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HENRY J. LEIR INSTITUTE FOR MIGRATION & HUMAN SECURITY

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ASSESSING REFUGEES' UNDERSTANDING OF AND RESPONSES TO U.S. RACE RELATIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

REFUGEES IN TOWNS

Henry J. Leir Institute for Migration and Human Security

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ABSTRACT

Understanding race relations is highly context specific and newly arrived refugees have a difficult time navigating the complex racial hierarchy that exists in the United States. Racial constructs are context-specific and dependent upon refugees' region of origin, socio-economic status, appearance, and one's own racialized experiences. As a result, an individual's understanding of race is an iterative process that evolves over time and is dependent on lived experiences. Refugees construct new understandings of race relations throughout their migration journeys, influencing their integration experience. There is a significant gap in the literature about how refugees specifically learn about race relations in the United States. The following research focuses on how refugees come to understand race in the US, and how this understanding influences their experiences of racism. To investigate these questions, the research team utilized a sequenced, qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two mid-sized US cities – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Mobile, AL – exploring how refugees ages 18-65 learned about race. The study concludes that refugees learned about US race relations through school, media (digital and print), word of mouth, and personal experiences of discrimination. However, the degree of this learning is heavily dependent on education level, age, and country of origin. For practitioners and academics alike, this research emphasizes the need to incorporate anti-racist curricula into cultural orientation sessions to better equip refugees for integration into the United States.

hello neighbor network

DWELL MOBILE

Tufts UNIVERSITY
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Racial hierarchy is deeply rooted in the United States' history. Over time, the country has morphed from a central perpetuator of the transatlantic slave trade into a contemporary underwriter of structural racism. Whiteness remains at the pinnacle of the US' racial hierarchy, despite the country's long history of receiving migrants. Migrants, including refugees, have historically experienced the effects of this racial hierarchy. While much of the current research examines the ways in which immigrants and refugees experience racism in the US,[1] relatively little research examines refugees' understanding of race prior to and immediately following refugee resettlement and, ultimately, how this understanding shapes refugee integration in the US.

Racial constructs are context-specific and dependent upon refugees' region of origin,[2] socio-economic status, appearance, and one's own racialized experiences. As such, an individual's understanding of race is an iterative process that, depending on lived experiences, changes over time. Refugees' constructs of racial relations change throughout their migration journeys, which ultimately impacts their understanding of race within resettlement countries. For example, before their arrival in the US, some refugees may carry internalized discriminatory attitudes or biases from their own cultures. Racism is not a unique phenomenon constrained to the US, as cultures worldwide feature different levels of social stratification based on colorism and/or ethnicity, among other factors. Consequently, refugees may carry these racialized societal norms to new countries through transit and resettlement. Other factors, such as skin whitening creams,[3] media messaging, and Western beauty standards, also contribute to one's social capital based on their lightness or darkness. Because cultures have varying categorizations of race and racism, refugees may not recognize certain home country racial norms as "racist." Little research examines if – and how – refugees learn about US race relations during this pre-arrival stage.

Current research also fails to examine how refugees learn about race relations during transit and after arrival in the US. Experiences in transit cities and refugee camps influence refugees' perceptions of race and culture, as some refugees remain "in transit" for decades. Though the US refugee resettlement process takes an average of 18-24 months,[4] refugees can spend years in transit. Transit times vary significantly between refugees and are dependent upon a refugee's country of origin and connection to the United States, among other extenuating circumstances. For example, in 2021, many Afghan refugees admitted via the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program had expedited applications and/or were allowed to immediately resettle in the United States under its humanitarian parole program. Conversely, many Somali refugees have lived in political limbo for over 30 years in Kenyan refugee camps.[5] If a refugee spends more time in transit than in their country of origin, their in-transit experiences are equally as influential in shaping their racial perceptions. Awareness of new stereotypes, racial hierarchies, and racial divisions in the US are formed in transit via cultural and media exposure... Consequently, refugees may adopt transit country perceptions of other races and ethnic groups. Upon arrival in the United States, some refugees internalize and replicate these hierarchies.[6] The United States' Northern, Southern, rural, and urban divides contribute to differences in integration and racial awareness amongst refugees. A majority of immigrant-friendly, certified "welcoming"[7] cities are located in the North, while Southern and rural communities are conventionally labeled as hostile and/or racist. A refugee's geographic location within the

1 Francesca Bentley, "Migrants and Refugees Experience American Racism," Pulitzer Center, October 14, 2020. https://pulitzercenter.org/fr/node/19573.

