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A Black helping hand: Collecting the narratives of Black American voluntourists in Trou Baguette, Haiti

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A Black Helping Hand:
Collecting the Narratives of black American Voluntourists in Trou Baguette, Haiti

A Senior Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements for the B.A. Degree in Sociology & Anthropology

Honors Anthropology 433 Anthropology Thesis
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Submitted by
Tayler Ulmer
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Jessie,

Everything that I do, I do for you.

Mwen renmen ou pou enfínte ak aprè.
A Black Helping Hand:
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Spelman College, Atlanta, GA

Volunteer tourism is marketed to be a mutually beneficial program where volunteers are said to gain personal development and contribute to developing communities (Raymond and Hall 2008). While white women are the predominant volunteering group, black Americans have a presence within this field. Black American volunteers are having racial encounters in their host community that juxtapose their skin color to their privilege as volunteers.

Drawing upon the scholarly literature on transnational blackness, master status (Hughes 1945), migrant identity, and privilege, this project examines the experiences of black American volunteer tourists and how they negotiate their nationality and identity in their host communities. Using a sample of convenience of students who have participated in Morehouse College’s Alternative Spring Break Program to Haiti, this project explores their experiences in Haiti and the ways that they engaged their privilege and racial identity.

The black American voluntourists find similarities through shared oppressions and histories with the Haitians that they encounter. However, the voluntourists remain aware of their Americaness and it becomes the most important aspect of their identity while in Haiti. Furthermore, the voluntourists engage privilege as Americans—a new phenomenon for the students that represent a historically disenfranchised community.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Methodology, Scope and Limitations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Data Analysis</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Implications</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Conclusion</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: Statement of the Problem

My Journey: Volunteering in Haiti

The sun beamed on my back as I raised my head to smell the crisp sea air. To my left was the Caribbean ocean and to my right green and brown rolling hills painted the sky. One of my cohort members, a Spelman College student, yelled my name and disrupted my daze. Racially, I am black. Ethnically, I am black/African American. I was a volunteer on an alternative spring break in Trou Baguette, Haiti and we were building the foundation of a church and renovating a local orphanage. We also had the opportunity to travel throughout Haiti not only as volunteers but as tourists. Morehouse College and Rotary International organized this trip, and my cohort was comprised of twenty black American students from Spelman and Morehouse Colleges.

On our first day of service, I helped to build the foundations of a church. The children at the orphanage were intrigued by our presence and they stopped in front of our work area as if there was a physical divide between us. Our black skin blended into the sea of Haitian faces, yet the children seemed confused by our physical appearance. After we began speaking English and they realized we were American, they came closer. It seemed as if they were assessing their approach towards us. Would their approach be different if we were Haitian or even white foreigners?

Despite my cohort’s astonishment by the physical similarities between themselves and the Haitians, individuals in my predominately-black American cohort made similar differentiations between the Haitians and themselves. To make this differentiation, they

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1 For this project, I choose to reference those who are descended from enslaved Africans brought during the transatlantic slave trade as black American.
leveraged differences in experiences and histories as a way to separate “them” and “us”. Throughout our nightly debriefing sessions, I learned that many of my fellow volunteers possessed the outlook of not the poor black children because we were black as well, but the poor Haitian children. This internal demarcation was indicative of their belief that a distinct difference exists between the Haitians and us, the black Americans. The conversations that we had after days of service would reveal that the students felt a burden to help these “poor Haitian children” because of their lack of economic resources. From these experiences, I began to ask questions about identity, race, nationality, volunteerism, and blackness around the world. Being a voluntourist (Wearing 2006)², in Haiti catalyzed my interests in exploring the experiences of black American volunteer tourists abroad and how their identities impact their experiences as they volunteer abroad.

The Popular Trend: The Growing Demand to Take the “Unbeaten Path”

Volunteer tourism³ has recently swept the Western world as a new, hip trend. This trend is viewed by many as a way to have meaningful interactions with an international community and also have the opportunity to be a tourist. Voluntourists take the knowledge from their 2-D textbooks and apply it in a 3-D learning space.

NPR reporter, Carrie Kahn (2014), analyzed volunteer tourism in her NPR radio segment, “As ‘Voluntourism’ Explodes In Popularity, Who’s It Helping Most?”. Her report highlighted this new trend among Western youth. She found that volunteers seek this opportunity to “give back”, travel to foreign countries, and practice new languages. Ken Jones, owner of the Antiguan Voluntourism Company, Maximo Nivel, says, “It used to be beach and beer. And now it’s, ‘Well, I want to come down and learn something and figure

² This is a term used to describe a volunteer and tourist.
³ I use volunteer tourism and voluntourism interchangeably.
out how to help or be a part of something.' It was more superficial 20 years ago, maybe"(2014). According to Jones, tourism has evolved to have altruistic goals as more people decide to take the "unbeaten path" of helping least developing nations while also enjoying the natural amenities of that country. Haley Nordeen, a young white woman international relations major at American University and volunteer at an orphanage in Antigua, Guatemala said, "I've met a lot of international relations majors here, so it seems like a trend," (2014). Another interviewee in the NPR segment, Sam Doddono, had an eye-opening experience, "The way I view things now is a lot different than before," Doddono says. "I've visited other countries but I've never done hands-on work or really talked to the people about the problems that they face in their lives" (NPR 2014). Voluntourism has become a popular form of alternative tourism that seeks to "solve" global issues in innovative ways. Kahn's radio segment presents this phenomenon as a positive and beneficial experience for both the volunteer and the volunteer site.

Like the volunteers interviewed in Kahn's (2014) radio segment, I had a transformative experience in Haiti. It was through this experience that I began to ask critical questions about volunteer tourism and the potential impact that volunteers may have on development. Furthermore, I began to ask questions about identity and how my experiences may differ from white American volunteers such as Haley. My interactions presented an ever-important question: how do aspects of black, American, volunteer tourists' identities intersect, and how do their identities impact their service in Haiti?

Current research on volunteer tourism does not consider the impact of racial identity on service delivery, and the ways that a black helping hand is perceived in developing nations.
Furthermore, current research does not explore black Americans' shifting master status as they enter international spaces (Hughes 1945).

**Identity and Volunteering Abroad**

Aspects of volunteer's identities have the potential to impact volunteer's perceptions of their work and the interactions that they have in their host communities. Dyci Manns, founder of a volunteer organization, Bookbags with the Basics, believes his status as an African American seems to be the biggest differentiator between the communities he serves and himself. Manns, whose work has taken him to multiple places within the African Diaspora, describes regions of the world where historically African descended peoples have moved to, such as Uganda and Belize, explains that within his family, “There are no millionaires, and I am a student of modest means, but there are some people in the world who can live for a year off of what I can make in two weeks at a minimum-wage part-time job” (Manns 2010). In this statement, Manns describes the Ugandans and Belizeans that volunteer abroad as “some people”; he makes the clear distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’ despite many Ugandans and Belizeans sharing similar physical features as black Americans. The latent messages interwoven within his comments expose the economic, cultural, political, and social separations that differentiate himself from the others. Interestingly, in America the common perception of black Americans are that they are economically, socially, politically, and culturally inferior; the historical and systematic disenfranchisement of these populations have only perpetuated these stereotypes (Omi and Winant 1986). Yet, he still makes a differentiation between himself and the other community. He sees his position as an American, despite being a black American and the mainstream stereotype that black Americans are economically
disadvantaged, as a way to impact change in international African diasporic communities because they were not as economically advantaged as black Americans.

**The Project**

My experience in Haiti was informed by a multitude of factors such as my personal motivation to be a change in the world, the service work that I was completing, my skin color, my racial identity, my status as a woman, my socioeconomic class as being self-identified as US middle class, my lack of French and Creole skills, etc. ultimately shaped my interactions with Haitians and my perceptions of the overall experience. Through the compilation and analysis of black volunteer tourist's narratives, I offer a multi-faceted analysis of the black American volunteer tourist in communities within the African Diaspora.

I would like to understand how black American volunteer's "master status" (Hughes 1945) and racial identity may shift after their encounters volunteering in an African diasporic community. A person's master status is defined by the identity of that person that outweighs all other aspects of that person's identity (Laws 1979). My research also explores how black American volunteers' identities as being of African descent but having an American nationality may challenge their existing master statuses and ultimately impact their experiences abroad. It is very important to understand how different aspects of volunteers' identities may impact their experience and encounters within diasporic communities. Likewise, it is crucial to consider whether their blackness can impact their service.
Significance

My research will contribute to the sociological and anthropological approach of analyzing volunteer tourism and contribute a racial lens that specifically seeks to explore volunteer's experiences. It is important to gain a better understanding of how black American volunteers are impacted abroad and what factors of their identity may ultimately be shifted during the duration of their volunteer experience. Furthermore, this research can offer policy recommendations for ways to better ensure a more pleasant experience for this group and could possibly be the foundational research for ways to improve the service delivery of black Americans in both voluntourism and even study abroad trips. Additionally, it furthers our understanding of how volunteer tourism is defined and how different individuals within the volunteer tourism communities' experience may differ according to their race and nationality.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Being a Volunteer or Being a Tourist: An Introduction to Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism deconstructs the proverbial image of tourism as a time only for relaxing and sun bathing. Volunteer tourism "combines travel with voluntary work, attracting individuals that are seeking a tourist experience that is mutually beneficial to their personal development but also positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate" (Raymond and Hall 2008). Individuals from western communities travel to developing nations through volunteer agencies to serve developing communities primarily in the Global South. According to an NPR report by Carrie Kahn (2014), "More than 1.6 million volunteer tourists are spending $2 billion each year". Within the literature, scholars have varying opinions about volunteer tourism, its effectiveness, and volunteers' roles. Given the momentous impact that volunteers can have, it is important to consider the implications of volunteers' experiences and how their service can make an impact on the world.

