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"Just black" or not "just black?" ethnic attrition in the Nigerian-American second generation

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ABSTRACT
Despite the largely voluntary character of Nigerian immigration to the United States since 1970, it is not clear that their patterns of integration have emulated those of earlier immigrants who, over time, traded their specific national origins for "American" or "White" identities as they experienced upward mobility. This path may not be available to Nigerian immigrants. When they cease to be Nigerian, they may become black or African-American. In this paper, I use US Census data to trace patterns of identity in a Nigerian second-generation cohort as they advance from early school-age in 1990 to adulthood in 2014. The cohort shrinks inordinately across the period as its members cease to identify as Nigerian, and this pattern of ethnic attrition is most pronounced among the downwardly mobile – leaving us with a positively select Nigerian second generation and, perhaps, unduly optimistic assessments of Nigerian-American socioeconomic advancement.

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Nigerian immigrants to the US often understand that they are black people entering a society where black people are at a significant disadvantage but take solace in the fact that they are not "just black".[1] Many of them believe that their Nigerian origins and culture set them apart from the descendants of enslaved Africans who arrived in the US centuries earlier (Imoagene 2017). However, this distinction may fade with the passing of generations. The central aims of this paper are to measure the extent and nature of this fading – referred to here as *ethnic attrition* – among US-born children of Nigerian immigrants.

It has been argued that the American mainstream is increasingly making space for non-European immigrants to become "just American" (Alba and Nee 2003; Alba 2009). To do so is to become "regular" and/or raceless in the popular imagination, and the presumed alternative is to remain ethnic – to remain distinctly Nigerian, in this case. For Nigerians and other black

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groups, however, there is a third alternative. The US-born children of Nigerian immigrants are at once Nigerian, American, and black. If they are unable to achieve a regular and raceless (non-black) identity, the "just American" option may not be viable for them – leaving them only Nigerian and black identity options. When they cease to identify as Nigerian, they may become "just black" (Butterfield 2004) – a designation that immigrants to the US have done their best to avoid (Roediger 2005; Bashi-Treitler 2013).

In this paper, I use US Census and American Community Survey data to track the size and patterns of identity in the 1976–85 US-born Nigerian birth cohort across the years 1990, 2000, and 2010–14 in search of answers to two questions. First, is ethnic attrition evidenced in the Nigerian-American second generation? And, second, is it selective? Findings here suggest that there is considerable ethnic attrition out of the Nigerian second generation and that it is most common among those who appear to be downwardly mobile. These are important findings for both theoretical and methodological reasons to be discussed in the pages to follow.

Prospects for assimilation and racialization among Nigerian-Americans

Theory and prior research suggest that processes of assimilation and racialization will lead some US-born children of immigrants to undergo "ethnic attrition". This phrase implies no particular rationale, reasoning, or process leading individuals to stop identifying as members of their ethnic groups, but social scientists have articulated a variety of reasons we might expect to see some amount of ethnic attrition among immigrant minorities. Widely cited assimilation theories hold that identificational shifts are bound to occur as ethnic boundaries "blur" and immigrants become integrated into the American mainstream (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003; Alba 2009) or into American minority communities (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Golash-Boza 2006). Some such shifts reflect the dissolution of ethnic boundaries as immigrants become "just American" in their own eyes and/or in the eyes of others. However, for some groups, ethnicity and ethnic identities have protective effects that are essential to well-being and upward mobility, and their dissolution could signal trouble. This may be particularly true of groups and individuals who are phenotypically black, because when they cease to identify with their immigrant origins they may not become "just American" but rather "just black". In this section of the paper, I review straight line and racialized assimilation theories that portend ethnic attrition as well as theories of racial and ethnic identity that highlight reasons for ethnic persistence addressing relevant research literatures along the way.

Straight line assimilation theories suggest identificational assimilation is an integral part of immigrant integration. Identificational assimilation refers to

the set of processes through which immigrants cease to identify as members of their (national) origins group and come to identify primarily or solely as members of the receiving society. In the US, this has been a central aspect of the process sometimes called "Americanization" which often occurs by way of primary group associations and intermarriage with members of the "host" group (Gordon 1964). In its most extreme manifestations, identificational assimilation (Gordon 1964) would lead immigrants, and especially their children and grandchildren, to identify entirely with the new country and not at all with the old. Perez and Hirschman (2009) demonstrate that by the end of the twentieth century, among whites "almost half reported *no* ethnicity or gave only a New World ancestry, including 9 percent who simply said 'American'" (30) in response to the Census question about "ancestry or ethnic origins". For many white Americans, the national origins and/or ethnicities of their immigrant forebears are of no real consequence in their day-to-day lives. It has been argued that what ethnic attachments persist among them are largely *symbolic ethnicities* that are not constraining marks of subordination but rather are optional, situational, and life-enhancing identities (Gans 1979; Alba 1990; Waters 1990). We may expect to find that some Nigerian-Americans will cease to identify as Nigerian over time but not for the reasons discussed above. In particular, they may *not* marry non-Hispanic white Americans and have kids who are "just American".