2 Mohamed Eno & Abdi Kuscow, "Racial and Caste Prejudice in Somalia," *Journal of Somali Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 91-118, https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/handle/20.500.12876/89273.

3 Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, "What it means for Rwanda to have Banned Skin Bleaching Creams," Dazed Beauty, https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/42912/1/rwanda-banned-skin-bleaching.

4 "Refugee Resettlement 101," *Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.*

5 Laura Hammond, "Somali refugee displacements in the near region: Analysis and Recommendations," *UNHCR,* accessed October 19, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/55152c699.pdf.

6 Neda Maghbouleh, "The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race," (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017).

7 "Certified Welcoming Places," *Welcoming America,* accessed October 14, 2022, https://welcomingamerica.org/initiatives/certified-welcoming/

US contributes to their own post-resettlement views of US race relations, as regional political and social dynamics impact refugees' perceptions of US racial groups.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study sought to fill these research deficits by exploring how refugees learn about, experience, and replicate racial attitudes both pre- and post-resettlement. The study took place in two regionally and culturally dissimilar US cities, Mobile, AL, and Pittsburgh, PA, which produced varied findings. Firstly, refugees' own ethnicities and experiences impacted the ways in which participants perceived race and race relations. Prior to leaving their home countries, refugees in both cities tended to learn about US race relations via social media, word of mouth, and television programming. Home country racial hierarchies also impacted how refugees conceptualized race prior to their arrival in the US. While in transit, refugees learned about US racism from informal channels. Post-arrival, refugees learned about US race relations via direct interactions with individuals born in the US, through educational and bureaucratic institutions, and through refugees' own personal experiences with discrimination. The following analysis outlines these findings, along with the purpose and significance of this study, research methods used, and pertinent topics for future research.

Exploratory studies are important in beginning to understand the racial issues that define refugees' resettlement experiences. Our study was based on a relatively small number of interviews, and our conclusions are provisional. We hope future studies can build upon our findings.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Throughout its history, the United States has maintained paradoxical relationships with both immigration and racial justice. While immigrants are praised for laying the foundations of US commerce, culture, and industry, corresponding nativist movements simultaneously launch hateful, racist attacks against newcomers. Since the early onset of immigration to the US, ethnic and racial discrimination has been observed through US social, cultural, and political structures. Early US Protestant "nativist" movements against Irish, Italian, and Chinese immigrants set the precedent for today's colorized racism and the subsequent "racialization"[8] of newer ethnic and religious groups. From the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, nativism in this sense is more specifically defined as the belief "that true national identity requires a particular racial, ethnic or religious background," and in the case of the previous historical example, has been used in "immigration policy as a means of shaping national demographics in ways that reinforce this idealized national identity."[9] Linguistic and cultural barriers further "otherize" immigrants and refugees, who experience racism "differently from their US-born counterparts."[10] Refugees thus have to navigate their identities as both immigrants and, often, racial minorities in the United States.

This typical racial discrimination in the US is new to some refugees, and they could internalize and become complicit in the US racial hierarchy, perpetrate racism in their resettled communities, or fall victim to it. Thus, it is essential to examine how refugees in the US learn about racism in order to prevent the replication of it. A deeper understanding of refugees' learning processes of racism in the US, both before and after resettlement, could inform interventions such as an antiracist curriculum, that could lessen refugees' attitudes towards racism and improve their understanding of the ways in which the US racial hierarchy is relevant to them.

1.2 Significance

Assessing refugees' racial perceptions and experiences can help fill a research void to better conceptualize how refugees learn about race relations throughout their migration journeys. Further, navigating life in some racially stratified communities proves difficult for many newcomers to the US and complicates refugees' perceptions of their new homes. Complex race relations are challenging to understand,

8 Breanne Leigh Grace and Katie Heins, "Redefining refugee: white Christian nationalism in state politics and beyond," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 44:4, (2021), 555-575, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419870.2020.1767799?journalCode=rers20.

9 Rachel Kleinfeld and John Dickas, "Resisting the Call of Nativism: What U.S. Political Parties Can Learn from Other Democracies," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 05, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/05/resisting-call-of-nativism-what-u.s.-political-parties-can-learn-from-other-democracies-pub-81204.