The term volunteer tourism has taken various names such as cross-national volunteering, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, agritourism, and ecotourism (Lee 2011:1). Volunteer tourism (also known as voluntourism) was first coined after the creation of Volunteer Services Incorporated during John F. Kennedy's presidency. Despite the general definition of volunteer tourism as a time to volunteer abroad, definitions vary on length of time and volunteer's intended purposes. Dr. Stephen Wearing, a leader in the
voluntourism field and professor at the University of Technology, Sydney, defines voluntourism as involving:

"...tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into certain aspects of society or environment (2001: 1)".

While Wearing's definition has been widely accepted across the field, other scholars have created their own variations of his definition of volunteer tourism. McGhee and Santos (2005) define volunteer tourism as "utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need" (760). Raymond and Hall (2008) extend Wearing's time frame to include any amount of time that unites tourists and volunteering, which can encompass a breadth of programs under one umbrella term. Using Raymond and Hall's definition, examples include Habitat for Humanity, Cross Cultural Solutions, school-organized Alternative Spring Breaks (ASBs), various NGO-organized programs, Hostelling International, Volunteers for Peace, Doctors without Borders, Peace Corps programs, among other more long-term programs. For the sake of this project, I adopted Stephen Wearing's definition of volunteer tourism.

Overall, volunteer tourism programs are organized by several organizations such as non-profits, governments, and privately owned operators. Volunteers serve in programs that respond to everything from environmental crises to social problems. Trip lengths vary and they are found to extend anywhere between three months, the average span of many volunteer tourism programs (VTP), to two years.

Volunteer tourism is a space for perceived opportunity for Westerners to individually respond to global injustices in a controlled encounter (Veradi 2013:2). To some, it more
importantly combines a volunteer opportunity with the opportunity to enjoy "vacations [that] are culturally sanctioned escape routes from paid work for Western travelers" (Lyons et al. 2008:5). Sally Brown (2005) identifies short term tourism as the "vacation-minded voluntourist" (Verardi 2013:7; Brown 2005:981), which offers an interesting intersection of volunteering and tourism due to its short time frame and heightened urgency to jam pack more "experiences" within a shorter amount of time (Verardi 2013:7). Volunteer tourism is ever growing.

**The Volunteer: Demographics and Motivations**

Most volunteers are women from a diverse age group but volunteer's ages typically range from ages 20-25 (Lee 2011; Wearing 2001; Kahn 2014). They come from various walks of life in respect to their education levels and careers. However, many have at least a college education and have additional income to pay for program fees (Verardi 2013:7; Lee 2011:12). The overwhelming proportion of volunteers is white. While there is not much statistical information about the racial demographics of these programs, a vast majority of volunteer tourism literature focuses on the experiences of white volunteers.

Volunteers choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons, but most do not expect financial gain. In fact, many programs require participants to pay hefty program fees (anywhere from $500-7,000) to have "transformative" experiences. Caldwell and Andereck (1994) found that volunteers pursue these experiences based on professional development and are driven by the "perks of volunteering"(1994 [Ruhanen, Cooper, and Fayos-Sol:2008]). Such "perks" include the ability to make themselves more competitive for employment, the opportunity to participate in a "responsible" version of tourism, and the
pure excitement of traveling and living abroad for an extended amount of time in a “safe”
and structured environment (Roberts 2004:15, Verardi 2013:1).

**The Work: What do Volunteers Do?**

Voluntourism is big business for organizations that offer these programs. These organizations “promote, sell and organize programs for volunteer tourists” (Raymond and Hall 531: 2008). Volunteer tourism extends the typical form of tourism to include work that helps a community and is a transfer of resources and skills. Thomas Roberts (2004) describes this type of work as typically focused on conservation of the environment, youth work, practical projects, social work and other ways to uplift the community. In recent years, the popularity of Volunteer Tourist Programs (VTPs) has grown tremendously, and there has been a rapid increase in the number of individuals who participate in these short-term programs.

There are inextricable connections between voluntourism and international development. Volunteer tourism or how Smith and Brewis (2004) refer to it as, ‘Cross-national volunteering’, can now be identified as a developing movement as part of a globalizing civil society (Davis Smith and Brewis 2004). VTPS form part of a wider phenomenon of what Smith (1990: 279) calls the “transnational private aid network”. This network of organizations and individuals are engaged in “moving resources across country borders through cost-effective channels to alleviate human suffering in crises and to enable the hard-core poor in developing countries to better themselves in some significant, if limited, way” (2004). According to Smith and Brewis, volunteer tourism can effectively
combat international disparities and play a significant role in international development schemas.

**Transformation of Self**

Volunteer tourism is as much a discovery of self as it is a journey to help others. "In some instances, it is possible that volunteering can be life-changing and life-fulfilling, but it can also cut one adrift from self-knowing to the sometimes unnerving worlds of self-discovery and self-doubt (Lyons 2003[Wearing, Deville, Lyons 2008:63])". A. Lepp (2008) discusses the process of self-reflection that is inherent in VTPs. From her study, Lepp found that by "confronting global inequality and witnessing the resiliency of Kenyans in the face of it, enabled volunteers to put their own problems in perspective" (94). One of the most substantial findings is that volunteers confront realities that they may normally not have been exposed to and through this experience, they personally reflect. Viewing volunteer tourism through a symbolic interactionist frame of leisure, Wearing and Neil (1999) find that volunteer tourism has the potential to transform. A. Matthews (2008) argues that in fact young travelers seek the "otherness" that occurs on these trips as a means to have "authentic" experiences in hopes of personal transformation.

**The Untold Story of Tourism: Do Volunteers Really Make a Change?**

Volunteer tourism agencies have successfully marketed volunteer tourism as an opportunity to transform, but does volunteer tourism transform the *host community?* This question has had little attention in volunteer tourism literature. Peter Smith (2014) argues that "the actual contribution to development is minimal and that the impacts on host communities are often assumed rather than researched" (Smith 35). This lack of
transformation can be accounted to “insufficient knowledge, inappropriate skills or weak qualifications to produce ‘effective help’ or even question the level of volunteers’ altruistic intent (Smith 35).

For instance, Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), an American based volunteer tourism company, uses stereotypical images of the Global South to invoke emotions and sympathy. CCS’s website, in many ways, is an artificial reconstruction that is idealistic and does not necessarily reflect the reality of the programs on the ground. However, as K. Simpson (2004) suggests that the first action of perpetuation of stereotypes by volunteers is through VTP’s marketing material that over simplifies host communities. VTPs “impose a simplistic view of ‘the other’ so that ‘difference’ can be sold and consumed” (Raymond and Hall 532: [2004] 2008). This is not the only promotion of stereotypical and sweeping generalizations through marketing materials to attract volunteers, but it continues once the volunteers arrive as critical engaging conversations about the host communities are left unsaid. It is envisioned that, “volunteer service engenders hope and friendship, both of which are critical to waging peace... The more people volunteer all over the world and make friends with local people, the more peaceful the world will be” (Raymond and Hall 532:2008). However, if there is a distinct definition of who is considered to be “us” vs. “them”, then this goal seems to be a more daunting task then envisioned. “One way” interactions have “the ability to ensure cultural hegemony” (147). Seemingly, cross-cultural understanding through volunteer tourism is an aspiration rather than a result.

Furthermore, it has been found that some projects are not a result of a community’s need or desire but rather a business venture established to profit from the booming
volunteer tourism industry (Guttentag 2009). Also, the cost of the programs could be used to purchase local labor, which would nurture the local economy. Guttentag finds that volunteers are many times more concerned with their own perceptions about development and ways to help that they fail to recognize the host community's desires. UK based volunteer organization, Voluntary Service Overseas, "favor long term placements, utilizing skilled graduates, over short-term voluntary projects" (Smith 2014:36). Yet, it may still be harmful for inexperienced volunteers to work in communities abroad without proper training except an enthusiastic personality. Volunteer tourism is more beneficial for the volunteer rather than the host community.

**Exploration of Postcolonial Otherness and the Tourist Experience**

Stephen Wearing and Michael Wearing (2006) conclude that the stereotypes that tourists hold about the Global South are fortified by global hegemonic economic systems. Wearing and Wearing's (2006) pivotal paper, "Exploration of Postcolonial Otherness and the Tourist Experience", provide a framework to critically assess volunteer tourism organization's intentions and their possible contribution to volunteers' hegemonic attitudes about the host communities.

Wearing and Wearing situate hegemonic attitudes of Western tourists in global capital flows, the effects of capitalism, and neoliberalism. Volunteer tourism in itself denotes the flow of goods and services from the Global North to the Global South and particular identities have been attached to such economic flows.

"In terms of the globalization of capitalism in the last 20 years or more these constructions cannot be disentangled from the dominance of liberalism and the intensification of global market economies... neoliberal
ideologies regard people as consumers rather than producers" (2006:146).

