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Three Decades of Campus Racial Climate Studies and 25 New Directions for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

Sylvia Hurtado's 1992 article, "The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict." remains a groundbreaking contribution to research on campus racial climates. In their 2007 publication, "Nine Themes in Campus Racial Climates and Implications for Institutional Transformation," Shaun Harper and Sylvia Hurtado synthesized 15 years of studies and presented findings from qualitative climate assessments conducted at five U.S. postsecondary institutions. This article builds on those two highly-cited publications. Categorical clusters of 140 studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals within and beyond the field of higher education over three decades are presented herein. Also, 25 new topics that will deepen and modernize the study of campus racial climates are offered. The need for greater institutional type balance in the literature – specifically, increasing the number of climate studies conducted at community colleges – is repeatedly emphasized throughout this article.

More than 30 years ago, *The Journal of Higher Education* published Sylvia Hurtado's article, "The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict." It quickly became and remains one of the most-cited academic papers on the topic. The study was based on quantitative data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) fourth year follow-up survey, a nationally representative longitudinal study of undergraduates in the late-1980s. It revealed differences in how students perceived the racial climate at their institutions by race and ethnicity, institutional size and type, and other factors. One major finding was that nearly a quarter of undergraduates surveyed felt there was considerable racial conflict at their colleges and universities. Another was that Black and Latina/o students, in comparison to their white peers, had higher perceptions of racial conflict and lower appraisals of institutional commitment to addressing those issues. Hurtado (1992) was the centerpiece of a book chapter published 15 years later that synthesized campus racial climate studies that appeared in higher education journals between 1992 and 2007 (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In addition, nine themes that emerged from qualitative climate studies conducted at five higher education institutions were presented.

In this article, we extend Harper and Hurtado's synthesis. Specifically, we add research that has since been published to show how the study of campus racial climates has evolved over the now more than 30 years since Hurtado's revolutionary article was published. Harper and Hurtado presented three thematic clusters of studies that appeared in peer-reviewed academic journals: (1) Differential perceptions of campus climate by race; (2) minority[1] student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments; and (3) benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement. We maintain those same categorical clusters here. Noteworthy is that Harper and Hurtado's synthesis was based almost entirely on data

collected from undergraduates attending four-year colleges and universities. At the time, campus racial climate had been grossly under-researched at community colleges. Unfortunately, that remains the case. Hence, we present in this article several ways to address this specific problem. We also present other climate-focused topics that can be explored across two-year, four-year, and online learning environments. Being more inclusive of community colleges is one aim of ours. Deepening and modernizing the study of campus racial climate is another.

Methods

For the most part, we repeated methods that were used to construct literature tables in Harper and Hurtado (2007). Eighteen years ago, Harper and Hurtado primarily relied on EBSCO and JSTOR. Google Scholar was not as popular then as it is now; hence, it was added here as a third search engine. We entered these keywords into the search windows of all three databases: campus climate, campus racial climate, campus racism, minority and minoritized student experiences, cross-racial interactions, and campus racial conflict. We also triangulated database results by doing manual keyword searches of the individual websites for a dozen peer-reviewed higher education journals: *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *Community College Review*, *The Review of Higher Education*, *The Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Retention*, *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *Innovative Higher Education*, and *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. We acknowledge that studies about higher education are published in peer-reviewed journals beyond the 12 that were selected for our analysis; some of those articles were captured via our Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO searches.

What is presented in this article is extensive and largely reflective of trends in research on campus racial climates. Not every single climate study published since 1992 or 2007 is cited herein due to length parameters. Nonetheless, ours is a robust, non-exhaustive sampling. Also noteworthy is that the updated literature tables only include studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals from 1992 onward; we did not include books, book chapters, and research reports, venues in which some important data on campus climate and minoritized students' experiences in higher education are published. Some scholars produced multiple papers from the same dataset; in most instances, we include just one per dataset. Lastly, we only include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies with samples of research participants. Frameworks, as well as conceptual, theoretical, and evidence-based opinion pieces were omitted because they were not studies that included methods sections, participant samples, and the presentation of research results.

Useful campus climate research frameworks and models have been offered elsewhere (e.g., Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999, 2012; Milem et al., 2005; Milem, Dey, et al., 2004; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Scholars also have performed systematic assessments of campus climate surveys and other data collection instruments (Hurtado et al., 2008; H. Lee et al., 2024). Additionally, Briscoe et al. (2024) furnished guidance on ways to use data from climate studies to improve practice, research, and policy in higher education. Even though these publications are not included in the clusters of studies presented in the next section, graduate students and other scholars who are conducting research on campus racial climates are highly encouraged to consult these valuable contributions to the literature.