10 Magdalena Szaflarski and Shawn Bauldry, "The Effects of Perceived Discrimination on Immigrant and Refugee Physical and Mental Health," *Advances in Medical Sociology,* 19, (2019): 173-204, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6553658/.

particularly for refugees with little pre-arrival awareness of US racial demographics. This study aims to explore how refugees learn about US race relations, which will help practitioners working with refugees provide expanded race-based programming. This study will also help practitioners identify methods to prevent refugees from replicating racial norms and discrimination attached to their home country, transit, or post-resettlement experiences. Finally, if refugees learn about race via discrimination, practitioners can provide refugees with the appropriate strategies to cope with these societal inequities, access resources, and participate in collective action, if desired.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

- How do refugees come to understand race and racism in the United States?
- How does this understanding influence their experiences as victims or perpetrators of racism?

This research study is exploratory. Prior to conducting interviews, the researchers worked from the proposition that refugees formed racial preconceptions prior to resettlement, which influenced their understanding of race relations in the United States. Additionally, if refugees did not have strong preconceptions, the researchers proposed that this was because refugees only developed their learning about race and racism after their arrival in the US. This research explores how these learning experiences developed.

1.4 Purpose

This research serves as an exploratory study to examine how refugees learn about US racism in their countries of origin/transit and in the US in order to inform future research, as no major studies have assessed these questions thus far. Moreover, this research will facilitate partnerships between the Hello Neighbor Network and universities/organizations to develop refugee educational curricula and promote racial equality and integration.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Limited existing literature examines how refugees learn about race and race relations in the US.

Despite this research deficit, some studies have explored refugees' overall experiences of racism and understanding of global race relations. This literature typically explores refugees' experiences throughout three key phases of their journeys: the pre-departure phase, the in-transit phase, and the arrival/post-resettlement phase. Below, we summarize key findings from this study's literature review, which was written prior to our field research.

Pre-Departure

The pre-departure stage, before a refugee departs their country of origin, is the first stage in which refugees develop racial perceptions via cultural immersion and social interaction. Home country norms can contribute to one's eventual understanding of race in subsequent host countries. Definitions of race vary by country and colonial legacies shape the ways in which skin color is perceived.[11] In Rwanda, for example, Belgian colonizers arbitrarily applied "race" to denote contrived physical features like height, weight, and face shape. Colonizers conflated the construct of race with ethnicity, resulting in varied definitions of race between societies. The concept of racial oppression is thus difficult to define, as "ethnic tensions" in one society may be classified as "racial tensions" by another. This definitional opacity makes refugees' pre-departure racial attitudes difficult to assess, as some refugees may see their oppressors as a different race (when, under US standards, their oppressors may actually belong to a different ethnic group) or may have vastly differing definitions of race prior to their arrival in the US. Pre-departure definitions of race are important to note when assessing refugees' racialized experiences in transit and upon arrival.

Western colorist norms have also been exported to many countries, which shapes how refugees view skin color prior to arrival. In Africa and Asia, the use of skin whitening creams and/or out-

11 Harry Garuba, "Race in Africa: Four Epigraphs and a Commentary," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008), 1643. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25501967.

sourced Western media (i.e. movies, television, and advertisements) contribute to the significant issue of colorism, or the preference of lightness over darkness.[12] However, in other regions, such as Iraq, Syria,[13] and Afghanistan,[14] discrimination can be based on cultural, religious, and physical characteristics. Few research studies examine how refugees conceptualize US race relations within their home countries. The rise of US influence abroad has resulted in some immigrants undergoing "Americanization" and acculturation before resettlement, which impacts the way migrants adapt to US society at this stage. However, more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon should be conducted,[15] especially if such acculturation impacts migrants' perceptions of racial groups in the US.

In-Transit

For the purposes of this study, "transit" is used to encompass migration journeys starting from the moment of displacement within refugees' country of origins until those refugees arrive in UNHCR designated third States that admitted those refugees with permanent residence status. The transit period thus includes time spent in refugee camps, military bases, other living situations, and physically traveling between each destination.[16] Refugees' country-specific, racialized experiences impact their racial views and learning through their societal interactions and ability to access resources in this transit process.