Subsequently, "identity is constructed in free market societies" (146). Neoliberalism functions to attach particular identities and cultures to what is perceived as either inferior or dominant cultures. These perceptions "reinforce the accumulation logic of Western economies" (Wearing 2006) and has emerged in discourses of tourist literature and marketing material. Western dominated tourist operations have "allowed the tourism industry and particularly the corporate, economically powerful tourist marketers to "design, plan, and implement tourist adventures into poorer developing countries..." (Wearing and Wearing 2006:147). Wearing and Wearing provide a framework to analyze volunteer tourists' interactions in their host community and critically assess the implications of world capital flows.

The black American community is vastly associated with poverty and historical disenfranchisement. According to Pew Research (2013), the average white American household assets in 2010 totaled $783,224 while black American's total household assets equaled a mere fraction of that amount-- $154,285. During 1976 to 2011, only 15% of black American students were enrolled in American colleges compared to 61% of white Americans (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2013). Despite the apparent disparities between the black and white American experiences within America, the difference between the black American and black Haitian experiences are even more shocking. For example, in Haiti, 54% of Haitians live on less than $1/day and 44% of Haitians are illiterate (Jobe 2011). Despite, the overall low socioeconomic status of black Americans, they are still a part of a global flow of capital that privileges Western
societies and in many ways themselves, especially in comparison to other African diasporic communities such as Haiti. Adopting the framework provided by Wearing and Wearing, it is impossible to isolate black American's national identity, their United States citizenship, from their overall identities. Furthermore, for those black Americans who go abroad to volunteer, they have additional privileges to be able to afford to volunteer, have the time to leave the country and have the exposure and specific networks to spark such ventures. This juxtaposition of identities only adds to the complexities experienced by black American volunteer tourists.

**Hegemony**

Development encompasses many different facets, and it includes everything from economic to human capabilities growth (Lewis 2:2006). Volunteering has put a human touch to development projects in Less Developed Countries (LDCs), yet many argue that the downside of these programs is the lack of cross-cultural understanding and dependency on Western aid that they perpetuate. It is important to recognize the ways in which the legacy of colonialism and hegemony of the United States is actualized through volunteer's work.

Wearing and Wearing explore the effects of hegemonic attitudes on the representation of the host communities. Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci, coined hegemony to refer to the ruling class' power over the subordinate class. Its definition has been broadened and is commonly understood as the "plural domination of particular forms of culture to the exclusion and inferiorization of other forms" (2006:149). Wearing and Wearing use hegemony to refer to tourists' interactions with the host community.
Consumption of arts and crafts, cultural ceremonies, and festivals are all packaged to fulfill tourists’ desires. Subsequently, hosts’ cultural practices are trivialized and stripped of their important cultural value to meet the desires of the tourist and their “voyeuristic gaze” (Wearing and Wearing 2006). The “cultures of “developing nations” are promoted as “commodities of difference”, and they fulfill a commercially created need in the consciousness of affluent clients” (Ibid. 150). This trivialization of culture only deepens the divide between host communities and volunteers, and does not provide a space for cross-cultural exchange. Furthermore, it reinforces the maintenance of the cultural hegemony of the tourist’s culture and the practiced inferiorization of other cultures.

Black American voluntourists have the potential to leverage American attitudes and promote hegemonic structures. The morals, values and beliefs that black Americans may hold are greatly informed by their American identity. Despite black Americans’ skin color, they have the potential to recreate spaces of global hegemony that serve to trivialize the host community.

The Opportunity for Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Wearing and Wearing are particularly interested in the tourist space as a site for genuine cross-cultural dialogue between the tourist and the host society. Due to the hegemonic perspectives of many tourists, tourists “consume yet frequently misunderstand and generally undervalue what the ex-primitive or “other” in that region has to offer them” (150). The host culture is effectively packaged, presented and commoditized as “exotic”, “savage”, and “primitive”. In effect, tourists bring their perspectives of the host culture and through limited and/or unauthentic interactions between groups, tourists leave with the
same reinforced perceptions of the Global South as being backwards. Essentially, tourists and "the toured" are in a perpetual cycle of cultural misunderstanding.

While volunteer tourism works to alleviate problems by refocusing funds from the Global North to the Global South, it has been argued that volunteer tourism fails to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue. Despite the fact that cross-cultural dialogue is one of the founding tenets of many VTPs, Wearing and Wearing believe that host communities can create spaces that lack cross-cultural understanding. In fact, many dispositions that volunteers held prior to coming are not disrupted but rather fortified after their experiences abroad. In essence, this view creates the tourist as capitalist "us" and the host as oppressed "them" (146). Many times, these efforts have yet to be actualized and the assumptions and stereotypes carried by those of the Global North continue to negatively impact the image of the Global South (Wearing and Wearing 2006). Wearing and Wearing define this lack of cross-cultural interaction as a "self-other expectation", which presents the tourist as having a narrow analysis of their interactions within their host community. Simply put, the tourist sees members of the host community as "others". The dissonance born in neoliberalist structures have created strong and very real divides between the tourists and toured.

The International Institute for Peace Through Tourism (2006) suggests tourism is meant to promote cross-cultural understanding by creating dialogue and eventually reducing conflict. In fact, some scholars believe volunteer tourism would deconstruct some of the stereotypes and assumptions that surround developing countries (2006). In order to attain these goals, there needs to be an active commitment to provide volunteers the
opportunity to interact with host communities on a cultural level (Raymond et. al. 532:2008). Furthermore, David Lewis (2006) argues that volunteer tourism can put the needs of the server over the served, and frame and influence the server’s perspective on social construction of ideas about development, poverty, and the ‘third world’ through strategically crafted programs. Volunteering has the potential to be a site for substantial cultural exchanges, but it often merely reinforces previously conceived ideas about the host community and its people.

**Cannibalistic Touring**

Wearing and Wearing use the term “cannibalistic touring" to describe the process of host communities “eating themselves” as they perform their culture for the Western tourists. This concept focuses on the ways that volunteer tourism presents Western hegemonic views and values as superior to the host community and the community accepting these views. “Host communities are in effect “eating themselves" with the cultural logic of profit and capital accumulation, and the cultural values of Western imperialist discourse” (146). Host communities detach from their culture and adopt Westerner's cultures. This one-way exchange is determined by the uneven distribution of capital between the Global North and South, and these behaviors only continue the cannibalization of certain cultures.

Cannibalistic touring leaves little space for Western tourists' self-development because of the constructed images that lay the foundation for “othering”. “Western culture is reaffirmed in its restrictive dimensions and its constraints, prejudices, and blind spots remain projected to varying degrees on to the subjectivities of hosts and tourists” (Wearing
and Wearing 2006:150). The cultures and lives of those in developing regions are wrapped and packaged as “other” and are “promoted as the creation of “commodities of difference” through the rearrangement and trivialization of cultural ceremonies, festivals, and arts and crafts to meet the expectations of the tourist” (Wearing and Wearing 2006). The differences between cultures are pronounced and the potential for meaningful cross-cultural dialogue is diminished. In many ways, Wearing and Wearing find that volunteer tourism only serves to contribute to the oppressed/privileged dichotomy that reconstructs an “othering” perspective as tourist volunteer.

Despite the growing literature about varying aspects of voluntourism, the literature fails to address the express the impacts of racial identity on voluntourism. Within the literature, voluntourists are only framed as white Westerners and as a result of their whiteness they possess hegemonic views. Through my work, I will explore the relevance of nationality and the perpetuation of privilege for black Americans who also participate in this work. Furthermore, I will explore the interactions between the black American voluntourists and the Haitians that they encountered and how those interactions may have impacted the ways that they view their own racial identity.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This project seeks to understand how black American volunteer's "master status" (Hughes 1945) may shift after their encounters volunteering in an African diasporic community. This research also explores the ways that the black American volunteers' identities as being African-descended but having an American nationality may challenge their existing master statuses and ultimately impact their experiences abroad. It is very important to understand how different aspects of volunteers' identities may impact their experience and encounters within diasporic communities. Likewise, it is crucial to consider whether their blackness can impact their service.

My specific research questions are as follows: RQ1: How are black American volunteer tourists' perceptions of their own identities impacted by interactions within their host communities? RQ2a: How does the master statuses of black Americans shift based on encounters within their host community? RQ2b: Do their interactions in their host community influence the ways that they view race and nationality in the American context? RQ3a: How do black Americans exhibit their privilege abroad and under what circumstances? RQ3b: How has this impacted the ways that they view their Americaness and positionality in America?

Arriving as a Stranger: Racial Constructions, The Self, and Transnationalism

Race is situational. It can be dependent on an individual's location, accent, hair texture, and in some cases is dependent on simply another person's interpretation. "Race not only serves as an element of social structuring, but also a phenomenon achieved through social interaction situated in social contexts" (Bratini 2012). While race is situational, it is very real. The ways that a person self-identifies and in many cases how
others interpret their physical characteristics, can determine their social, political and economic realities.

