



Lessons from Portugal 

Climate, Culture & Community

Sabbatical Presentation

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Background

This study examines the process of healing from racial trauma as experienced by Black Americans seeking residency in Portugal. I focused on Racial trauma, mental/emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias, discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. and Racial Battle Fatigue which is the cumulative result of race-related stress responses to distressing mental and emotional conditions. This study approaches these issues through a lens of trauma informed care that recognizes race-related struggles and embeds resources and strategies to reduce their impact.



Background

- 17 Participants
- Age range: 34–67
- Had been in Portugal at least 1 Year
- March 2023–April 2023
- Universidade de Porto and Lisboa

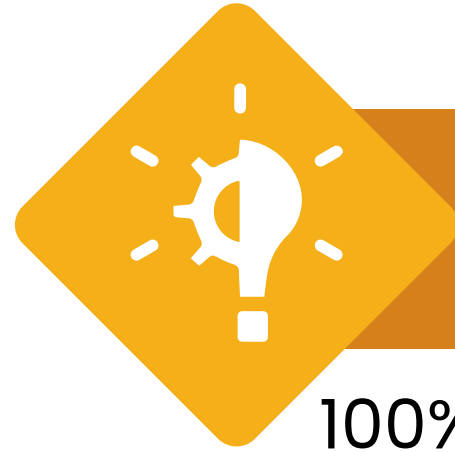


Background

- How has moving to Portugal facilitated healing from racial trauma?
- What influenced you to move to Portugal specifically?
- What specific actions did you take or factors did you consider to reconcile Portugal's role in colonialism?
- How did these actions impact your experience with racism?

4 Key Questions





Fear, Vitriol, Lack of Protection

100% of participants interviewed alluded to or explicitly stated that the social climate in America made them fearful. They felt their lives were in danger, the laws did not provide enough protection, and that there was little to no accountability for those who committed race-related or hate based crimes.



Lesson Learned: Discomfort is the Point

What protection do we provide for students and how do we make this explicit? Our job is not necessarily to make people comfortable with diversity and equity, but rather provide safe space and dialogue for people to process their discomfort with DEI on the path to growth and understanding.

Culture



Perfect? No. Better? Yes

Interviews from participants made clear that Portugal is NOT a racial utopia. However, their experiences with Racial Battle Fatigue were dramatically reduced because they did not feel “othered” or “targeted” or “profiled” in the ways they had experienced in the United States particularly in third spaces (social surroundings that are separate from the two usual social environments of home & work or school)



Lesson Learned: Free to Be

In addition to written declarations of equity, we also have to adopt a physical and psychological posture of welcome, for example in law enforcement. How are campus police perceived by students of color? Are the interactions/relationships positive or friendly? Hate has no home, but students need to feel like they have one at Harper.

Community



Blacks in Portugal

There is a community of Black Americans who have immigrated to Portugal who meet regularly to learn the city, navigate the nuances and bureaucracy, and compare their experiences in Portugal to the ones in the United States. Having a community that understands the challenges of acclimating to a new country, and healing together in a new country has proved to be therapeutic. No one I interviewed regretted the move.



Lesson Learned: Affinity Groups

We can offer students opportunities to heal together and facilitate dialogue about the possibilities of a brighter future beyond hardships. How do we make this accessible & obvious?

Points to Consider



Curricular Choices



Trauma Informed Care Groups



Diversity Symposia Reimagined



Coping Communities