30-year trends in the study of campus racial climates

Trends from 140 qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies are described in this section. Tables include all the studies that S. R. Harper and Hurtado (2007) cited, as well as new research published from 2007 onward. Cumulatively, 383,650 students participated in these research projects. The studies are presented below in the same three categorical clusters used in S. R. Harper and Hurtado (2007), with some slight modifications to the headers (e.g., changing minority to minoritized). The clusters are presented separately in a trio of tables. It

is important to note that for consistency, we standardized the racial groups. Specifically, Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander is represented as AAPI; African American was changed to Black; American Indian and Native American were changed to Indigenous; Caucasian and European American were changed to white; and Hispanic, Latinx, and Latiné were changed to Latina/o.[2]

While hundreds of higher education institutions are represented across these studies, the overwhelming majority are four-year colleges and universities. The under-exploration of topics pertaining to racial climates at community colleges was a pattern in the literature that Harper and Hurtado synthesized – almost 20 years later, it remains a problem that is not attributable to the institutions themselves, but instead to scholars who have privileged four-year institutions in their studies. The National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC), a suite of quantitative surveys, was launched at the University of Southern California (USC) in 2019; they are based largely on Shaun Harper's two decades of qualitative campus racial climate assessments. Nearly 46% of institutions that participated in the NACCC during its first five years are community colleges. As Harper and other USC Race and Equity Center researchers begin publishing more peer-reviewed journal articles using NACCC data, the lopsidedness in institution type will be addressed. But the field would benefit greatly from the publication of community college climate studies from a wider array of other quantitative, qualitative, historical, and mixed methods data sources. Using Harper and Hurtado's thematic categorical clusters, we now present other trends from the corpus of studies published over three decades.

Differential and group-specific perceptions of campus climate

Forty studies show how 162,579 students perceived and appraised the inclusiveness, safety, and responsiveness of racial climates on their campuses. As shown in Table 1, just two studies were based on mixed methods, five were qualitative, and the remaining 33 were quantitative. The average qualitative sample size was 22 students; the average was 4,817 in quantitative samples. Nearly 70% of studies were based on research conducted at single institutions. Most studies show differences between groups; some are group-specific. Consistent with S. R. Harper and Hurtado's (2007) observations, subsequent research continues to show that students of color, relative to their white peers, routinely report less favorable perceptions of campus racial climates. Specifically, they characterize predominantly white institutions (PWIs) as more hostile toward nonwhite students. Also, sense of belonging tends to be durably lower among AAPI, Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and multiracial collegians relative to their white peers at PWIs. Furthermore, students of color offer negative appraisals of institutional leaders' responses to hate crimes and other racist incidents occurring on their campuses.

Minoritized students' encounters with racial stress and racist campus environments

Being called the N-word and other racial epithets, being the lone student from one's racial group in a classroom (sometimes in an entire academic major or department), being expected to speak on behalf of all members of their racial groups, being wrongly accused of plagiarism because their academic work is so excellent, being physically threatened and assaulted, being mocked in blackface and "South of the Border" deportation theme parties hosted by predominantly white fraternities, being denied membership into predominantly white sororities on the basis of race, and having racial slurs painted on their residence hall doors are just a few of the numerous experiences that AAPI, Black, Indigenous, Latina/o, and multiracial students reported in studies that explored their racialized experiences in college over three decades. All of this is consistent with S. R. Harper and Hurtado's (2007) analysis of the literature at that time, and was reflected in themes presented from their multicampus qualitative climate assessments. One noticeable difference is the uptick in studies focused explicitly

Table 1. Post-1992 research studies on differential and group-specific perceptions of campus climate.