Racial identity has the power to determine so many aspects of individual’s lived experiences, but individual’s identity can change based on the context. In social identity theory, the self has the opportunity to categorize itself based on surroundings and its relation to those surroundings. This process is called self-categorization; it is here that an individual determines whether he/she is a part of the “in-group” or “out-group” (Turner 1985; Stets and Burke 2000). Furthermore, it is here where some aspects of that individual’s identity become salient and others are activated. Individual’s identities are fluid and some are more recessive in certain environments while others may be more apparent in others. Renown sociologist Mary C. Waters (1999:49) states in her study of West Indian immigrants to America that, “For all the respondents identity was socially constructed and situational: it mattered who they were with, what the circumstances were, and who was doing the asking and defining of identities and labels.” While Waters was discussing the experiences of Afro-West Indians to America, the same concept can be applied to black Americans that travel to other places within the Diaspora. Black American’s identities abroad are socially constructed and situational: they are based on a multitude of factors. Applying that understanding, it complicates the experience of black American volunteer tourists who may associate themselves with one identity, but who are being ascribed another by their host communities.

The flexibility in the interpretation of identity has presented complex interactions. For example, given the United States one-drop rule, black Americans come in every skin color, have every hair texture, every eye color, and every body type capturing those who are “ambiguously” black to those that are associated with “stereotypical blackness”. Black Americans’ identities are
even more complex within the African Diaspora because of their economic, social and political power of their Americaness coupled with their black skin.

As the British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, pointed out, departure from one's homeland means that immigrants “can no longer take themselves for granted as people who do not require definition” (1989). As black Americans travel, they are no longer guaranteed the simplicity of being just black because they are encompassing a new environment where the majority of people are black or identify with the African Diaspora. But now and maybe for the first times in their lives, they need to recognize how other identities may become more salient or more apparent in this new context such as their American identity and their economic status.

My first research question asks: How are black American volunteer tourists’ perceptions of their own identities impacted by interactions within their host communities? It is essential to understand salient and activated identities in order to understand the black American’s interactions within society. Furthermore, it is important to understand how host communities’ perceptions of black Americans may inevitably impact the black American experience abroad. For black American tourists, I am interested in understanding the complexity of the ways that their racial and national identity intersects and how those identities impact their volunteer service abroad.

**Master Status**

The theories of self-categorization and discussions of salient and visible identities are rooted in the concept, master status. In “Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status”, Everett C. Hughes (1945) introduced his groundbreaking concept, master status. “Even in our society, certain statuses have developed characteristic patterns of expected personal attributes and a way of life” (1945: 353). Individuals fit that status and partake in activities
and build their lives around what is assumed from this status and the assumptions of it. Master status outweighs other status criteria and creates tension when it is not in accordance with the cultural definition of inferiority or superiority of other status criteria (Laws 1979). In the case of race, the black American identity or status comes with a host of assumptions or assumed auxiliary traits that many determine their actions and interactions in society (1945). As described by Hughes, “the expected or “natural” combinations of auxiliary characteristics become “embodied in the stereotypes of ordinary talk, cartoons, fiction, the radio and the motion picture”(Hughes 355). These images and conversations set the standard for individuals.

Inevitably there are some positive and other negative assumptions that have inextricable ties with the public’s perceptions of blackness. Hughes notes that for black Americans, the black American identity, “tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (Hughes 1945:357). Hughes uses the example of a black professional, to Hughes these factors of this individual’s identity clash. Blackness and the attainment of powerful positions are not one in the same story; this is a contradiction to the master status. Whites who encounter this black professional have to choose whether to recognize his master status as being African American, which may degrade their acceptance of his auxiliary statuses of being a professional. They have to choose “whether to treat him as a Negro or as a member of his profession” (1945:357). This same theory can be applied to the black American volunteer tourist. In this context, the master status of black Americans may shift within a different context. Individuals have both a master status and auxiliary statuses. However, it is dependent on other’s perceptions to choose which aspect of their varied identity and statuses they choose to recognize.
Of course, Everett’s concept has evolved since 1945 and it now encompasses the intersections of various identities. The intersection of gender, race, class, religion, socioeconomic status, sexuality, etc. help to define an individual and more importantly, it defines that individual’s interactions and social position within a given society (Crenshaw 1989). Social position also has two fractions: ascribed and achieved statuses (Lindemann 2007). Ascribed characteristics are statuses that are not determined by the individual such as age, gender, and ethnicity. But, achieved statuses are those statuses that are earned or chosen and reflect a person’s skills, efforts and abilities. Master status, like social position, considers the layers of an individual’s lives and identities to determine social interactions within certain spaces. Additionally, social position and master status are situational and have the opportunity to change depending on that individual’s environment and the people that they are surrounded by.

Similar to my first question, my second question seeks to explore the role of various identities within black American volunteer tourists and whether some identities became more important within certain contexts and others less important within others. Specifically, I would like to identify the most important identities while the Americans are in the United States and whether those identities change once they travel to Haiti. Also, utilizing master status as a theoretical foundation, it will help me understand how they view themselves as Americans and how that may impact their interpretations. RQ2a: How does the master status of black Americans shift based on encounters within their host community? RQ2b: Do their interactions in their host community influence the ways that they view race and nationality in the American context?

Black Americans Have Privilege Too...
Many tourists, mainly Westerners of a higher socioeconomic status, view the Global South as culturally inferior, backward and non-progressive. Privilege can be exhibited and performed in several ways, but at its core it is understood through the dichotomy of the oppressed versus privileged. Essentially, privilege can be defined as the opportunity to leverage certain identities in order to gain both tangible and intangible items solely based on membership within certain communities. It is important to consider the implications of privilege as we explore the possible effects of racial identity on volunteer tourism. “It would be a mistake to conclude that decolonization marked the end of the empire” (Roberts 2004:2). Black Americans are American. Many have adopted Western values and have been acculturated to view the world through a Western perspective, despite their forced migration to the “New World”.

According to Roberts, volunteer organizations only strengthen the need of developing nations to depend on Western countries and their aid. With the fall of colonialism, the dynamics between Western countries and colonies still maintained the same power relations. The West:

"attempted to dominate the developing world culturally, politically, economically, and socially. It is because colonizers believed and embodied forms of privilege and they believed that this privilege granted them the ability to dominate the developing world with their cultural, political, economic and social ideologies. These processes have been played out through a wide variety of agents including the work of Western NGOs and volunteer tourism" (16:2004).

Coupling Robert’s and Wearing and Wearing’s perspectives, it is evident that neoliberalism has aided in constructing the Global North and South. Subsequently, this global divide has
created a separation economically, politically, and culturally. Inevitably, this separation also created an oppressed versus privileged dichotomy.

For middle and upper class black Americans, there are arguably certain privileges that are afforded them versus other people of color around the world. In Mary Patillo’s (2013) book, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class Elite*, she discusses the privileges experienced but not commonly associated with the black American community. This community differs from others because they:

"own houses; they do not rent. They have often gone to college; they are not high school dropouts. They are more likely to have stable jobs; they are less likely to be unemployed. Their incomes are above that of many whites; they are not part of the one-quarter of African Americans living below the official poverty line" (2013:ix).

Due to the high costs associated with volunteer tourism and traveling overseas, only the middle and upper class communities have access to volunteer tourism—even if they are black American.

Black Americans also inherit a distinct privilege that is only correlated with their American identity, which creates points of divergences between themselves and many African Diasporic communities abroad. As discussed by Roberts, given neoliberalist structures and the capital flows of the world, the Western world has situated itself as a hegemonic figure and it determines the economic, political and social standards. With this power comes privilege. Black Americans as American citizens have this privilege and operate within a system where their American passports carries economic, political, and social power and rights that are unparalleled to many other people within African diasporic communities. American privilege or First World privilege/ First World Problems are defined as a “relatively trivial or minor problem or frustration (implying a contrast with
serious problems such as those that may be experienced in the developing world)" (Oxford Dictionary). Interestingly, black American privilege like many other privileges experienced by groups such as whites and males, go unnoticed by the beneficiary groups and are assumed to be normal (McIntosh 1989).

Lastly, understanding privilege will help me answer my third research question that focuses on privilege and the influence of American privilege on black voluntourists. I am curious to understand how this community confronts privilege and “first world problems” especially given that 1) black Americans are not usually associated with privilege in the American context 2) black Americans placement within the African Diaspora as an economically and politically privileged community may impact their interactions and encounters with people of other African Diasporic communities. RQ3a: How do black Americans exhibit their privilege abroad and under what circumstances? RQ3b: How has this impacted the ways that they view their Americaness and positionality in America?
Chapter Four: Methodology, Scope and Limitations

Research Design and Sampling

For this study, I utilize reflexive dyadic interviewing, a semi-structured interviewing method introduced in Carolyn Ellis and Leigh Berger’s in *Their Story/My Story/Our Story: Including the Researcher’s Experience in Interview Research*. I share a personal experience with this topic because I have participated in black volunteer tourism and I am a member of the black American community. I adopted an auto-ethnographic approach to this project, and I intertwined my personal narrative throughout this research to reinforce theoretical analysis of the experience in which I live. It is essential for me to recognize my personal experience and not alienate my own story in the process of collecting another’s. Also, by adding my personal story, I create a more comfortable environment that embraces an equal and respectful climate for my interviewees.