In Ukraine, for example, students of color were pushed off trains during the initial rush to leave the country at the start of the conflict.[17] For the refugees who experienced and/or witnessed this discrimination, their views of racial hierarchies likely evolved through these personal encounters. White Ukrainians may have developed an understanding of their racialized superiority within transit, while Ukrainians or foreign nationals of color may have experienced relative deprivation of rights in flight. Another example is pulled from Sudanese refugees' experiences in Lebanon, where UNHCR failed to provide full protection for the population it served, making the concerns of Sudanese invisible. Discrimination in programming there led to division amongst refugees and the community.[18] For Black and other minority migrants who continue their journeys beyond Lebanon, or other primary or secondary countries of asylum, discrimination related trauma will impact how refugees view their status in future resettlement communities.

The media that refugees consume in camps and elsewhere both pre-departure and in-transit, such as television shows, movies, etc., could present them with new perspectives about US race relations. This is representative of a movement beyond just *experiencing* racism, expanding into *learning* how the US racial hierarchy is depicted and should be interpreted according to the dominating social order. A study examining gang violence amongst Karen refugee youth in Utica, New York briefly examined this idea. Having fled isolated, mountainous villages in the conflict regions of Myanmar, Karen refugees who escaped to Thailand reported not knowing that persons with different skin colors existed until living in the Thai refugee camps. According to a participant in the study, movies and television shows served as many refugees' first introductions to Black people. Due to the often-violent media depictions of Black people in the US, many Karen grew fearful of their Black neighbors upon resettlement.[19]

12 Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, "What it means for Rwanda to have Banned Skin Bleaching Creams," *Dazed Beauty,* https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/42912/1/rwanda-banned-skin-bleaching.

13 Radwan Ziadeh, Radwan Ziadeh, *The Kurds in Syria: Fueling separatist movements in the region?* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2009), https://www.usip.org/publications/2009/04/kurds-syria-fueling-separatist-movements-region.

14 Fadlilah Satya Handayani, "Racial Discrimination towards the Hazaras as reflected in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner," *LANTERN* (Journal on English Language, Culture and Literature) 5, no. 4 (2016).

15 Ibid.

16 This definition adds to the broader understanding of "transit" described by ICRC in a 2017 case study. ICRC stated a transit country is "a country that refugees and migrants pass through along the way to their preferred country of asylum – it may be located anywhere between the country of origin and the country of destination" and is highlighted by irregular movement. See Pavle Kilibarda, "Obligations of transit countries under refugee law: A Western Balkans case study," *International Review of the Red Cross,* (2017), 99(1), 211-239. doi:10.1017/S1816383118000188.

17 Rashawn Ray, "The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows racism has no boundaries," *The Brookings Institution,* March 3, 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2022/03/03/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-shows-racism-has-no-boundaries/.

18 Maja Janmyr, "Sudanese Refugees and the 'Syrian Refugee Response' in Lebanon: Racialized Hierarchies, Processes of Invisibilization, and Resistance," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2021): 131–156, https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdab021

19 Sarah R. Morehouse, *Civil War to Turf War: A Positive Deviance Approach to the Examination of Gang Conscription Amongst Karen Refugee Youth,* (Medford: The Journeys Project, 2022), https://sites.tufts.edu/journeysproject/searching-for-respectable-work/.

Arrival to Final Country of Resettlement and Post-Resettlement period

Race is most evident to the racialized[20] and refugees find themselves thrust into new racial categories once they enter the United States. For example, in the same study examining gang violence amongst Karen refugee youth mentioned in the proceeding section, participants reported disorientation and confusion when, immediately upon arrival, they were categorized as Asian in the US. Participants reported being discriminated against and categorized as Chinese or Vietnamese, two groups from which Karens had previously described as racially separate.[21] Moreover, housing, schools, language learning, and more all act as formal and informal "spaces of encounter" where racism shapes how refugees make meaning of themselves and their new society.[22] For instance, in a 2021 study on resettled Hmong refugees in Minnesota, state-imposed residential segregation contributed to the development of negative and racist views within this community. In this context, Hmong refugee's spatial proximity to African Americans in resettlement neighborhoods, in addition to their preconceived stereotypes about Black Americans learned in camps, led to racially coded fears and anti-Black sentiments.[23] A school is another interesting example: it is a space of both integration and discrimination, often concurrently. On the other hand, Margaret Sinclair reported in 2001 that education was critical to the emotional healing and psychosocial fulfillment of refugees who had experienced traumatic displacement.[24] Schools also enable language-learning; many studies indicate that refugee children become conversational more quickly than their parents, and then become crucial translators of social experiences, both literally and figuratively.[25] One the other hand, systematic review by Graham reveals that young refugees tend to face descrimination, stereotypical judgment, and bullying perpetrated by friends and teachers.[26]