Ethnic intermarriage has been a critical part of the "Americanization", but *racial intermarriage* has not. Marriages across racial boundaries may contribute to patterns of ethnic attrition among racial minorities, but the frequency of intermarriage between members of racial minority groups and whites varies substantially from minority group to minority group (Lee and Bean 2010). Robust patterns of intermarriage between Latinos and non-Hispanic whites (Edmonston, Lee, and Passel 2002) have led to considerably "thinned attachments" and ethnic attrition among US-born Latinos (Jimenez 2004; Duncan and Trejo 2009; Emeka and Vallejo 2011; Vasquez 2011) but the same cannot be said of US-born blacks. Marriages across the black-white divide are relatively rare and participants tend to be acutely aware that their unions traverse a salient social divide. Spouses in black-white marriages often refer to their children simply as black (Lee and Bean 2010). As we will see, Nigerian-white unions are rare. Children of those unions may or may not identify as Nigerian, but they will almost certainly NOT see themselves or be seen by others as "just American".

There is another important reason straight line assimilation is unlikely for this group, and that is a less frequently cited requisite called receptional assimilation. This phrase refers to the set of processes through which immigrant minorities cease to be perceptibly constrained by prejudice and discrimination at the hands of members of the "host" group (Gordon 1964). Studies have shown that patterns of prejudice and discrimination perceived

by immigrant minorities bear significantly on their identities (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Golash-Boza 2006; Imoagene 2017). Nigerians may or may not face anti-immigrant, anti-African, or anti-Nigerian discrimination, but they will almost certainly face anti-black discrimination which could lead them to adopt reactive ethnicities that are "just black" and/or oppositional to the American mainstream (Rumbaut 2008). For these reasons, straight line assimilation does not seem likely for Nigerian-Americans.

Racialized assimilation theories have been developed by scholars studying patterns of adaptation of non-European peoples in the US and may be better suited to elucidate patterns of adaptation among Nigerians. They stem from *segmented assimilation theory,* which articulates several possible adaptive pathways for immigrant groups, not all of which are beneficial. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) posit that race is one factor among many that nudges groups down one pathway or another, but they assign the highest priority to characteristics of families and national origins groups. Racialized assimilation theories build on the contention that race and racial discrimination bear significantly on processes of immigrant adaptation – assigning them a causal centrality that segmented assimilation theory does not. Lee and Kye (2016) argue that:

> even as contemporary immigrants successfully undertake processes of acculturation and socialization, they must confront the challenge of their nonwhite racial status, which – unlike the more soluble nature of ethnicity – persists through the years and even generations in a country fundamentally defined by the perception of race. (255)

Due to prevailing patterns of racial classification and racial discrimination, Nigerians and other phenotypically black people(s) may be faced with struggles similar to those of slave-descended African-Americans, and some may come to see themselves as "just black" as a result.

The idea that assimilation processes are wound up tightly with race and racist exclusion is not new (see Reid 1938; Bashi and McDaniel 1997). It has been shown that black immigrant experiences are often marked by prevailing patterns of black exclusion. For instance, black immigrants exhibit pronounced patterns of residential segregation that leave them far removed from white communities and often nested in black American communities (Crowder 1999; Iceland 2009). It has been demonstrated that Caribbean and African immigrants exhibit higher levels of segregation from white non-Hispanics than was true for any other group – including native non-Hispanic black Americans (Iceland 2009). Segregation has been most pronounced among Nigerian immigrants who, even after two decades of residence in the US, registered a dissimilarity index in excess of 90 (Iceland 2009, 66–67). This pattern is consistent with the racialized assimilation perspective articulated above and probably bears directly and indirectly on patterns of identity.

Given the high levels of segregation between black immigrants and white Americans and relatively low levels of segregation between black immigrants and black Americans of native stock, it should not surprise us that there is a robust pattern of intermarriage between black immigrants who have arrived since 1965 and black Americans whose enslaved ancestors were brought to the US more than a century earlier (Lee and Bean 2010; Lichter, Qian, and Tumin 2015). The pattern exhibited by Nigerians is instructive. By 1990, more than a third (38 per cent) of Nigerian married men were married to US-born black American women with no known Nigerian ancestry (Emeka 2016). The children of such unions can make legitimate claims to both Nigerian and black American identities. Some may come to feel that their blackness is the thing that matters most – to themselves and to others – leading them to more often opt for a black or African-American label.