Authors	Research Design	Sites	Sample (n)	Participants by Racial Group
Ancis et al. (2000)	Quantitative	Single	578	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Briscoe (2024)	Qualitative	Single	12	Black
Cabrera and Nora (1994)	Quantitative	Single	879	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Cabrera et al. (1999)	Quantitative	Multiple	1,454	Black, White
M. Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2016)	Mixed	Multiple	818	AAPI, Latina/o, White
M. G. Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2023)	Qualitative	Single	20	Latina/o
D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993)	Quantitative	Single	146	Black, White
Edman and Brazil (2009)	Quantitative	Unspecified	475	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Eimers and Pike (1997)	Quantitative	Single	799	More Than Four Groups
Fischer (2010)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,924	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Grier-Reed et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Multiple	543	Black, White
Griffin et al. (2016)	Qualitative	Single	43	Black
Helm et al. (1998)	Quantitative	Single	566	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005)	Quantitative	Multiple	370	Latina/o
D. R. Johnson (2012)	Quantitative	Multiple	1,722	More Than Four Groups
D. R. Johnson et al. (2007)	Quantitative	Multiple	2,967	More Than Four Groups
D. R. Johnson et al. (2014)	Quantitative	Single	1,837	More Than Four Groups
Johnson-Durgans (1994)	Quantitative	Single	2,957	Black, White
Johnston and Yeung (2014)	Quantitative	Single	7,597	More Than Four Groups
Kenney and Johnson (2024)	Qualitative	Single	10	Black
Koo (2021)	Quantitative	Multiple	11,232	More Than Four Groups
Leath and Chavous (2018)	Quantitative	Single	345	More Than Four Groups
Mills (2021)	Quantitative	Single	388	Black
Museus et al. (2018)	Quantitative	Single	1,005	More Than Four Groups
Nguyen et al. (2018)	Mixed	Single	2,703	AAPI
Nora and Cabrera (1996)	Quantitative	Single	831	More Than Four Groups
Oxendine et al. (2020)	Quantitative	Multiple	604	Indigenous
Pewewardy and Frey (2004)	Quantitative	Single	275	Indigenous, White
Pieterse et al. (2010)	Quantitative	Single	289	AAPI, Black, White
Radloff and Evans (2003)	Qualitative	Single	27	Black, White
S. R. Rankin and Reason (2005)	Quantitative	Multiple	7,347	More Than Four Groups
Stevens et al. (2018)	Quantitative	Multiple	69,722	More Than Four Groups
Strayhorn (2013)	Quantitative	Single	391	Black, White
Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2003)	Quantitative	Single	322	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Tynes et al. (2013)	Quantitative	Single	217	Black, White
Ward and Zarate (2015)	Quantitative	Single	1,052	More Than Four Groups
Wei et al. (2011)	Quantitative	Single	160	AAPI, Black, Latina/o
Wells and Horn (2015)	Quantitative	Single	116	AAPI
Worthington et al. (2008)	Quantitative	Single	144	More Than Four Groups
J. Yi and Todd (2022)	Quantitative	Multiple	37,692	More Than Four Groups

on racial microaggressions – subtle, seemingly innocuous racial insults that become increasingly harmful as they accumulate in the daily lives of people of color. This body of research has provided more nuance and dimensionality to the study of students' racialized experiences since 2017.

Table 2 shows trends across four mixed methods, 47 qualitative, and nine quantitative studies published over three decades. A total of 11,185 students participated in this research. The average sample size for qualitative studies was 33 participants, which is 23 fewer than the average reported in S. R. Harper and Hurtado (2007). The average was 845 for quantitative studies we analyzed in this cluster, which is more than twice the average of quantitative samples included in Harper and Hurtado's synthesis. Fifty-five percent were single-institution studies. Eighteen studies included two or more racial groups. The remaining articles presented data that were collected from the following single-group samples: AAPI ($n = 6$), Black ($n = 21$), Indigenous ($n = 1$), Latina/o ($n = 12$), and multiracial ($n = 2$). Relative to the other two clusters, more studies are included in Table 2 because more research has been published on minoritized students' racialized experiences inside and outside of classrooms on college campuses. The consistency of findings about their frequent encounters with racial stress, stereotyping, onlyness,[3] tokenization, microaggressions, and racism cannot be overstated.

Table 2. Post-1992 research studies on minoritized students' encounters with racial stress and racist campus environments.