However, refugee experiences are not monolithic and individuals carry intersectional identities that affect their integration with systems of oppression and privilege in a multitude of ways.[27] When Muslim refugee women wear visual representations of Islam, such as a hijab or headscarf, doing so "may trigger hostility and discrimination from the dominant society."[28] Additionally, certain groups and politicians use political rhetoric that conflates Islam and terrorism, thus refugees who practice this religion will have a different integration experience than those who practice a different religion. Thus, the intersection of one's social identities impacts racial understanding, which is important to note when examining how refugees learn about and come to understand race in the United States.

With limited racial literacy, or the knowledge of racial hierarchies and how these hierarchies developed through history, some migrants to the United States can experience internalized racial oppression. Some migrants internalize US stereotypes via media and word-of-mouth, in turn developing racist beliefs towards their own ethnic groups and upholding the supremacy of the society's dominant group.[29] However, cultural groups within immigrant communities provide spaces for immigrants to share their own stories of discrimination and provide an outlet for trauma. These spaces provide migrants with an opportunity to organize and respond to racial oppression via protests and other means.

20 Janmyr, "Sudanese Refugees and the 'Syrian Refugee Response' in Lebanon."

21 Morehouse, *Civil War to Turf War.*

22 Helga Leitner, "Spaces of Encounters: Immigration, Race, Class, and the Politics of Belonging in Small-Town America," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 4 (2012): 828–846. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2011.601204.

23 Teresa Toguchi Swartz, Douglas Hartmann, and Pao Lee Vue, "Race, Ethnicity, and the Incorporation Experiences of Hmong American Young Adults: Insights from a Mixed-Method, Longitudinal Study," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 7 (2022): 1197–1217.

24 Margaret Sinclair, "Education in emergencies," in Learning for a future: Refugee education in developing countries, (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Publications, 2001), 1–84.

25 M. Zhou, "Straddling different worlds: The acculturation of Vietnamese refugee children," in Ethnicities: Children of immigrants in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 187–227.

26 Hamish R. Graham, Ripudaman S. Minhas, and Georgia Paxton, "Learning problems in children of refugee background: A systematic review," *Pediatrics* 137, no. 6 (2016).

27 Merih Ugurel Kamisli, "Acculturation experiences of Syrian Muslim refugee women in the United States: Intersectionality of nationality, religion, gender, and refugee status," *Adult Learning* 32, no. 3 (2021): 103-114.

28 Ibid.

29 Tanya Golash-Boza, Maria D Duenas, and Chia Xiong, "White Supremacy, Patriarchy, and Global Capitalism in Migration Studies," *The American Behavioral Scientist* (Beverly Hills) 63, no. 13 (2019): 1741–1759, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219842624.

Population Change by Race and Hispanic or Latino Origins - City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County - 2010 to 2020

	City of Pittsburgh				Remainder of Allegheny County				Allegheny County Total			
	2010	2020	Change		2010	2020	Change		2010	2020	Change	
Total	305,704	302,971	-2,733	-0.9%	917,644	947,607	+29,963	3.3%	1,223,348	1,250,578	+27,230	2.2%
White Alone	201,766	189,948	-11,818	-5.9%	795,529	756,373	-39,156	-4.9%	997,295	946,321	-50,974	-5.1%
Black Alone	79,710	69,050	-10,660	-13.4%	82,151	94,628	+12,477	15.2%	161,861	163,678	+1,817	1.1%
Asian Alone	13,465	19,836	+6,371	47.3%	20,625	38,705	+18,080	87.7%	34,090	58,541	+24,451	71.7%
Other single race alone	3,075	6,158	+3,083	100.3%	4,428	10,174	+5,746	129.8%	7,503	16,332	+8,829	117.7%
Two or more races	7,688	17,979	+10,291	133.9%	14,911	47,727	+32,816	220.1%	22,599	65,706	+43,107	190.7%
Hispanic*	6,964	11,620	+4,656	66.9%	12,106	22,705	+10,599	87.6%	19,070	34,325	+15,255	80.0%