Ethnic persistence, however, is also likely to be pronounced among Nigerian-Americans as both enduring affective attachments to ethnic communities and strategic responses to racialization and racial exclusion. Both straight line and racialized assimilation theories seem to suggest that the ethnic attachments and identities of Nigerian-Americans will disintegrate as they become American and/or black American, but it is hard to imagine that either of these accounts will capture their experiences completely. Between the difficulties they are likely to face in becoming "just American", difficulties they are likely to face because they are mistaken for "just black", and legacies of Nigerian success in the US, there is good reason to think that the ethnic attachments and identities of Nigerian-Americans will persist across generations. Assertion and insistence on a Nigerian identity may partly shield them from antipathies and exclusions long suffered by black Americans of native stock.

While most European descendants and some Latinos make claims to whiteness and Americaness (Rodriguez 2000), few Nigerians can do the same (Devos and Banaji 2005). To the extent that this is true, it precludes the possibility of Nigerians coming to be seen as "just American". In 2014, more than 97 per cent of the Nigerian population checked the "Black or African American" box in response to the race question on the American Community Survey (author's tabulation). Ethnic attrition may, therefore, leave Nigerian immigrants and their descendants aspiring to "Americanness" and perhaps even feeling "American" but not being viewed as such by others. When they cease to be Nigerian, they do not become "American" in the way others have; they are more likely to become "just black". Some number will surely resist this racialization since having a black experience – an experience associated with socioeconomic struggle and stagnation (Imoagene 2012) – is antithetical to their immigrant aspirations.

To avoid entrenched patterns of black exclusion which, some Nigerian immigrants may distance themselves as best they can from black people

and black identities as generations of US immigrants before them (Roediger 2005; Bashi-Treitler 2013; Wu 2014). To ensure that they not be taken for African-American, they may maintain and accentuate Nigerian identities long after they or their parents arrive in the US – a pattern that has been observed among West Indian immigrants in New York City (Waters 1999) and Nigerians across the US (Balogun 2011; Imoagene 2012, 2017). This might lead us to predict extraordinary levels of ethnic persistence among them, and it may also lead to a pattern of ethnic attrition that is fundamentally different from that observed among European and Latin American immigrants and their US-born descendants.

Prospects for selective ethnic attrition among Nigerian-Americans

Whereas, ethnic attrition has been associated with upward mobility for European and Latin American immigrant groups (Hirschman 2005; Duncan and Trejo 2009; Emeka and Vallejo 2011), for Nigerians and other black immigrant groups the opposite may be true. In her seminal work on West Indians in New York, Waters (1999) uncovered a pattern of *negatively selective ethnic attrition* among second-generation West Indians whereby the upwardly mobile continued to identify with the national and/or ethnic origins of their parents, and the downwardly mobile tended to identify themselves as "black" or "African-American".

If Nigerians associate blackness with marginalization and stagnation, then we might expect that those who have positive assessments of their present situation and future prospects will be less likely to identify as black and perhaps accentuate a different identity. Nigerian interviewees in one study drew strong connections between educational success and Nigerian identity insisting that "it is not Nigerian not to go to college!" (Imoagene 2017, Ch. 3). If this is the prevailing view, we might expect Nigerian-Americans who do not live up to that standard to have an acute sense of their own marginality to both the Nigerian community and US society. The cognitive dissonance such struggles invoke may lead many of them to identify not as Nigerian but more often "black" (see Penner and Saperstein 2008). In short, downward mobility may make black Americans of Nigerians. For this reason, it is important to point out that despite high levels of education evidenced among them, Nigerian families with children have also evidenced high poverty prevalence (Emeka 2016).

As much as immigrant attachments to their ethnic and/or national origins are matters of the heart, their identificational choices may be in part strategic, with Nigerian immigrant identities being embraced to evade patterns of black exclusion. At the same time, *reactive* black identities may arise in response to black exclusion (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2008; Imoagene 2017). If we carry this line of thinking to its logical end, we should expect to find more

upwardly mobile members of the second generation holding steadfastly to their Nigerian identities and more marginalized (i.e. impoverished, unemployed, and/or incarcerated) members opting for black identities.