Authors	Research Design	Sites	Sample (n)	Participants by Racial Group
Briscoe, Davis, et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Multiple	13	Black
Brooms (2025)	Qualitative	Multiple	105	Black
Davis et al. (2004)	Qualitative	Single	11	Black
DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2023)	Qualitative	Multiple	15	Black
Diver-Stamnes and LoMascolo (2001)	Qualitative	Single	153	More Than Four Groups
Flores et al. (2024)	Qualitative	Single	52	Black, Latina/o
J. R. Ford (2024)	Qualitative	Multiple	20	Black
Fries-Britt and Turner (2001)	Qualitative	Single	15	Black
George Mwangi et al. (2018)	Qualitative	Multiple	25	Black
Harper (2015)	Qualitative	Multiple	143	Black
Harper et al. (2011)	Qualitative	Multiple	52	Black
Harper et al. (2018)	Mixed	Single	23	Black
Harris (2017)	Qualitative	Single	10	Multiracial
Harwood et al. (2012)	Qualitative	Single	81	AAPI, Black, Indigenous, Latina/o
Hurtado (1994a)	Quantitative	Multiple	510	Black, Latina/o
Hurtado (1994b)	Quantitative	Multiple	859	Latina/o
Hurtado and Carter (1997)	Quantitative	Multiple	272	Latina/o
Hurtado et al. (2015)	Quantitative	Multiple	4,981	More Than Four Groups
Hurtado et al. (1996)	Quantitative	Multiple	203	Latina/o
Hwang and Goto (2009)	Quantitative	Single	186	AAPI, Latina/o
R. M. Johnson and Strayhorn (2023)	Mixed	Multiple	251	Black
J. M. Johnson et al. (2024)	Qualitative	Single	14	Black
D. J. Johnson et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Single	21	Black, Latina/o
Kelly et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Multiple	16	Black
Koo et al. (2023)	Qualitative	Multiple	18	More Than Four Groups
M. J. Lee et al. (2020)	Mixed	Single	1,688	More Than Four Groups
K. R. Lewis and Shah (2021)	Qualitative	Single	30	Black
J. A. Lewis et al. (2013)	Qualitative	Single	17	Black
A. E. Lewis et al. (2000)	Qualitative	Single	75	More Than Four Groups
Linley (2018)	Qualitative	Single	11	Black, Latina/o, Multiracial
McCabe (2009)	Qualitative	Single	82	More Than Four Groups
McGee (2016)	Qualitative	Multiple	38	Black, Latina/o
Mills (2020)	Qualitative	Single	17	Black
Minikel-Lacocque (2013)	Qualitative	Single	6	Latina/o
Muñoz and Vigil (2018)	Qualitative	Multiple	12	Latina/o
Museus and Park (2015)	Qualitative	Multiple	46	AAPI
Museus et al. (2016)	Qualitative	Multiple	22	Multiracial
Nadal et al. (2014)	Quantitative	Single	225	More Than Four Groups
Newton (2024)	Qualitative	Single	25	Black
Ngo and Espinoza (2023)	Qualitative	Single	20	AAPI
Patrón (2021)	Qualitative	Multiple	50	Latina/o
Pérez Huber (2010)	Qualitative	Single	10	Latina/o
Ramirez (2017)	Qualitative	Single	24	Latina/o
Ramos and Yi (2020)	Qualitative	Multiple	11	More Than Four Groups
Rodriguez et al. (2020)	Qualitative	Single	17	Latina/o
Sanchez (2019)	Qualitative	Multiple	40	Latina/o
Smedley et al. (1993)	Quantitative	Single	161	AAPI, Black, Latina/o
Smith et al. (2007)	Qualitative	Multiple	36	Black
Solórzano et al. (2000)	Qualitative	Multiple	34	Black
Strayhorn (2014)	Qualitative	Single	4	AAPI
Sue et al. (2009)	Qualitative	Single	10	AAPI
Swim et al. (2003)	Mixed	Single	51	Black
Szymanski and Lewis (2016)	Quantitative	Single	212	Black
Tachine et al. (2016)	Qualitative	Single	24	Indigenous
Truong et al. (2016)	Qualitative	Multiple	26	More Than Four Groups
Turner (1994)	Qualitative	Single	32	AAPI, Black, Indigenous, Latina/o
Von Robertson et al. (2016)	Qualitative	Single	23	Latina/o
V. Yi and Nauk (2024)	Qualitative	Multiple	10	AAPI
Yosso et al. (2009)	Qualitative	Multiple	37	Latina/o
Zheng et al. (2024)	Qualitative	Single	10	AAPI

Cross-racial engagement in campus environments

> Studies verify that students who attend racially diverse institutions and are engaged in educationally purposeful activities that involve interactions with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds come to enjoy cognitive, psychosocial, and interpersonal gains that are useful during and after college. (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 14)

Subsequent studies consistently show this. They also routinely corroborate prior findings that students of color and white students profit educationally from meaningful, repeated, and sustained engagement with peers from different racial groups – in some instances, white students benefit most. The 40 peer-reviewed articles listed in Table 3 had a total of 209,886 participants. Just over two-thirds of these publications are multicampus studies. Four employed mixed methods, five were qualitative, and the remaining 31 were quantitative. On average, qualitative samples included 23 participants; quantitative samples had an average of 6,698 students. Given its emphasis on cross-racial interaction, it is unsurprising that 77.5% of studies in this cluster are based on research projects that included two or more racial groups. Interestingly, 17.5% were based on samples that had only white collegians and consistently highlighted the educational benefits that substantive interracial interactions accrue to them.

Table 3. Post-1992 research studies on cross-racial engagement in campus environments.

