secretary of State Marco Rubio remarks to the press*. https://www.state.gov/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-remarks-to-the-press-3/

Yao, C. W., George Mwangi, C. A., & Malaney Brown, V. K. (2019). Exploring the intersection of transnationalism and critical race theory: A critical race analysis of international student experiences in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *22*(1), 38–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497968

Yao, C. W., Oates, E. Q., Briscoe, K. L., Buell, K. J., & Rutt, J. N. (2023). Re/negotiating race and racialization for international students of color in the US. *Journal of College Student Development*, *64*(1), 79–95. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2023.0003

Yeo, H. T. (2023). Not a citizen but a student: International student critical race theory (IntlCrit) framework. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research* (Vol. 9, pp. 23–42). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-375220230000009002