To date, studies of middle-class Nigerians have exposed important identificational patterns by interviewing snowball samples of middle-class Nigerian-Americans (Balogun 2011; Imoagene 2012, 2017). However, such study designs cannot directly address the extent and nature of ethnic attrition in the Nigerian second generation because there is no way to know whether and what kinds of Nigerian descendants are being overlooked in the sampling procedure. The most thoroughgoing sociological study of identities in the Nigerian second generation is Onoso Imoagene's *Beyond Expectations: second generation Nigerians in the U.S. and Britain* (2017). She draws conclusions based on interviews of seventy-five middle-class Nigerians born in the US (or immigrated at a young age). The vast majority (82 per cent) of Imoagene's interviewees identified primarily as "Nigerian" or "Nigerian-American", and *none* of Imoagene's interviewees identified as "African American". They actively "reject an African American identity that is frequently synonymous with a lower/underclass African-American culture" (2012, 2169–2170). However, she notes that some respondents tried hard to fit into the black American contexts (i.e. schools and neighbourhoods) in which they lived as youth. Many changed their dress, manner, and speech to avoid ridicule for being too African and in some ways strove to be "just black" (Imoagene 2017, 64–70). Those who succeeded may elude sociological study of the Nigerian second generation leading us to unduly optimistic appraisals of that group's advancement.

In all, we are left with good reasons to predict that substantial ethnic attrition *and* ethnic persistence will manifest in the Nigerian second-generation cohort observed here, with ethnic attrition being more pronounced among the downwardly mobile and ethnic persistence being more closely associated with upward mobility.

Data and methods

I trace patterns of identity among the children of Nigerian immigrants as they move from the households of their immigrant parents – where their identities are often expressed by parents rather than by themselves – to households of their own where they are free to identify as they choose. I use US Census to identify a child cohort (5–14 years of age) in 1990 whose members had transitioned into adulthood (25–34 years of age) by 2010. Patterns of identity in this cohort will be examined in 1990, 2000, and 2010–14 using US Census and American Community Survey data which are the only nationally representative samples large enough to yield sufficient samples of Nigerian-Americans. Since the 1990 and 2000 Census Public Use Files are 5 per cent samples and

the American Community Survey (ACS) samples are only 1 per cent each year, I use a five year (2010–14) cumulative ACS file that amounts to 5 per cent on the US population (Ruggles et al. 2015).

What can we learn about racial and ethnic identities from the US Census?

As mentioned above, the US Census and American Community Survey files are the only national random samples large enough to yield robust Nigerian second-generation samples. This is of tremendous importance since studies of identity are often limited to convenience methods that yield samples that may or may not be representative. The identificational patterns observed using Census data are limited by the form and substance of the survey, but they are observed across all levels of socioeconomic class which allows us to determine whether identificational patterns observed in typically middle-class convenience samples are generalizable to others.

Exactly what we can learn about racial and ethnic identity from the Census and ACS is limited by the questions asked and the mode of their asking. I will address shortcomings of the Census identity questions and discuss an important but not fatal flaw in their delivery. On the first page of the Census questionnaire, a close-ended race question is asked. Almost all Nigerian respondents choose "Black or African-American". Unfortunately, "Black or African-American" people cannot express their ethnic identities on the race question the way American Indians, Asians, and Latinos can. The absence of ethnic response options for black respondents leaves most Nigerians "just black" unless they respond to an open-ended ancestry question that appears later in the survey. The ancestry question appears pages later asking, "What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" It is followed by examples of appropriate responses and two blank spaces. In every year since 1990 the list of examples has included "Nigerian" which is fortunate since changes in that list of examples have been shown to influence responses (Farley 1991). The presence of "Nigerian" in the list of examples reduces the likelihood that Nigerian descendants will claim "African" or "West African" ancestry or ethnic origins which would make it difficult to distinguish them from black Americans whose enslaved ancestors arrived prior to 1808.

From these questions, we can see what racial and ethnic labels respondents choose to describe themselves and, at least as importantly, what labels they do not choose. However, in the case of children residing with parents, we do not know whether the mother, father, children, or someone else is making decisions about the "ancestry or ethnic origins" of members of the Nigerian second generation. Irrespective of who is doing the identifying, immigrant parents or US-born children, it is significant that, for some,

"Nigerian" is listed neither first nor second in response to the ancestry question. Perez and Hirschman (2009) maintain that "responses to census questions about race and ethnicity [may] measure *identity*, which is theoretically distinct from *ancestry* … . While ancestral origins are potentially objective facts, identities are subjective articulations of group membership and affinity" (3). It may be that the ancestry question itself is read this way by some. Even when asked explicitly "What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" respondents may instead answer the question *to what group does this person belong?* This would explain how two Nigerian parents could have a child whose ancestry or ethnic origin they report as "African American" especially if that child does not "act Nigerian" (see Imoagene 2017, Ch. 4).