Authors	Research Design	Sites	Sample (n)	Participants by Racial Group
Antonio (2004)	Qualitative	Single	18	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Antonio, et al (2004)	Mixed	Multiple	357	White
Bowman (2012)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,098	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Bowman (2013a)	Quantitative	Multiple	8,615	More Than Four Groups
Bowman (2013b)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,098	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Bowman and Park (2015)	Quantitative	Multiple	2,932	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Bowman and Park (2016)	Quantitative	Multiple	2,932	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Briscoe, Yao, et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Single	19	More Than Four Groups
Chang (1999)	Quantitative	Multiple	11,680	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Chang (2001)	Quantitative	Single	167	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Chang et al. (2006)	Quantitative	Multiple	19,667	More Than Four Groups
Chang et al. (2004)	Quantitative	Multiple	9,703	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Culver et al. (2024)	Mixed	Multiple	1,667	More Than Four Groups
Denson and Chang (2009)	Quantitative	Multiple	21,651	More Than Four Groups
Denson and Chang (2015)	Quantitative	Multiple	14,161	More Than Four Groups
Dinh et al. (2008)	Quantitative	Single	315	White
Engberg and Hurtado (2011)	Quantitative	Multiple	4,697	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Fischer (2008)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,924	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Fischer (2011)	Quantitative	Multiple	775	White
K. A. Ford (2012)	Qualitative	Single	49	White
Gurin et al. (2002)	Quantitative	Multiple	12,965	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Hudson (2022)	Qualitative	Single	21	More Than Four Groups
Hussain and Jones (2021)	Quantitative	Single	626	AAPI, Black, Latina/o
Jeong et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Multiple	5,855	More Than Four Groups
Kim et al. (2015)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,510	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Levin et al. (2003)	Quantitative	Single	1,215	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Locks et al. (2008)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,468	More Than Four Groups
Maxwell and Chesler (2022)	Mixed	Single	58	White
Milem, Dey, et al. (2004)	Quantitative	Single	536	White
Neville et al. (2014)	Quantitative	Single	857	White
Park (2012)	Qualitative	Single	6	Black
Park (2014)	Quantitative	Multiple	3,008	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Park and Kim (2013)	Quantitative	Multiple	752	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Park et al. (2013)	Quantitative	Multiple	14,894	More Than Four Groups
Pike and Kuh (2006)	Quantitative	Multiple	42,588	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Rodríguez et al. (2018)	Quantitative	Multiple	737	More Than Four Groups
Sáenz (2010)	Quantitative	Multiple	4,697	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Sáenz et al. (2007)	Quantitative	Multiple	4,380	AAPI, Black, Latina/o, White
Strayhorn et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Multiple	144	Indigenous
Williams et al. (2020)	Mixed	Single	44	Black, White

25 new directions for future research

Scholars, including but not limited to those who authored the 140 peer-reviewed articles showcased herein, have done much to help advance understandings of how race, racism, and racial interactions are perceived, appraised, and experienced at U.S. postsecondary institutions. There are still opportunities to contribute to and complicate understandings of trends across the three thematic categorical clusters first introduced by Harper and Hurtado (2007) and subsequently reused in this article. We encourage such revisitations, replications, and extensions. But we also call for the use of new methods and pursuits of a wider array of topics that will complexify the study of campus racial climates in higher education.

In this section, we present 25 topics and inquiry approaches for graduate students, early career scholars, experienced climate scientists, and other researchers who endeavor to make campuses diverse, equitable, and inclusive for collegians across all racial and ethnic groups. They are mostly informed by gaps and possibilities we discovered in our literature synthesis. Two caveats about our list: (a) these are not the only explorable topics; and (b) some of what we recommend below has been explored, but our field would benefit from the publication of many more studies on these topics in peer-reviewed academic journals.

(1) **Community College Climate Studies** – As previously noted, the campus climate literature includes too little published research situated in community colleges. Given that this is the sector of U.S. higher education that disproportionately enrolls students of color, their experiences as well as their engagement with white peers deserves greater exploration and documentation. Unless otherwise specified, every remaining topic presented on this list could be explored in both two-year and four-year postsecondary contexts.

(2) **Studies of Climate at Minority-Serving Institutions** – Not all students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are Black. Latina/o students only comprise a fraction of collegians who are enrolled at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs); in many instances, they are far from the most-represented racial group on those campuses. Far too little is known about racial climates at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), as well as at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). Future studies should explore racial dynamics within and between groups at these institutions. Several HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and AANAPISIs are community colleges.

(3) **Research on Indigenous Students' Racialized Experiences** – Only three of the 140 studies cited in our synthesis focused exclusively on Indigenous collegians. Begaye-Tewa et al. (2024) observed the following in their review of campus climate literature: "only a few studies described Native students but frequently these descriptions were limited to a few sentences," which exacerbates their "invisibilization" (p. 929). Indigenous students at Tribal Colleges, PWIs, and everywhere else deserve explorations of their climate appraisals and racialized experiences. Begaye-Tewa et al. also noted that Indigenous frameworks and methodologies were not utilized in studies they reviewed. Future studies must do more to honor these.