* Note Hispanic population counts here include all races. ***University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research***

Figure 1: Breakdown of Pittsburgh Population by Race[30]

3.0 METHODS

This research was conducted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (PA), and Mobile, Alabama (AL), between June 2022 and August 2022. The study was a partnership between the Refugees in Towns (RiT) project at Tufts University and the Hello Neighbor Network (The Network). The Network is a coalition of grassroots organizations working with refugees and immigrants in the US. In this partnership, RiT was then connected to local programs by and within the Network: Hello Neighbor (PA) and Dwell Mobile (AL). The research aims to explore how refugees learn about racial relations in the United States in order to develop more extensive refugee resettlement programming.

3.1 Cases

This study focuses on two mid-sized cities in contrasting regions of the United States. Participant responses highlight refugees' typical racialized experiences within the US Rust Belt (Pittsburgh, PA) and the US South (Mobile, AL).

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh is a mid-sized city, with a population of 302,971 as of the 2020 census, of which 66.4% of residents are White, 23% are Black, 5.8% are Asian, and 3.4% are Hispanic or Latinx.31 Many local connections the researchers made described Pittsburgh as a city with "small town vibes," where there is an atmosphere of a well-connected community. There are 90 unique neighborhoods that make up the larger Pittsburgh area, with most individuals living outside the downtown center.[32] These neighborhoods were carved out of hills and sandwiched between rivers due to Pittsburgh's geography, and has resulted in neighborhoods with distinct communities, cultures, and feel. A negative consequence of this dynamic has been a persistent segregation of racial groups within the city. Many historically Black neighborhoods have also experienced upheaval due to systematic racism driven by city "urban renewal" efforts.

Penn Hills and the Hill District are two stark examples where gentrification and redevelopment have displaced Black communities and continue to be a cornerstone in the fight for racial justice in Pittsburgh today.[33] Pittsburgh is also a city shaped by immigrants. In its infancy, Pittsburgh played a large role in both the French and In-

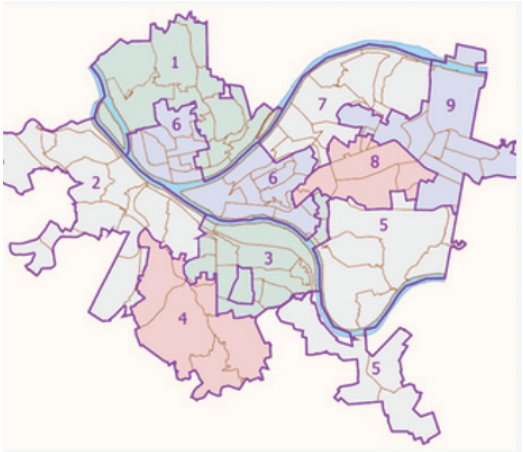
30 Mairead McCarthy, "Welcoming Pittsburgh Annual Report 2021," Special Initiative of the Office of Mayor Peduto, September 2021, https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/16851_2021_Annual_Report.pdf.

31 "Annual Comprehensive Financial Report: Year Ended December 31, 2021," City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 10, https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/18398_Annual_Comprehensive_Financial_Report_December_31,_2021.pdf.

32 "Explore Our City: Neighborhoods," Visit Pittsburgh, accessed August 18, 2022, https://www.visitpittsburgh.com/neighborhoods/.

33 90.5 WESA, "You Have to Contribute Something," Land and Power (podcast), November 16, 2020, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/935323333/land-power

dian Wars and the American Revolution, which saw French and British settlers invade indigenous land.[34] Later, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many European immigrants came to Pittsburgh motivated by a booming industrial economy. According to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette "Between 1880 and 1910, 17.7 million immigrants poured into the US, largely from Southern and Eastern Europe. By 1910, Pittsburgh had become the eighth largest city in the United States, and 26 percent of its population was foreign-born."[35] The demographic make-up of foreign-born residents in Pittsburgh has changed over time, partially due to refugee resettlement. Between 2010 and 2015, roughly 2,365 refugees have been resettled there from a variety of countries. Because this data is older, this number has increased, especially with the sudden influx of Afghan refugees in fall of 2021 and now with arriving Ukrainians. The various immigrants and refugees that call Pittsburgh home can be viewed in Figures 2 and 3.[36]