So long as they reside with their Nigerian-born parent(s) we can reliably locate members of the Nigerian second generation simply by looking at the birthplace(s) of their co-resident parent(s). Children born in the United States but who reside with one or two Nigerian-born parents are members of the Nigerian second generation. The ancestry question further allows respondents to be identified as Nigerian even in the absence of Nigerian-born parents. I treat all US-born respondents residing with at least one Nigerian-born parent OR identified as having Nigerian ancestry or ethnic origins as members of the Nigerian second generation. Some US-born children with Nigerian ancestry but not living with a Nigerian-born parent could be members of the Nigerian third generation. However, since less than 2 per cent of Nigerian immigrants present in 1990 had arrived prior to 1965 (author's tabulation), there are very few Nigerian immigrants who had been in the country long enough to have US-born children AND grandchildren. There is also the possibility that divorce and remarriage could leave some non-Nigerian children living with a Nigerian-born parent. To alleviate this problem, stepchildren of Nigerian householders residing with non-Nigerian partners are excluded from the analyses to follow. This leaves us with 2,118 members of the second generation observed across the 1990 ($N = 795$) and 2000 ($N = 799$) Censuses and the 2010–14 ($N = 524$) American Community Surveys.

Analytical strategy

The extent of ethnic attrition is gauged by producing and comparing weighted population estimates of the Nigerian second-generation cohort at ages 5–14 in 1990, ages 15–24 in 2000, and, finally, 25–38 in 2010–14.[2] That exercise will be followed by a set logistic regressions meant to identify the best predictors of Nigerian identification among US-born children residing with one or more Nigerian parents.[3] All analyses and estimates are adjusted using weights provided by the US Census Bureau to correct for differential undercounts across subgroups within the US population. These analyses

will yield parameter estimates that are more accurate, but they will overstate the statistical significance of the results. Therefore, assessments of statistical significance offered in later sections will be based on both weighted and unweighted analyses.

Multivariate analysis will then be carried out to identify statistically significant predictors of Nigerian identity among children and young adults residing with one or more Nigerian parents[4] in 1990 and 2000. Findings from the 2010–14 period are not included since Nigerian second-generation men and women still living with their parents in adulthood are probably not representative of the whole cohort and their small number ($N = 143$) leads to erratic results in multivariate analyses. The outcome of interest is a dichotomous variable based on the open-ended Census ancestry question. Respondents for whom "Nigerian" is listed as a first or second response are assigned the value of 1, and all others are assigned a 0. The Nigerian identity variable will be regressed on a set of dummies that capture the effects of parental birthplace configuration (i.e. Nigerian-born mother & father, Nigerian-born mother and US-born father, etc.), parental education, family income, and respondents' progress through school on identity. I treat high school dropouts and respondents enrolled in a school-grade level not commensurate with his/her age as "delayed" (see Thomas 2009). We can thereby assess the net effects of intermarriage and socioeconomic status on patterns of ethnic identity and come to some conclusions about just how selective ethnic attrition is among members of the Nigerian second generation.

Results: ethnic attrition among second-generation Nigerian-Americans

Figure 1 depicts weighted population estimates of the Nigerian second-generation cohort described above. In each of the three time periods the cohort consists of children or young adults (1) living with one or two Nigerian parents and who are themselves identified as having Nigerian ancestry, (2) not living with Nigerian parents but who are themselves identified as having Nigerian ancestry, and (3) living with one or two Nigerian parents but not themselves identified as having Nigerian ancestry. The sum total of these three groups constitutes the second-generation cohort for the purposes of this paper.

Figure 1 is suggestive of significant ethnic attrition in two ways. First, there is the height of the bars across the three periods. The substantially shorter bar to the right (2010–14) represents a loss of more than a quarter (26.4 per cent) of the Nigerian second generation between 2000 and 2010–14. Though these estimates are based on one-in-twenty samples, confidence intervals constructed (using replicate weights) suggest that true cohort size in 2010–14 could be as low as 12,238 and no higher than 15,479 – well below the 2000

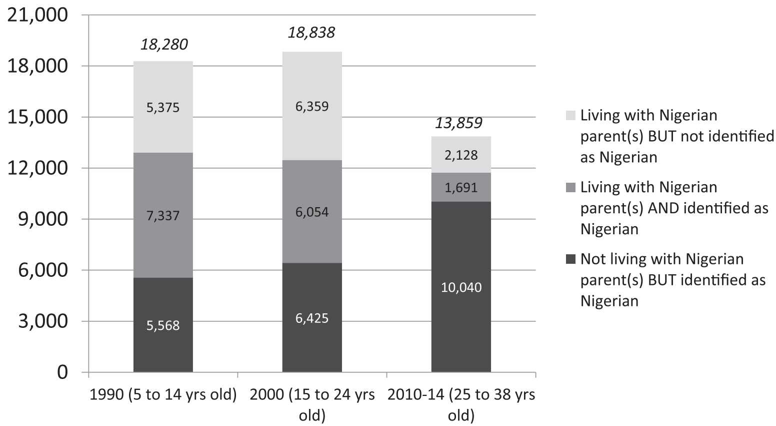

Figure 1. Nigerian second-generation cohort population and composition estimates, 1990–2014. Data source: 1990 and 2000 US Census 5% Public Use Files and American Community Survey 2010–14 5% Cumulative File (courtesy of the Minnesota Population Center [Ruggles et al. 2015]).