(4) **Campus Climate for Multiracial Students** – A pair of qualitative studies focused specifically on multiracial students' encounters with microaggressions are included in this study (Harris, 2017; Museus et al., 2016). Many other racialized aspects of their college experiences need to be explored and published.

(5) **Mixed Methods Studies** – Only 10 of the 140 studies in our synthesis are based on a mix of research methods. Scholars should always select methods that best fit their research questions. But the campus climate literature would be tremendously enhanced by a wider array of questions that warrant complex combinations of inquiry approaches, including historical and experimental methods.

(6) **Deep Ethnographic Understandings of Climate** – Most qualitative climate studies are based on data collected via individual interviews and focus groups. A few also included systematic

reviews of documents and students' written reflections. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of ethnographies resulting from deep immersions and prolonged pursuits of insights into campus climates and cultures. Qualitative studies based on shorter-term observations also would diversify the literature.

(7) **Disaggregated Analyses of White Collegians** – Seven studies cited herein are based on entirely white samples (Antonio et al., 2004; Dinh et al., 2008; Fischer, 2011; K. A. Ford, 2012; Maxwell & Chesler, 2022; Milem, Umbach, et al., 2004; Neville et al., 2014). All of them are in the cross-racial interactions cluster, six are more than a decade old. Beyond their genders, other participant characteristics were typically undisclosed, perhaps unknown. Future studies should explore more dimensions of white students' racialized experiences beyond their interactions with diverse peers from other groups. Also, research that disaggregates white participants by an expansive range of identities and characteristics is needed. Otherwise, white collegians could be mistaken as being all the same.

(8) **Intersectional Understandings of Students' Experiences** – Harris and Patton (2018) clarify what intersectionality is and is not. Many studies we reviewed pursued the intersections of race and gender. More of these are needed, especially among AAPI, Indigenous, multiracial, and white students. Ways in which gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, religious identity, immigration and citizenship status, disability, and other aspects of students' identities intersect with race warrant deeper exploration. Scholars should also push the field beyond 2 × 2 analyses (e.g., race × gender and race × sexual orientation), as collegians concurrently possess and perform many more identities that inform how they experience campus climates. See Haynes et al. (2020) for useful methodological guidance on how to rigorously conduct intersectionality research.

(9) **Analyses of Difference by Political Identities** – The mere inclusion of one demographic item that captures students' political affiliations in multivariate quantitative studies provides too few insights into differences in how liberal, conservative, independent, and apolitical students appraise and experience campus racial climates. Studies on this topic should focus intentionally on how race co-mingles with political identities, attitudes, and sensemaking.

(10) **Campus Climate in Online Learning Environments** – Existing research focuses almost entirely on students' in-person interactions and experiences on physical campuses. Future studies should explore how racial climate is constructed and navigated in fully online and virtual learning environments. It is possible that students experience racism in those spaces in very specific ways that have not yet been discovered. It is also plausible that racist encounters are nonexistent or less frequent in online learning spaces.

(11) **Racialized Climate on Social and Digital Media** – Student engagement with peers extend beyond campuses onto TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitch, and other social and digital media platforms. Tinder, Bumble, Grinder, Jack'd, and other dating apps also are spaces where many college students interact across different races. Moreover, Discord and in-game messaging functions allow collegians to engage with other video gamers. Brendesha Tynes' research (e.g., Tynes et al., 2013) offers groundbreaking insights into the racism that occurs in digital engagement spaces like these. More remains to be captured – not only what collegians experience, but also how it affects them, how it shapes subsequent in-person interactions with peers who caused them racial harm online, and how they recover from racial abuse experienced on social and digital media.

(12) **Impact of Policies, Politics, and External Environments** – The NACCC includes questions about how occurrences outside of institutions affect students and campus climates. Qualitative studies could deepen understandings about the extent to which spillover occurs and how it plays out at higher education institutions. Some examples could include polarizing local, state, and national elections; Democratic and Republican Party turnover between congressional sessions, governorships, and U.S. presidencies; mass deportations and

separations of immigrant families; transphobic legislative activities; police murders of unarmed Black people; and the elimination of various government services, to name a few.

(13) **Racial Climate in White Supremacist Recruitment Zones** – White nationalists lurk on and around campuses across the country (Harper, 2025). They sometimes post recruitment flyers to trees, bulletin boards, and in other spaces. Occasionally, they distribute materials directly to white students. Future research projects should explore how this affects racial climate on campuses that white supremacist groups target.