"Narratives do not merely “evaluate” actions and identities; they also contribute to changing or maintaining them. Narratives are important in the diffusion and strengthening of social prejudice“ (DeFina 22). Narrators have the power to “create, circulate, and contest images about in-groups and out-groups by stressing similarities and differences, and by building interpretations on common contexts of experience“ (DeFina 22). My narrative provides one of many experiences of black American volunteer tourists. While my narrative is important—it is my personal account and should not be taken as the authoritative, single narrative of black American volunteers abroad, but only as one story of a complex and varied network of experiences. Throughout the interview, the reflexive dyadic interview method will help me to facilitate conversation between the interviewee and myself.
For this project, I interviewed eight Spelman and Morehouse students from across disciplines and classifications that participated in Morehouse Rotary's 2013, 2014 and 2015 Alternative Spring Break program. Students participated on trips during their freshman, sophomore and/or junior years. Participants came from various majors and parts of the United States. There were three students from Spelman and five students from Morehouse. I also interviewed Mr. Julius Coles, the director of Morehouse's Andrew Young Center and organizer of this event. By controlling for the location and the actual program structure, I was able to collect substantial data that critically compares different black American experiences within one context. I chose this trip because it uniquely brings African American students from Morehouse and Spelman colleges, historically black colleges in Atlanta, Georgia, in contact with people in an all-black country, Haiti, through a volunteer program that uniquely blends both service work and tourism through cultural immersion excursions. Also, this program is one of the well-organized alternative spring break programs that allow a substantial amount of time to interact with Haitians within their neighborhoods and communities verses in isolated volunteer sites or tourist areas. Despite this single context and with particular consideration to the volunteer and their unique program, I hypothesize that the interviewed volunteer tourist's experiences can be duplicated across areas within the African Diaspora and across volunteer programs.

**Interview Questions**

I have strategically created questions that will unlock the participant's stories (Please reference Appendix 1). Firstly, I placed the more general information at the beginning of my agenda. This will allow the respondents to become comfortable with the interview space and sharing information with me. It will also provide me with essential
information about the interviewees experience abroad such as 'where did they do?', 'what are their surface level feelings about their experience?', 'when did they go?', 'what did they do'. As our conversation progresses, I asked more intimate questions that did not guide my interviewee to answer questions directly related to my research questions, but only presented instances where she/he had encounters with topics and stories related to my research goals. Overall, I did not lead the interviewee to my research questions, nor did I “plant” guiding phrases or personal experiences in our conversation to direct our conversation.

**Human Subjects Consideration and IRB**

I have received IRB approval from Morehouse and Spelman Colleges. I recruited participants by requesting them from the Andrew Young Center on Morehouse campus. Through this initial introduction via email, I did not receive the total amount of respondents needed and I used the snowballing procedure to collect more respondents. I contacted the participants via text message. The interviews were held in Morehouse’s Douglass Hall private study rooms for 45-60 minutes. The interviews were voluntary and participants were allowed to leave at any time in the interview if they feel uncomfortable. I also interviewed administrators that were involved in the planning process for this trip and who served as chaperones in Haiti. To ensure the confidentiality of the participant, I use pseudonyms for the participants.
Chapter Five: Data Analysis

Background Information about the Alternative Spring Break Trip

January 12, 2010, Haiti suffered a catastrophic earthquake that killed more than 220,000 people and left more than 1.5 million people homeless (Oxfam n.d.). An already suffering Haiti, already characterized as the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, was further paralyzed by the magnitude 7.0 earthquake.

In 2010, Jacques Pape, a former student at Morehouse College and Haitian national, wanted to do something for his country and created this Alternative Spring Break program. Jacques continues to help organize the program and he works closely with the director of Morehouse College’s Andrew Young Center for International Affairs, Mr. Julius Coles. Jacque and Mr. Coles wants to mobilize Morehouse students to serve and be a change in Haiti. This program has sent students to Haiti for the past five consecutive years. Primarily, the programs have focused in and surrounding Trou Baguette, Haiti.

In 2013, the same year that I participated in the program, twenty students helped to lay the foundation for a local orphanage and school. We also helped to repaint and repair the classrooms within the orphanage. In 2014, the program was unable to work with the orphanage/school due to new federal regulations that prohibited foreigners on the property. For that year, twenty-one volunteers helped to remove boulders from a local Trou Baguette woman’s front yard. Students also planted a garden. In 2015, fourteen Morehouse students climbed Pumice Mountain, a three-hour hike, to help an isolated village on the top of the mountain. They built the foundation of a multipurpose center that would primarily serve as a church.
While in Haiti, the students are hosted by Jacques' family in their gated private beach home in Trou Baguette. While there, students enjoy servers and private cooks. Each day, students received a breakfast and four-course dinner. They received a daily packed lunch, which students ate on the mountain.

The programs have received funding from private Morehouse donors and the Rotary Club of Atlanta. For the first four years, Spelman College students were allowed to participate in the Alternative Spring Break programs but this past year, the Alternative Spring Break administrators decided not to include Spelman students for various reasons. After speaking with Mr. Coles, I learned that one of the contractor's primary donors would expire this year. They are currently seeking grants to support the program for coming years.

**First Impressions**

The seas of black faces that resembled their own struck many of the students. In fact, it was most of the participants first time within an African Diasporic country and they all expressed a level of intrigue by the black and brown faces that surrounded them. From simply wanting to travel to a unique place to wanting to do a comparison of Haiti to the Dominican Republic (this particular person would be traveling to the Dominican Republic this summer), the students had various reasons for wanting to participate in the Alternative Spring Break program. Before arriving, the student's perceptions of Haiti were wholeheartedly influenced by media especially media covering the Post-Earthquake destruction of Haiti. One student revealed that she thought that it would "only be destruction" and she expected the Haitians to be "living in huts and having to pick food"
(Cameron). Upon arrival, many of the students expressed that the natural beauty of Haiti pleasantly surprised them.

Devon, a junior Film Studies major at Morehouse College, volunteered in 2015 with seventeen other men from Morehouse College. During his year, his all-male cohort climbed daily to a village on the top of Pumice Mountain. Devon says,

“When we got off the plane, it was SO hot!....[I thought]Wow, there are really black people outside of the United States”. When we climbed the mountain [Pumice Mountain], it would usually take the Haitians 30 minutes to climb but it took us 3 hours. {When they began their service} We knocked down palm trees with machetes and burned the leaves. We also moved boulders from one part of the mountain to the other”.

Later in his interview, Devon reveals that not only was he taken back by being in a predominately black country but also the discomfort he felt by the poor economic reality of many of the Haitians. “My first reaction was wow they’re black but they are poor”.

Language

All of the participants discussed language as a barrier. Three of the students studied French; only one of those students was fluent. Patrick, the student who identified as fluent is a French major at Morehouse College. He said, “I was able to get a lot from the experience that other students did not get because I spoke the language” (Patrick). The students that did not speak French mentioned that the difference in language limited their communication with the Haitians and subsequently their ability to discuss more complex issues.

Balance and Service: On Being a Voluntourist

After asking the students how they balanced being a tourist and a volunteer, students believed that it was essential to find a balance between the two roles. They
believed it was essential to fulfill the mission of the program, which was to do service, but they still wanted to participate in tourist activities, which would introduce them to Haitian culture and geography.

Nevertheless, it was important to maintain a balance in order to have the most rewarding experience. Lola, an International Studies major from Spelman College, explains an imbalance of identities as: "When your tourism takes over more than your volunteer hours, then yes, that can be an issue but if you balance them then there's nothing wrong with that" (Lola). Cameron, another Spelman student, felt that she was unable to find a balance between the two identities. During her year, her cohort worked in a woman's garden in Trou Baguette. The woman worked in the beach house and they worked to plant flowers and move boulders to improve irrigation in that area. Cameron expressed that she felt like a tourist even while volunteering. "Even as a volunteer, I was still entering into this woman's space. I wanted to remain cognizant of that... So, even in the volunteer space, I felt the same" (Cameron). She then explains that she always feels this way while volunteering even in Atlanta.

Patrick believes that in some ways tourism is essential to being able to volunteer. He explains:

"...when you go and visit the townships in South Africa is it voyeuristic because you're viewing the way they live and maybe you're going to someone's home? Or, is it a process that one has to go through in order to really understand a problem to work and fix it? You have to go through a process. This process will lead you and it will tell you that now that I have a better understanding of the issue, how can I be a better resource?" (Patrick).

Patrick believes that the only way to be the best volunteer is through adopting a voyeuristic gaze in order to completely (or at least attempt to) understand the problem. By leveraging
knowledge through exposure, volunteers are able to best serve the communities’ needs and desires rather than imposed needs and desires. While he offers that insight, he noted that “I don’t think that a lot people adopt that [perspective]” (Patrick).

**Service Impact**

After asking whether the volunteers believed that their service impacted the community, I received a variety of responses. One underlying theme throughout the group was a sense of dissatisfaction with the work that they did; most students believed that their work was not sustainable or voluntourists wanted to have a more significant impact within the community.

“Yes, I think it helped. I wouldn’t say the whole community, but just interacting with the kids I think it helped their day. It brightened up their day. That one-day they probably had a really good time. Painting the school, yes that was cool, but I do think that someone in the community could have painted the school. It did, probably, take the burden off of someone else. I think the best thing that has happened though, is that I’ve learned about Haiti. I learned about Haiti through a Haitian perspective and not an American viewpoint” (Lola).

“I believe that my work helped to enhance that one house but I don’t think that it was sustainable... As it was explained to me, what we did helped with irrigation” (Cameron).

“Yes, I think that we were able to lay the foundation for the community center, which will be multipurpose. I like to think that the more important aspect of my work was through writing a grant proposal so that we could do additional projects in the community. We very much so focus on doing projects that the community needs right now. But absent the funding that the community needs long term, then were just building a center to build a center.... I think it’s symbolic that we went there but I very much so see the work that we need to do as incomplete” (Patrick).