Note: The sample is limited to respondents born in the US between 1976 and 1985.

estimate. For every four members of the Nigerian second generation identified in 2000, only three remained identifiable in the 2010–14 period.

There are some clues as to how this decline happened in Figure 1. The middle bar suggests that there are 12,413 children living with one or two Nigerian parents in 2000, about half (48.8 per cent) of whom are identified as Nigerian. As we might expect, there is a sharp decline in the number of Nigerian second-generation members living with their Nigerian parent(s) as they age into adulthood. This number falls to 3,819 in 2010–14 – representing the exodus of 8,594 young adults from their immigrant parents' households. Had all of them been identifiable as US-born Nigerians not living with Nigerian parents in 2010–14, there would have been 15,019 in that lower segment of the bar to the right. However, only 10,040 show up there – a growth of 3,615 which is far short of the 8,594 we would expect to see if ethnic persistence were the rule. Of those young adults who left their immigrant households after 2000, less than half (3,615/8,594 = 42.1 per cent) identified as Nigerian in 2010–14.

Surprisingly, ethnic attrition seems to be traceable to households headed by Nigerian immigrants. Table 1 displays the most common ancestries listed for children and young adults living in such households. In all three periods, "Nigerian" is the most common ancestry listed, but the share declines over time. "Afro-American" or "African-American" or "Black" ancestry is claimed by more than a quarter of the Nigerian second-generation cohort in all three periods. These identities tend not to be in combination with "Nigerian" or "African" responses; they are "just black" responses. Few identify

Table 1. Most common ancestries[a] reported for members of the Nigerian second-generation cohort living with Nigerian-born parents[b].

	Census year		
	1990	2000	2010–14
Nigerian only	55.6%	49.5%	37.4%
Nigerian in combination	4.1%	0.9%	7.5%
African only	2.9%	7.2%	7.0%
Afro-/African-American or black only	32.7%	26.8%	30.9%
American or US only	1.4%	0.3%	2.2%
Not reported	2.2%	13.4%	9.5%
Total	98.9%	98.1%	94.5%
Weighted *N*	12,233	11,936	3,639
Unweighted *N*	514	493	143

Data source: 1990 and 2000 US Census 5% Public Use Files and American Community Survey 2010–14 5% Cumulative File (courtesy of the Minnesota Population Center [Ruggles et al. 2015]).
[a]Based on the first and second ancestries listed in response to the open-ended ancestry question.
[b]The sample is limited to non-white respondents born in the US between 1976 and 1985 and who were living with at least one Nigerian-born parent. Those living with no Nigerian parents are excluded because their ancestry is not variable.

generic "African" ancestry, and fewer still identify "American" or "United States" ancestries, suggesting that whatever identificational assimilation is happening is segmented or racialized. Patterns of intermarriage may provide clues as to the causes of these identificational discrepancies.

Intermarriage in Nigerian immigrant households

Table 2 is a simple crosstabulation of mother's place of birth by father's place of birth for Nigerian second-generation children in 1990. Among children (5–14 years old) only 37.3 per cent had two Nigerian-born parents in 1990. Another 18.6 per cent were residing with a US-born mother and Nigerian-born father while 15.1 per cent were residing with a single US-born mother (no father present). The presence of US-born parents – mothers in particular – is likely to have some influence on how children are identified, and

Table 2. Crosstabulation of mother's place of birth by father's place of birth for children of the Nigerian second-generation cohort[a] in 1990.

		Father's place of birth				
		Nigeria	US	Other	Absent	Total
Mother's place of birth	Nigeria	37.3%	0.4%	0.1%	7.8%	45.6%
	US	18.6%	6.7%	0.0%	15.1%	40.4%
	Other	3.3%	0.0%	0.9%	0.5%	4.7%
	Absent	4.5%	1.7%	0.0%	3.0%	9.3%
	Total	63.8%	8.8%	1.1%	26.3%	100.0%
Weighted *N*	16,972					
Unweighted *N*	724					

Data source: 1990 US Census 5% Public Use File (Ruggles et al. 2015).
[a]The sample is limited to non-white respondents born in the US between 1976 and 1985 and living with at least one Nigerian-born parent.

perhaps, how they come to identify themselves (Rumbaut 1994). Therefore, it is significant that nearly as many Nigerian second-generation youth were living with US-born mothers (40.4 per cent) as were living with Nigerian-born mothers (45.6 per cent) in 1990.