(14) **Campus Climate in the Aftermath of Racial Crises and Hate Crimes** – In August 2017, tiki torch-carrying white nationalists marched at the University of Virginia chanting racist and antisemitic filth; a woman was killed the next day (Harper, 2025). How did this affect the campus racial climate in the hours, weeks, months, and years after? What happens when a hate crime occurs on campus or off campus in the city where the institution is located? What recovery strategies are most effective? These and other questions are pursuable in future research. Patton et al. (2023) used intersectional methodology and the concept of institution-sanctioned violence to study how encounters with hate crimes, hate speech, and anti-Blackness affected Black college women. Future studies should also similarly consider the impact of hate activities on specific student populations at the intersections of race, gender, and other identities. Other scholars (e.g., Briscoe, 2024; Kenney & Johnson, 2024) have studied Black students' appraisals of institutional responses to hate crimes and racialized violence. Additional insights from Black collegians and their peers from other racial groups, including whites, would be useful.

(15) **Campus Climates After Legislative DEI Bans** – Between 2023 and 2025, a total of 133 legislative bills that aimed to defund or eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at higher education institutions across the U.S. were introduced (Staff, 2025). In 18 states, DEI initiatives were eliminated by legislators or via executive orders that conservative governors issued. Also, U.S. President Donald Trump signed several anti-DEI executive orders on the first day of his second term, then weeks later the U.S. Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague" letter that threatened to strip educational institutions of federal funding if they did not eliminate so-called discriminatory DEI programs (Trainor, 2025). Researchers should explore shifts in campus racial climate resulting from these and other legislative actions that eliminated DEI professional roles, culture centers, multicultural affairs offices, and other resources between 2021 and 2025.

(16) **Other Aftermath Climate Examinations** – Assessing the campus climate in the midst of or immediately following a major event may not offer the most accurate understanding of what occurs during normal times. It would, however, reveal important insights into how students were affected, how their interactions changed, and how they appraised the goodness of institutional responses during that tumultuous or otherwise unusual moment. For example, some researchers (e.g., Briscoe, Davis, et al., 2022; Koo et al., 2023) studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on campus racial climates at higher education institutions.

(17) **Intergenerational Comparative Studies** – Surveys and interviews with people from the same racial group who attended the same institution across each decade between the 1970s through the current year could reveal several fascinating details about the campus racial climate. Instructive consistencies and differences will likely emerge.

(18) **Systematic Analyses of Material Climate Cues** – Portraits displayed in buildings, statues placed around campuses, photographs from major student activities (e.g., sporting events, concerts, spring flings, parent/family weekends, and graduations) could offer useful demographic cues about the cultural inclusiveness of campus environments. Inviting students to identify segregated spaces, as well as places on campus where meaningful cross-racial engagement can be observed, also would be a worthwhile inquiry activity. Similar stocktaking could occur within some radius surrounding a campus (say within 3-10 miles) to collect and then

analyze off-campus racial climate cues – students should be invited to interpret these and reflect on their effects.

(19) **Studying Expectations vs. Realities** – In qualitative climate studies, students of color often report being surprised by the racism that they encountered on campuses – they were not expecting it. On the contrary, several participants in Harper and Hurtado's (2007) study said they had been forewarned and were aware that their institutions had earned longstanding reputations for being racist. Understanding what information and expectations students of color and their white peers have about the racial climate as they are applying to and just before arriving on campuses would be a valuable contribution to the literature. These pre-college expectations could be later juxtaposed with those same students' actual experiences at the end of their first college year and at other milestones in their college journeys.

(20) **Microclimate Research** – Several studies cited in this article are based on students' racialized experiences in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) classrooms and labs (Flores et al., 2024; D. R. Johnson, 2012; M. J. Lee et al., 2020; McGee, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Also, Leath and Chavous (2018) compared Black women's racial climate experiences in STEM and non-STEM majors. Undoubtedly, more remains to be known about STEM climates at community colleges and four-year institutions. But researchers also should devote more attention to examining students' racialized experiences in the humanities, social sciences, business, education, and other academic fields. Also, studies of racial climates in athletics departments, residence halls, sorority and fraternity houses, performance arts venues, and other spaces would advance the literature. Findings from analyses of microclimates at an institution can be juxtaposed with data about the overall climate on those same campuses.