While the students appreciated their experience in Haiti and believed that they had somewhat of an impact in the community, they expected to have a more substantial impact in the community. Lola and Patrick used this dissatisfaction to encourage them to continue to work with the program. Lola participated in the
program for two consecutive years and Patrick decided to work on a grant proposal to continue this program for coming years. Students felt like their resources and bodies could have been used to make a more significant impact, but as one volunteer said, “We still talk about Haiti. We may have left Haiti physically but we’re still in Haiti mentally” (Shaq). Their work did not stop in Haiti.

Haitians are my Cousins: Exploring Common Histories and Shared Oppressions of Diasporic Peoples

“When I was there, we were clearly American. We were foreigners but I still identified as being black. They were just different black people. We didn’t have the same parents; they were our cousins” (Shaq).

Eight of the nine students racially identified as being either black or African American and seven out of the eight students found that racial identity or culture were the most important aspects of their identity. After being asked, what aspects of her identity was most important, Cameron, first replied religion but she quickly followed with race:

“I am proud of being black and specifically African American. We [African Americans] have this beaten down past and how we came to North America. We had to rebuild our own identity in this new place, but even that makes me proud because we could be relocated geographically and reinstate the same culture, religious practices, etc. It shows so much about our tenacity and our resilience. It just makes me so proud.”

Cameron, a Political Studies major and Religious studies minor from Delaware, participated in the Alternative Spring Break trip in 2014 during her junior year. Clearly, Cameron identifies with the black American group racially and finds pride within this identity. In another participant’s, Lola, interview she makes it clear that various aspects of her identity are important to her. However, she finds that being black and being a woman are the two most important aspects of her identity to herself and it influences the ways that people perceive her. As she compares the two aspects of her identity, she concludes: “When
people in society first see me, they recognize that I am a person of color. Yes, I am a woman and I believe that’s a strong aspect of my identity—society sees color.” Cameron and Lola like most of the other participants, viewed their race as an important aspect of their identity and it informed the ways that they navigated the world.

One participant, Patrick, found race less important to his identity. Patrick, a French major from the Northeast, identified as bi-racial. His father is Jamaican and grew up in the United Kingdom. His mother was white American. As a bi-racial individual living with his mother in a small northeastern state, he describes his community as “homogenous” so race became less important to him. He believed other aspects of his identity such as his intellectual capabilities and socioeconomic status was more important.

**Being black and being an African American: Micro versus Macro Approaches to people of the African Diaspora**

Within Cameron’s description of her racial identity, she made a separation between being black and being African American. In her response, African American refers to the group of individuals that have a shared history of being forcibly removed from West Africa and brought to the Americas as enslaved peoples. Within this thesis, I have referred to this group as black Americans. To Cameron, black refers to a fictive kinship and shared experience of African descended peoples across the world. I found that this distinction was important to understand throughout the interview process.

The participants switched between blackness to refer to their racial identity and blackness to refer to a shared oppression and common history as being African-descended peoples. For example, the black American volunteer tourists used blackness to refer to relationships with Haitians and they used their black American identity to refer to the
experience of African-descended people in America. As Devon noted, “There was a shared experience of oppression [between the black Americans and Haitians]...being black made it more personalized and passionate. Being able to help my people.” Throughout the participants’ interviews, there was a consistent theme of helping “my people”.

This basis of unity was founded on similarities as a result of blackness and the shared oppressions experienced by black Americans and black Haitians. Devon and Patrick discuss these oppressions as:

“If Haitians came to America, the cops would probably racially profile them or something based solely on the way they look. They would have all of those experiences based on the way they look... We have shared struggles that we go through such as being racially profiled. Over there, there are black police officers that racially profile them too. Not being able to get jobs, police brutality...”.

“I think it contributed to a sense of togetherness. Yes, we don’t have a shared colonial history but we do have a parallel history of socio-economic oppression...” (Patrick).

Devon and Patrick draw parallels in the historical economic, political and social disenfranchisement of black Americans and Haitians by the U.S. and various international communities. Devon drew parallels within his own life as being racially profiled by the police and the recent #blacklivesmatter movement led by young black Americans to end police brutality. He found uniqueness in this struggle that could only be justified on the basis of the Haitians and his own brown and black skin—their shared oppression. I asked Devon whether he could recall a time where he had a conversation with a Haitian about police brutality, but he was unable to provide a specific conversation from which this assumption came.
Patrick continues this conversation and believes that non-black Americans would have a different experience than himself and his all-black cohort. His beliefs are grounded in the thought that blacks have a shared history and oppression.

"I think that it was that shared experience that was different...[For non-black volunteers,] I think there is more of a detachment because there's a lack of similarity culturally. I believe the dehumanization and lack of recognition that you get, and the idea that black cultures are not of equal value, [unite us]. I think that it may be difficult for the average white person to understand that. Not that it's impossible but I don't think that a lot of people take the time to consider it" (Patrick).

Patrick recalls a conversation with a student group in Haiti and one of the students said, "it's surprising that you're American and you're not white". Patrick then explains that there were a lot of white Americans who came to do service in Haiti and many of the students were shocked that there was an all-black male group that came to do service. They said that it was their first time seeing an all-black group volunteering in Haiti. "I think that it really opened people's eyes to show them that you do have people other than Caucasian Americans coming to do service. I think it was helpful for them to see people that looked like them lending a hand and helping them" (Patrick). In a way, having a shared oppression and history made the black American volunteers' experiences tangible and permanent because they had something to directly associate them to within their own lives. To Devon and Patrick, similar oppressions that the Haitians experienced were also present in his own life; their reality was also their lived realities.

**Similarity in Oppressions but not the Same People**

The participants did not believe they had a relationship with the Haitians based on fictive kinship and brethren, but the participants discussed their relationships with the
Haitians as a result of a shared history and oppression. While the participants recognized a similarity in oppression and struggle, there was still a firm realization by the volunteers and an effort by the Haitians to show the different experiences of both groups based solely on their nationalities. The experiences of Americans and Haitians were different—even if the Americans and Haitians identified as black. This understanding brought nationality through an economic frame to the forefront as a main demarcation between the Haitians and the Americans.

**Recognizing their Americaness**

"The biggest difference is in terms of wealth and privilege. The understanding is that if you’re Caucasian and especially if you’re Caucasian American then you have money. So, there’s that instant thought that I need to start a relationship with them because they have something that I want or that I need. So you have that privilege in that way. We got that by virtue of us being American but it didn’t come out until people in the group began talking and it was clear that we weren’t Haitian. We encountered the same expectation that we would have money and material possessions. Some people got asked right out if they could have their iPods and tablets. There’s this expectation that you have money because you’re American but it’s intensified when you’re white. Because you’re clearly not Haitian and you look [pause] like the colonizer. Clearly, the colonizer has money" (Patrick).

Negotiating multiple identities can be complex and can result in the prevalence of some identities over others. As Everett Hughes (1945) proposes, black American’s master status as being black trumped all other aspects of their identities. However, after interviewing the students, they strongly identified (whether by choice or not) with their American identity compared to their black identity.

After asking the participants what they believed the difference between themselves and the Haitians were, I received two answers: wealth and nationality. The wealth disparities between the volunteers and the Haitians were visible through their everyday interactions with their volunteer sites. While the students were able to receive insight into an upper
class Haitian experience, the tourists’ experiences were vastly characterized by poverty. The wealth difference between the Haitians and volunteers, can in many ways be accounted to nationality and the global hierarchy of wealth and hegemonic power. As highlighted by Lola, the cross sections of nationality and wealth are important to understand.

“I see a separation between our citizenship, our language. But other then that we’re still humans—we’re still coloured people. I see the similarities there, but I do recognize that we are in different countries. Because of that, we are offered different opportunities” (Lola).

As Lola mentioned in her comment, opportunities or the possibility for social mobility is a result of good governance and can be a reflection of a country’s economic, political and social systems. While she recognizes similarities in the Haitian and black American experiences through shared oppressions as black people in the world, the two communities still differ and that can be reflected in both groups’ ability to attain certain political, economic and social opportunities. In Cameron’s interview, she reveals that she felt like an outsider in Haiti because she was North American.

“I felt like an outsider. You know that look that you give someone when they don’t belong. Yeah, people that I seen were giving me that same look. When we were doing work at the house, I got those same looks. I didn’t pay attention to similarities because I just felt so different in that context...We are Americans. People saw that we were Americans and people felt like we had something to give them. One day we went to the slums and this one little girl followed us the entire time asking for things... It was as if people knew that we had money and they were targeting us to ask for things.... They knew we were Americans by the way that we talked, the way that we dressed, and we were traveling on a big bus. One girl had a Micheal Kors bag that she was carrying” (Cameron).

Cameron continues and says she “had to check her privilege” and appreciate Haiti for what it was. Furthermore, she highlights the ways that Haitians perceived her
cohort, and a common belief that they could acquire money or material items from the Americans simply because they were American. Despite Cameron's black skin, her identity as an American was prevalent for many Haitians. At that moment, her nationality became a commodity.

**Being Just an American**

"No, they didn't really perceive us as a white person would. They just perceive us as Americans" (Devon).