Some single US-born mothers who do not reside with the Nigerian fathers of their children may not identify those children as Nigerian – rendering them invisible for the purposes of this study and leading to an undercount of the Nigerian second generation. The extent to which this happens may depend on the racial and ethnic identities of mothers themselves. The vast majority of the US-born mothers of Nigerian second-generation children in 1990 identified racially as black (91.6 per cent). All said, more than a third (37 per cent) of the second-generation Nigerian children were residing with US-born black mothers.

As members of the second generation moved out of their Nigerian-born parents' households, the possibility of identifying them on the basis of their parents' place of birth was eliminated – leaving us reliant on their own answers to the ancestry question. However, from a young age many of them are not identified as Nigerian; it makes sense that children being raised by parents who identify them as "Afro-American" rather than Nigerian might come to think of themselves in those terms. To the extent that this is true, it should not surprise us to see the disappearance of a substantial fraction of the Nigerian second generation as they move out of their parents' households. If particular "types" of second-generation Nigerian-Americans are more likely to identify as such than others, it could bias our assessments of intergenerational mobility.

Multivariate results: selective ethnic attrition among second-generation Nigerian-Americans

Table 3 displays results from logistic regression analyses predicting Nigerian identification among children and young adults living with at least one Nigerian-born parent in 1990 and 2000. All else being equal, children residing with two Nigerian-born parents are more likely than others to be identified as having Nigerian ancestry themselves. In 1990, the odds of children living with a US-born mother and a Nigerian-born father being identified as Nigerian were only one-tenth (Exp[B] = .09) as great as those of children residing with two Nigerian-born parents and remained at a similarly low level in 2000 (Exp [B] = .15). This is important in that just more than one-fourth of children in the analyses lived with a US-born mother. This finding is statistically significant in both the weighted[5] and unweighted analyses.

Parental education and family income have effects across the 1990 and 2000 censuses that are consistent with the negative selectivity hypothesis articulated here. At both times, children living with a parent who had not

Table 3. Logistic regression results: predictors of Nigerian identification[a] among US-born children and young adults residing with one or more Nigerian-born parents, 1990–2000.

	1990 (5–14 yrs of age)			2000 (15–24 yrs of age)		
	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Parents' place of birth						
Nigerian-born mother and father		Referent			Referent	
Nigerian-born father and US-born mother	−2.38	0.05	0.09[b,c]	−1.87	0.07	0.15[b,c]
Nigerian-born mother and absent father	−1.28	0.07	0.28[b,c]	−0.34	0.05	0.71[b]
Nigerian-born father and absent mother	−0.35	0.09	0.70[b]	−0.06	0.08	0.94
Nigerian-born father and non-Nigerian foreign-born mother	−1.25	0.09	0.29[b,c]	−0.30	0.09	0.74[b]
Parents' education						
1 or 2 college-educated parents, 0 parents with no HS diploma		Referent			Referent	
1 college-educated parent, 1 parent with no HS diploma	−0.04	0.12	0.96	−0.25	0.17	0.78
0 college-educated parents, 0 parents with no HS Diploma	−0.14	0.06	0.87[b]	−0.81	0.06	0.45[b,c]
1 or 2 parents with no HS diploma	−1.53	0.18	0.22[b]	−2.15	0.22	0.12[b,c]
Family income						
At or above 5× the poverty line		Referent			Referent	
Between 1× and 5× the poverty line	−0.44	0.08	0.65[b]	−0.29	0.05	0.75[b]
At or below the poverty line	−0.68	0.10	0.51[b]	−0.73	0.08	0.48[b]
Child's characteristics						
Delayed progress in school/HS dropout	0.10	0.12	1.11	−0.16	0.06	0.86[b]
Constant	1.78	0.08	5.92[b,c]	0.83	0.05	2.30[b,c]
Cox & Snell Pseudo R^2		0.215			0.133	
Weighted *N*		12,233			11,936	
Unweighted *N*		514			493	

Data source: 1990 and 2000 US Census 5% Public Use Files and American Community Survey 2010–14 5% Cumulative File (courtesy of the Minnesota Population Center [Ruggles et al. 2015]).
[a]$Y = 1$ if Nigerian listed first OR second in response to the open-ended ancestry question.
[b]Statistically significant at $P < .05$ in the weighted regressions.
[c]Statistically significant at $P < .05$ in the unweighted regressions.

completed high school had odds of being identified as Nigerian that much lower than children living with one or more college-educated parents. This effect is particularly strong in 2000 (Exp[B] = .12). Family income also bears significantly on patterns of identity. Residing with a family whose income is below the poverty line drives children's odds of Nigerian identification significantly downward. While this variable is only statistically significant in the weighted analyses, the unweighted effects (not shown) are all consistent with the prediction that we would observe more ethnic persistence among the upwardly mobile and more ethnic attrition among those less fortunate.