(21) **Racialized Experiences in High-Impact Practices** – Participating in a first-year learning community, studying abroad, completing an internship that aligns with one's academic field of study, and collaborating with faculty members on research projects are just some of many well-documented high-impact practices (HIPs). Kuh (2008) deemed these "high-impact" because they have been shown to produce extraordinarily positive student outcomes. Too little is known about the racial dynamics between peers and professors from different races in these experiences. Furthermore, Patton et al. (2015) called for the expansion of HIPs to include racialized experiences that produce extraordinarily negative outcomes for students of color. "Being called a 'nigger,' 'wetback,' or 'alien,' for example, is undoubtedly a high-impact experience ... experiencing the tenure denial and subsequent departure of the lone professor of color in one's department may have significantly large effects on a minoritized student's outcomes" (pp. 209–210). The campus climate literature would benefit from more explicitly racialized explorations of HIPs that produce both extraordinarily positive and extraordinarily negative student outcomes.

(22) **Alumni Racial Recall Research** – Understandably, most climate studies are based on data collected from students while they were still enrolled in college. It could be, though, that interviewing or surveying them about the racial climate at their alma maters one, two, or five years after graduation will furnish useful data on how prepared they were to engage with neighbors and coworkers from different racial groups, how "woke" they felt their classrooms were, satisfaction with the depth of their engagement with racially diverse peers, what and where they learned about race, and retrospective reflections on shifts in their racial attitudes throughout their time at their undergraduate institutions.

(23) **Engaging Dropouts** – College student attrition is attributable to a complex cocktail of factors: cost, insufficient academic preparation, evolving life goals and career interests, personal illness, family caretaking responsibilities, entering professional sports drafts, etc. However, students sometimes leave because of the racism they experience and because the climate is unresponsive to their cultural needs and expectations. Researchers should invite retrospective

appraisals of campus racial climates from previously enrolled students who departed without completing degree and certificate programs.

(24) **Qualitative Studies of High-Performing Institutions** – NACCC data and results from many quantitative studies cited in this article show institutional performance differences – some campuses are deemed more inclusive and less racially hostile than others, and some are relatively better at fostering conditions that facilitate meaningful cross-racial engagement between students from different races. Knowing which institutions is helpful. But understanding how they achieve and sustain these results, having robust descriptions from students about how those campuses feel, and identifying adaptable and scalable approaches would be even more useful contributions to the campus racial climate literature.

(25) **Inquiring Explicitly About Racism and Racist Climates** – Harper (2012) found that many articles published about race in peer-reviewed higher education journals did not explicitly name racism or racist policies, practices, and conditions on campuses. That was also the case for many studies included in our synthesis. Pursuits of sense of belonging and inclusion are fine – more of them could be helpful. The field also needs more studies that explicitly ask students if they feel their campuses are racist; as well as where and how they experience racism. Scholars ought not replace such characterizations with seemingly more palatable semantic substitutes.

Again, these 25 are not the only topics that will advance the study of campus racial climates. Notwithstanding, they will surely build on the groundwork that Sylvia Hurtado and other scholars laid over three decades. Until racism and its residual effects are permanently eradicated from U.S. colleges and universities, there will always be a need for rigorous campus racial climate research. What matters more is what administrators, faculty, staff, policymakers, accreditors, and journalists do with the truths that climate studies reveal.

Conclusion

The underrepresentation of community colleges in published campus climate studies is not only a problem for research – it also poses unfortunate implications for practice. Across all institution types, trustees and governing board members, presidents, other administrators and staff, and faculty members need high-quality data about how students across all racial groups are appraising and experiencing classrooms and out-of-class environments. Simply conducting climate assessments and having the data are not enough – practitioners must use what they learn to strategically inform policy-making, practice, and curriculum. Community colleges, the sector of American higher education that does more than its fair share in enrolling and educating students of color, have been persistently disadvantaged by too few publications on racial climate and ultimately by too few evidence-informed efforts to ensure that campuses are safe, inclusive, equitable, and responsive to learners across all racial groups. As repeatedly emphasized throughout this article, deeper questions, topical expansion, and methodological diversification are needed in the study of campus climates everywhere in higher education. Community colleges are poised to benefit most from the 25 ideas we presented herein, along with other inquiry innovations that climate researchers advance in future studies.

Notes

1. Harper and Hurtado (2007) referred to people of color as "minorities," which was common at that time. But we use "minoritized" throughout this article to signify the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities. Persons are not born into a minority status, nor are they minoritized in every social milieu (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or places of religious worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of whiteness.

2. Most people we know refer to themselves as Latina or Latino. We value their self-determination and do not deliberately aim to force upon them terms like Latinx and Latiné. Nevertheless, we acknowledge Salinas and Lozano's (2021) as well as Villanueva Alarcón et al's. (2022) gender inclusion rationales regarding the use of Latinx and Latiné.
3. Harper et al. (2011) introduced the term "Onlyness" to capture the experience of being the only one or one of only a few persons from one's racial group in a campus space (e.g., residence hall or classroom).

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