Pittsburgh's Welcoming Community Quick Glance		
District	Languages Spoken	Immigrant and Refugee Populations
1	Arabic, Burmese, Karen and Chin, Somali, Maay Maay and Zigula, Kinyarwanda, French	Burmese, Burundi, Somali-Bantu, Somali, Rwandan, Syrian
2	Kituba, Swahili, French, Arabic, Spanish, Nepali, Uzbek	Congolese, Somali-Bantu, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Syrian
4	Nepali, Kituba, Swahili, Arabic, Spanish	Bhutanese, Congolese, Iraqi, Latino
5	Arabic, Russian	Iraqi, Russian
8	Mandarin, Hindi, Gujarati, Spanish	Chinese, Indian, Latino

Figures 2 and 3: Pittsburgh's Welcoming Community
(Numbers in chart correspond with district numbers in map)

Figure 4, from 2016, reflects more detail on the immigrant and refugee populations on the neighborhood rather than district level.[37]

Hello Neighbor

Hello Neighbor Pittsburgh was founded in 2017. The team works closely with newly resettled refugees to support their lives in the United States. The organization offers mentorship programs, support for pregnant and new mothers, tutoring for school age children in addition to their refugee resettlement program. Hello Neighbor also powers the national Network, encouraging participating member nonprofit organization's growth and mutual understanding of the challenges faced by nonprofit leaders working with refugees. Hello Neighbor's community of clients and their understanding of Pittsburgh's refugee and host communities were important for our study. Hello Neighbor's Network was particularly interested in the research, because it will contribute to the development of antiracist education resources that can be utilized by their many partners across the US.

Mobile, Alabama

Mobile is a port city located at the mouth of the Mobile River in southern Alabama. Mobile shares the cultural history of New Orleans, as the same settlers founded both cities. Mobile's population is approximately 190,000[38] and the greater Mobile County is home to approximately 415,000 people. The foreign-born population in Mobile has doubled in the past five years to approxi-

34 "Fort Pitt Timeline," *Fort Pitt Museum*, accessed August 18, 2022, https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/exhibits/fort-pitt-timeline.

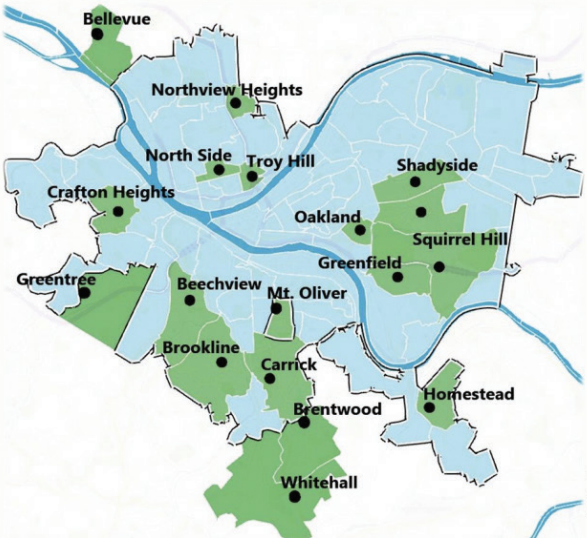
35 "Earlier immigrants reshaped the region, then blended in," P*ittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 2014, accessed August 20, 2022.

36 Mairead McCarthy, "Welcoming Pittsburgh Annual Report 2021."

37 "Overview of Immigrant Populations in Pittsburgh," *Allegheny County DHS Immigrants and Internationals Initiative*, March 2017, accessed August 20, 2022, https://gwpa.org/sites/default/files/resources/Overview%20of%20Immigrant%20Populations%20in%20City%20of%20Pittsburgh.pdf.

38 "Mobile, AL," *Data USA,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/mobile-al.