In all, we are left with evidence that the Nigerian second-generation cohort has shrunk considerably as its members have aged into adulthood; a fourth of them are no longer identifiable as Nigerian in 2010–14. If their childhood identifications are any indication, many (>25 per cent) of them identify only as "African-American" or "Black". Those who persist in their Nigerian identity are more likely children raised families with college-educated parents and high family incomes which may bias our perceptions of the Nigerian second generation.

Discussion and conclusions

Over time, immigrants and their children may cease to identify with their country of origin. Duncan and Trejo (2015) describe such losses as "ethnic attrition". In this paper, I have estimated the extent of ethnic attrition and ethnic persistence among the children of Nigerian immigrants in the US and uncovered evidence that the pattern is not random. We can think of ethnic attrition as one manifestation of assimilation and/or racialization. In this sense, it is important on theoretical grounds. But it is also important methodologically because it can undermine efforts to assess intergenerational mobility in this or any immigrant group. Therefore, gauging and accounting for ethnic attrition is pressing for both theoretical and methodological reasons.

The cohort of Nigerian-Americans born between 1976 and 1985 shrunk by more than 25 per cent between 2000 and 2014. This decline is well in excess of what we expect to see based on patterns of mortality and, more likely, reflects identificational changes in the cohort. I estimate that the Nigerian second-generation cohort observed here numbered 18,838 in 2000 but are reduced to only 13,859 in the 2010–14. This decline is important for reasons pertaining to ongoing debates about the plausibility of assimilation for non-European immigrants in the US twenty-first century. *Straight line assimilation* theory predicts that with the passing of generations immigrants to the US will cease to be foreign and ethnic and begin to take on "American" identities. While the pattern of attrition noted above is suggestive of a type of Americanization, it is crucial to note no more than 2.2 per cent of the Nigerian second generation identified "American" or "United States" as their primary ancestry or ethnic origin during the period examined here. As *racialized assimilation* theories would predict, their Americanization is "raced". No less than a 25 per cent of the Nigerian second generation identified "Afro-American" or "African-American" as their *only* ancestry or ethnic origin in response to the Census question. These results suggest that, to the extent any identification changes are taking place in the Nigerian second generation, they are not becoming "just American" but rather "just black".

While the attrition discussed above is significant, I estimate that three-quarters of the cohort remained identifiably Nigerian in adulthood. Most of them identified "Nigerian" as their primary ancestry or ethnic origin. This fact may speak to the strength of affective ties between members of the Nigerian second generation and the families and communities from which they hale, but it may also reflect the protective effects Nigerian identities have when the alternative is to be seen as "just black" in a society that continues to exclude black people. This seems to bear on which members of the Nigerian second generation cease to identify as such.

Results here suggest that US-born Nigerian children residing in poor families with parents who have not completed high school or college degrees are significantly more likely to "drop out" of the Nigerian group in favour of "African American" or "just black" identities. For Nigerian-Americans, it seems that ethnic attrition is associated with downward mobility and perhaps integration into black American communities that are marginal to the American mainstream. This may be due, in part, to an adamant insistence on high educational achievement as a defining aspect of Nigerian identity (Imoagene 2017). If Nigerian immigrants and their US-born children internalize the idea that "it is not Nigerian not to go to college" (Imoagene 2017, 71–73), those who fail in school may come to think of themselves and be thought of by others as *not* Nigerian. Findings here suggest as much. To the extent that this is true, it means we can only observe a positively selected portion of the Nigerian second generation in adulthood. This is a matter that must be taken seriously as we attempt to assess patterns of mobility and socioeconomic integration among immigrants in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. "Just black" is not meant to be degrading here; nor is "just American". I use the word "just" to mean "regular" or "normal" or "plain old". "Just black" and "just American" are only as degrading as "black" and "American" are by themselves.
2. Since I use a cumulative file with data from 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014, the cohort age ranges are adjusted as follows: 25–34 in 2010; 26–35 in 2011; 27–36 in 2012; 28–37 in 2013; and 29–38 in 2014.
3. The small number of white US-born children residing with Nigerian-born parents are excluded since most of their Nigerian-born parents are of people of British or other European descent who emigrated in the years leading up to and following Nigerian independence (1960). Their presence or absence from the analyses to follow has no significant bearing on the findings or conclusions of the study except that the small number of "White/Caucasian" responses no longer appear and the number of English, British, Dutch, and German responses to the ancestry question are reduced.
4. Regression analyses include only those respondents residing with one or more Nigerian-born parents since 100 per cent of those not living with Nigerian parents must themselves identify as Nigerian.
5. As was mentioned earlier, the weighted analyses provide more accurate estimates of the effects in the logistic regression model, but since the each case is treated as twenty-four cases (on average), measures of statistical significance are artificially inflated.

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