Within this comment, Devon exposes the lack of importance on behalf of the Haitians to differentiate between black Americans and white Americans. To them, it didn't matter that the black Americans were black-American. Their nationality outweighed their blackness. Furthermore, Devon brings light to the differences in the black and white American experiences. In our conversation, he put emphasis on "just", which revealed that at times black and non-black Americans (specifically white Americans) have different experiences in America. He believed that the Haitians did not associate the same stereotypes and misconceptions that white Americans would associate with his blackness. Instead, the Haitians that he encountered simplified the socio-cultural histories of the black American volunteers in order to emphasize the economic and political histories of all Americans. Simply, black Americans were associated with privilege and wealth due to global economic flows and the United States standing within it. The stark differences of wealth between the black American students and the Haitians that they encountered only strengthened the aforementioned beliefs and divide between the two groups.

**Day to Night: Experiencing privilege through Haiti's stark economic differences**
"Our living arrangements were amazing but I do understand that that was the exception. If we walked five minutes away, it was a totally different story" (Cameron).

One of the most important experiences from the Alternative Spring Break program was the polarizing experience of working in an impoverished village and living in a posh beach house. This opportunity juxtaposed the varied experiences of poor and wealthy Haitians. It exemplified the vast wealth disparities between the majority, the poor, and the minority, the rich. As Lola recalls,

“We stayed on a beach in a gated community with maids and cooks. That part of the trip I was like, “Oh, we’re not in the real Haiti”. But then I had to realize, who am I to say that I am not in the real Haiti. This is the real Haiti. Yes, the gap between the economic classes is real but that doesn’t mean that it isn’t Haiti anymore” (Lola).

As Lola explains, one way that the students learned about the complexities within the Haitian economic experience was simply through their homestay. They lived with Jacques’ mother in the family’s beach house in an exclusive strip of beachfront property. In an effort to understand the complexities of the country, students discussed what it meant to really be in Haiti. Yes, Haiti was characterized by poverty but that is not the narrative of all Haitians and the entire country. From this experience, students gathered multiple perspectives of what it meant to be in Haiti.

During the day, volunteers worked in the impoverished town across the street from their residence, and at the end of the workday, they returned to the lavish beach house to enjoy the beach and to relax. Tim, a senior computer science major at Morehouse College, believed that walking down the mountain to return to the beach house was like, “all of our worries and everything that we seen in the village would just go away because this was comfortable for us”. As Tim explained, the students were able to “taste” poverty and the
experiences of the impoverished Haitians for a controlled time. However, as they walked
down the mountain the experiences of the poor Haitians were no longer in the forefront
because they knew that they would be going to a comfortable living arrangement that was
the same living standard as many of their homes in the States.

For me, the conditions were polar opposites and I compared the two spaces to night
and day. We had the opportunity to experience two opposing views of Haiti. None of the
students in my cohort had servers or cooks within our private residences in the United
States. Having this experience was weird because through one lens I enjoyed the treatment
but through another lens I did not want to consume such luxuries after working in a village
with no running water. To strengthen this discomfort all of the servers and cooks were
residents from across the street, which added a new layer of guilt because our enjoyment
was visible to the residents that worked at the house.

Interestingly, the black Americans became associated with privilege in Haiti. The
black American students who are generally considered underprivileged in the United
States due to the socio-historical disenfranchisement of people of color had become
privileged in Haiti because they were American. Oh, the irony.

"It was so interesting to see how some people who weren't considered
privileged in the American context become privileged in the Haitian
context. It was a comparative privilege and it really put in perspective
poverty in the developed world and poverty in the developing world" (Patrick).

In relation to the Haitians, the black American students were privileged. As Patrick
notes, privilege is relational. Cameron shares the same sentiments as Patrick. She
finds a direct correlation between her level of content and privilege.

"When I thought that I was privileged in one context, I felt a sense of peace
and contentment. But when I got to the United States [and left that
position of privilege), I felt like I needed to do more. That’s interesting...It’s almost as if our sense of peace and solace are based on our socioeconomic status or where we are in the “line up”... Darn” (Cameron).

Many of the students never had a maid or cook. Coming to Haiti and being able to enjoy amenities that were not granted to them in the United States, was eye opening for many of the students and it changed the way that they perceived their own

**Staying in a Village on top of Pumice Mountain**

During the 2015 program, students wanted to strengthen their experiences in the mountainous village through an overnight stay. Patrick believed that it was “good to stay at least one night and understand—or at least partially understand the struggle”. In response to this suggestion, Devon provided his thoughts, “Morehouse and especially not Spelman would allow us to do that; too much of a liability. What would happen if there was an emergency” (Devon). This comment exposes another operation of economic privilege, the privilege to choose housing and more importantly the opportunity to choose how to engage with spaces that are perceived to be safe and unsafe. Unlike the villagers, the students did not have to stay in the village—that was not their reality. At the end of their short stay in the village, volunteers would return to their indoor plumbing, uncompromised housing structures, and easily accessible water.

If the students stayed within the community, they would be experiencing it for 1) the opportunity to heighten their understanding about this mountainous community and the villager’s everyday struggles to strengthen their reason to do service in the community for an abbreviated time 2) a tourist experience. Both of these reasons could be beneficial for relationship building between the students and the villagers and it could help the
students create a more holistic understanding of the villagers' lives. Albeit these benefits, it is extremely important to make sure that the village would not be simplified. For the experience to be truly impactful, the students would need to be assured that they did not know everything about the struggles, beauties, and hardships of the villagers, but that their experience was simply a glimpse into the realities of their world. If the program decides to include an overnight stay within the village, they would need to consider student's interactions with the village and how their perceptions of privilege may aid in the simplification of that experience.

**Situating Privilege**

Throughout our interviews, participants consistently used the words: fortunate, privileged, and blessed to describe their experiences compared to the people in Trou Baguette and the village on the top of Pumice Mountain. “We're so fortunate in America and I took these fortunes for granted” (Devon). Students referenced both tangible and intangible items that granted them this privilege. The most widely referenced items were toiletry and hygienic items such as soap, shampoo, dependable running water, and clean drinking water. But students also believed that intangible items such as education, the ability for social mobility, and the privilege to move freely without economic constraints were also a part of the black American volunteers' privilege.

Students used their experiences in the United States as the standard to analyze and Haitians. “They don't know the "regular" way to live. I then asked, “what's the "regular" way to live”(Devon). Devon insisted that I knew what he meant when he said regular and even raised his eyebrows and hands to emphasize his point, he then replied, “You know, a regular way of life like here. Having a stove, a pillow, your own home” (Devon). Juxtaposing
the lifestyle that he was accustomed to in the United States to those that he viewed in Haiti, he deemed the way of living in Haiti was not just different but it was irregular. Devon’s strong word choice exposed underlying sentiments of privilege. He perceived the Haitian experience to be abnormal. Despite Devon finding similarities within the Haitian and black American experience through shared oppressions and histories, the lifestyles of the two communities made them different.

**Haiti's too rich to be poor.**

Despite the inaccessibility of various resources, one quote was repeated in six of the nine interviews, “Haiti is too rich to be poor.” The US Ambassador to Haiti, Ambassador Pamela A. White, told this quote to the cohort and it clearly resonated with the students. For the students, it helped them to engage cultural practices and perceived happiness as measurements of wealth compared to economic and materialistic goods. From these experiences, many of the students reported that they altered the ways that they viewed their own lives:

“For them to have nothing, they were still happy. On our first day, Sunday, we climbed the mountain to attend a church service. Their church was made out of stems and leaves. It was barely hanging up. But they were still happy. They were dancing, praising the lord, and speaking in tongues. They only spoke Creole but they were still trying to engage with us. It was like an unspoken language—the language of love. In their villages there were no stoves, no running water, nothing. There was nothing that would equate to proper living standards in the United States. They should have every reason to be mad. But they were still smiling. After that trip, I realized that I couldn’t complain about anything” (Devon).

Their experiences in Haiti made them consider their realities and privileges. Students placed less emphasis on material items as a measure of wealth but Haiti forced the students to find value in intangible items. This shift in perception made the students more
appreciative of their experiences at home. Furthermore, it encouraged them to appreciate
many Haitians drive to survive despite adversity.

*Understanding America through a Global Perspective*

Upon reflection, the voluntourists revealed that the trip helped them understand the
perceptions of Americans abroad and the relations between the United States and other
countries.

"Being abroad made me realize that there are other stories out
there besides the United States' story. It opened my eyes up to help me
understand what it means to be a global citizen, something that I wasn't
really working on before going to Haiti... I think you really realize
dominant figures and international political arenas. The winners get to
write history. All things come out of power and control and that can be
damaging" (Lola).

Students were able to gain a critical consciousness of their status of being American and
what that may imply in the global flow of wealth, power and privilege.

It also revealed the dissemination of news that was particularly prevalent within the
Black American community such as Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown to other
parts of the world. "We visited a college campus and one of the students asked us about
being racially profiled by police. Some of the men actually raised their hands... I never
knew that American news was as prominent before going to Haiti" (Devon). Devon as well
as other participants expressed their disbelieve that something so important to them was
being recognized around the world as a problem. This experience allowed Devon and the
other students to realize that they were a part of an interconnected world. Moreover, the
experience in Haiti forced the students to have a heightened realization of American
politics, the implications of American foreign policy, and the prevalence of American news.
Chapter Six: Implications

Through the participant’s interviews I gained a better understanding of the ways that the students understood ethnicity and race, similarities in oppressions and histories,
the ways that they negotiated their nationality abroad, and the ways that the expressed their privilege.

In W.E.B. DuBois' (1903) book, The Souls of Black Folk, he discusses the double consciousness of black Americans. As DuBois writes, Black Americans have a “two-ness”; one part of them explains their African ancestry and another side explains their American identity. These two identities were at the forefront as the black American volunteers interacted with the Haitians. Students did not adopt a “self-other expectation”, but they adopted a Pan-African perspective to understand their blackness on an international perspective (Wearing and Wearing 2006). Much like the literature that has been written about black Americans that travel to Africa, there was a general understanding of their blackness through a Diasporic lens (Richburg 1998; Bunche 2001; Hartman 2008). Blackness referred to the shared oppressions and histories of African-descended peoples around the world. Despite the dissonance forged through the language barrier, the black Americans felt a sense of connectedness. However, the black American volunteers never detached themselves from their American identity. Furthermore, the Haitians that they encountered did not allow them to detach themselves from this identity by always speaking to the students in terms of their Americaness rather than their blackness.

Through this experience, the black American voluntourists identity as Americans became the most important aspect of their identity and thus their master status (1945). The shift from their American identity as being the most prominent from their black identity forced the students to understand the implications of their American identity and how it may impact their experiences abroad. Unlike how Hughes viewed blackness and success as being clashing ideals, the black Americans social position changed and they were
in a place of privilege in Haiti because they became *just* Americans rather than black-Americans.

The voluntourists operated through privilege. The very opportunity to travel abroad is a denotation of a certain class privilege. As the voluntourists traveled abroad they benefitted from their American privilege and claimed many “first world problems” while in Haiti. The students assumed their American lifestyles were normal until they visited Haiti, a developing country. As Peggy Mcintosh (1989) writes in her pivotal paper, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”, privileges go unnoticed because the peculiar position of privilege; the privileged are detached from their privileges. As a group, black Americans, a historically disenfranchised community, is rarely considered privileged. Not until the black Americans traveled to Haiti did they recognize their privileges and the connections they had to the “First World”. The perplexing shift from a place of disadvantage in the U.S. to privilege in Haiti was an interesting space for the black Americans to navigate.

Lastly, it is important to explore the inextricable ties of economic wealth to nationality and identity. As Wearing and Wearing (2006) explains, “identity is constructed in free market societies” (146). The black Americans were undeniably impacted by their nationality and the ways that their “American experience” impacted the ways that they perceived Haiti. Also, the effects of global economic flows affected the ways that Haitians viewed the black American students. While the students focused less on the commodification of the Haitian culture due to a respect founded on the concept of “shared oppression and histories”, the students still used their American lifestyle as a normalizing standard. Effectively, they viewed themselves as privileged in Haiti.
For future iterations of this program, I hope that the program will further discuss the implications of student's American identities and how that may impact their interactions with the Haitians. It would also be beneficial for the program to integrate a community planning aspect that allows the students to engage with the community and learn about the concerns of the community and how future programs can improve these conditions. Also, through these implementations, students will have a strengthened sense of fulfillment and projects designated by the community can be maintained for coming years.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Within the literature on voluntourism and mainly within popular discourse, discussions of privilege are mainly tied to whiteness. Within the public sphere, questions
and commentary centered on voluntourism is about white Western women and how they engage their economic and political privileges in communities of the Global South. However, this research inserts the much-needed voices of people of color from the Western world. Their voices were missing from the discussion as if they could not engage or understand the same complexities of privilege while traveling abroad. While, their experiences are different because they believe they share “oppressed histories and histories” with other African-descended peoples, they still engage questions of privilege while they travel abroad. Thus, it is important to frame discussions of privilege and identity within voluntourism as an effect of nationality and not necessarily race.

Also, it is important to address how black Americans’ experiences differ from other voluntourists. Because they share black skin, their interactions within the host communities have an added layer of complexities because of the expectations of the host communities to have a basic understanding of their culture. Another complex layer is the black Americans’ own sense of ownership within the development of their “brethren’s” communities, a relationship based on fictive kinship. Seemingly, this difference in motivation had an impact on the service delivery of the black American voluntourist. They had an investment in the betterment of this community and thus the service became personal.

As I continue this research, I hope to explore the intersections of various identities on the black American voluntourists’ experience such as gender, religion, and sexuality. Also, I hope to implement the perspectives of Haitians and their interactions with the black American voluntourists. Lastly, I would like to do a comparative study and broaden this research to interview both black American and non-black voluntourists.
Black American voluntourists' experiences disrupt the narrative of voluntourists from the Western world. Until the narrative of a black helping hand is told, literature on voluntourism will remain incomplete.

Bibliography


Appendix

Map from: Ezilon Maps.com
**Introductory Script**

Me: Hello! How are you? As you already know through the emails and text messages that I used to contact you, I am Tayler Ulmer. I'm a student in the sociology, international studies and anthropology departments.

I've had the opportunity to volunteer abroad in Haiti and South Africa. I had the most amazing experiences, and these experiences have led me to this research, which focuses on the black American volunteer tourist abroad. Specifically, I seek to understand how various aspects of your identity may impact their interactions with your host community.

Here’s a consent form that outlines your rights. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are free not to respond.

I am really excited to hear about your experiences.

**Interview Schedule**

**Post-Trip Interview Questions**

Tell me about your experience volunteering abroad.  
How do you racially identify?  
How was it volunteering abroad?  
What aspects of your identity are most important?  
Can you provide some examples of when some aspects of your identity are important in some situations and less important in others?

How did you hear about this volunteer opportunity to participate in the Alternate Spring Break? How’d you decide on this destination?  
Why did you choose to go overseas? Was there a specific event or moment that affected your decision?  
Do you describe yourself as a volunteer tourist?

What was your first impression?  
Describe your host community.  
Did you conduct research on your host community prior to arriving?  
Have you ever been abroad? Have you ever traveled to a country within the African diaspora?

What did you do in your host community?  
Did you notice differences in wealth? How so?  
Do you believe that your service helped the community?  
In what ways do you believe you helped your host community?

Tell me about your host family/ living arrangements.  
What was the most difficult experience you had abroad?  
Have you ever discussed with someone in your host community about their physical perceptions of you?  
What was a pivotal moment in your experience?
What has your biggest lesson been?

Were the nightly debriefing sessions beneficial? Tell me about some of your conversations.

Was this your first time traveling to an African diasporic nation? Explain your reactions. Was it empowering? Disturbing? Calming? Uncomfortable? Did you notice that you were in a majority-black nation?

Did you travel within your host community? Do you think that you were perceived differently in different places or with different people within the same country?

What did you most like about your host community? What did you most dislike? Did you make any friends in Haiti? Would you return there? Were there things that you missed about America? What was the first thing that you did when you returned home?

Did you feel differently as a tourist compared to being a volunteer? Describe the balance of being a volunteer and tourist? Do you see think you act differently in the US compared to Haiti? Can you give me an example. If so, how did you navigate those identities, do you think that those identities overlapped? Did you go out to eat? Tell me about it. Did you go on any excursions? Tell me about it.

Tell me about being black abroad. Did you find any hardships as being black abroad? How do you believe other black American experiences compared to yours? How do you believe non-black student’s experiences would compared to your own? What do you think about the orientation sessions?

What aspect of your identity did you think that you would be challenged on the most? What aspect of your identity were you challenged on the most?

Was nationality ever discussed? I would like to hear that story(ies). Did you ever feel an obligation as an American to serve? Why not serve in your home? Is there anything that you were scared of when you went abroad?

Do you speak French? Creole? How did that impact your experience?

Would you describe this experience as transformative? Why or why not?
How, if in any way, did your experience abroad change your views of race and your own sense of racial identity?

How did your experience abroad change your view of America and your view of yourself as an American?
IRB Approvals
NOTIFICATION OF PROTOCOL APPROVAL

PI: Taylor Ulmer
TITLE: A Black Helping Hand: The Experiences of Black American Volunteer Tourists Abroad in Communities of the African Diaspora
DATE: March 19, 2015
Review Type: Full
IRB Protocol #: 1502004

This approval is valid from March 19, 2015 to March 19, 2016.

Your research proposal referenced above and the associated informed consent process was reviewed and APPROVED by the Institutional Review Board.

Your approval period is noted above. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the submission of a renewal form that must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to the anniversary or expiration date of this study. Any serious reactions resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the Committee, to the Departmental Chairperson, and to any sponsoring agency or company. Approval is granted based upon your agreement to abide by the policies and procedures of Morehouse College with regard to use of human subjects in research and to keep appropriate records concerning your subjects.

Failure to receive a notification that it is time to renew does not relieve you of your responsibility to provide the IRB with a “Request for Renewal” in time for the request to be processed and approved before your expiration date.

Please note that this protocol has been assigned the above referenced IRB protocol number. All inquiries and correspondence concerning this protocol must include: 1) The IRB Protocol number, 2) Name of the Principal Investigator, and 3) Full Title of Study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Michael Hodge, michael.hodge@morehouse.edu, IRB Chair, at 404-681-7552 or go to the Morehouse College website to review IRB guidelines and procedures.

Sincerely,
Michael Hodge, PH.D
Co-Chair
Morehouse College Institutional Review Board