- **Bhutanese (Nepali):** Largest refugee group in Pittsburgh. Many have been attracted to our region from other states. The greatest concentration can be found along the Brownsville Rd/Rte 51 corridor, including Carrick, Mt. Oliver, Brentwood, Baldwin and Whitehall, as well as Greentree.
- **Burmese (Burmese, Karen and Chin)**: Ethnically diverse group of refugees from Burma residing mainly in Prospect Park with notable groups in Troy Hill and Bellevue.
- **Chinese (Mandarin)**: One of the largest immigrant groups in the city, including individuals from Taiwan and Hong Kong. While they are dispersed throughout the city, a large student population resides in the East End, especially Squirrel Hill and Shadyside.
- **Congolese (Kituba, Swahili and French)**: A fast-growing group due to recent refugee arrivals, dispersed throughout the city with notable concentrations in the West End.
- **Indian (Hindi and Gujarati)**: Another of the largest immigrant groups in the city, residing largely in the East End and outer suburbs.
- **Iraqi (Arabic)**: A generally dispersed group with a large refugee population, though there are known concentrations in Greenfield and Mt Lebanon.
- **Latino (Spanish)**: A large group of diverse individuals from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America. They are widely dispersed, although large populations are known in Beechview, Brookline, Oakland, Highland Park, North Side and many of the surrounding suburbs.
- **Russian (Russian)**: This population resides largely in the Homestead, Greenfield and Hazelwood neighborhoods.
- **Somali-Bantu (Somali, Maay Maay and Zigula), Somali (Somali), Rwandan (Kinyarwanda and French)**, and **Burundi (Kirundi and French)**: These groups largely reside in Northview Heights and other North Side neighborhoods, along with smaller immigrant populations from other African countries.
- **Syrian (Arabic)**: While there are known concentrations in the North Side and Crafton Heights, the Syrian population is largely dispersed throughout the city.
- Other notable immigrant populations dispersed throughout the city include:



- **Afghani (Pashto and Dari)**
- **Filipino (Filipino)**
- **German (German)**
- **Italian (Italian)**
- **Japanese (Japanese)**
- **Korean (Korean)**
- **Pakistani (Urdu)**
- **Polish (Polish)**
- **Sudanese (Arabic)**
- **Turkish (Turkish)**
- **Uzbek (Uzbek and Russian)**
- **Vietnamese (Vietnamese)**
- **Nigerian (Igbo and Yoruba)**

*This content is based on various data provided by the Allegheny County DHS Immigrants & Internationals Initiative. It should not be viewed as a complete representation of immigrant populations in Pittsburgh. For more information about the I&I Initiative, visit http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/immigrantresources.

Figure 4: Areas with Immigrants in Pittsburgh and Relevant Languages

mately 3.36% in 2019. Black/African Americans make up 51% of the city's population while 42% is White.[39]

Mobile has a lower level of income inequality (0.459) than the national average. Mobile's primary industries include healthcare, manufacturing, and construction;[40] immigrants primarily work within the healthcare and construction sectors. The broader Mobile County is primarily Republican; Donald Trump garnered 55.3%[41] of votes in 2020, though this number is lower than Alabama's average of 62%. Alabama is the most religious state in the United States, with over 77% of residents, including immigrants, noting religion as a "very important" aspect of daily life.[42] Mobile's sole resettlement agency is faith-based, and Evangelical, Catholic, and African churches provide monetary and spiritual support to new refugees. Churches and mosques serve as important integration communities for Congolese, Sudanese, and Iraqi refugees.

Though rarely regarded as a migration hotspot in the US, large arrivals of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the 1980s augmented Alabama's foreign-born population. Similar movements of Iraqi, Congolese, and Rwandan refugees (among others) have followed; since 2002, over 1,600 refugees[43] have resettled within the state. These refugees coexist among the state's Mexican (27%), Chinese (6%), and Indian (6%)[44] immigrant populations.

39 Ibid.

40 Andre M. Perry, Carl Romer, and Anthony Barr, "Why local leaders in Mobile, Alabama must address racial equity in the manufacturing sector," *The Brookings Institution*, July 16, 2021 https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-local-leaders-in-mobile-alabama-must-address-racial-equity-in-the-manufacturing-sector/.

41 Ibid, 30.

42 Michael Lipka and Benjamin Wormald, "How religious is your state?" *Pew Research Center,* February 29, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=alabama.

43 "Refugees among us: Mobile, Alabama," *Reno Gazette Journal,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://data.rgj.com/refugee/alabama-mobile/all/.

44 "Immigrants in Alabama," *American Immigration Council,* August 6, 2020, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-alabama.

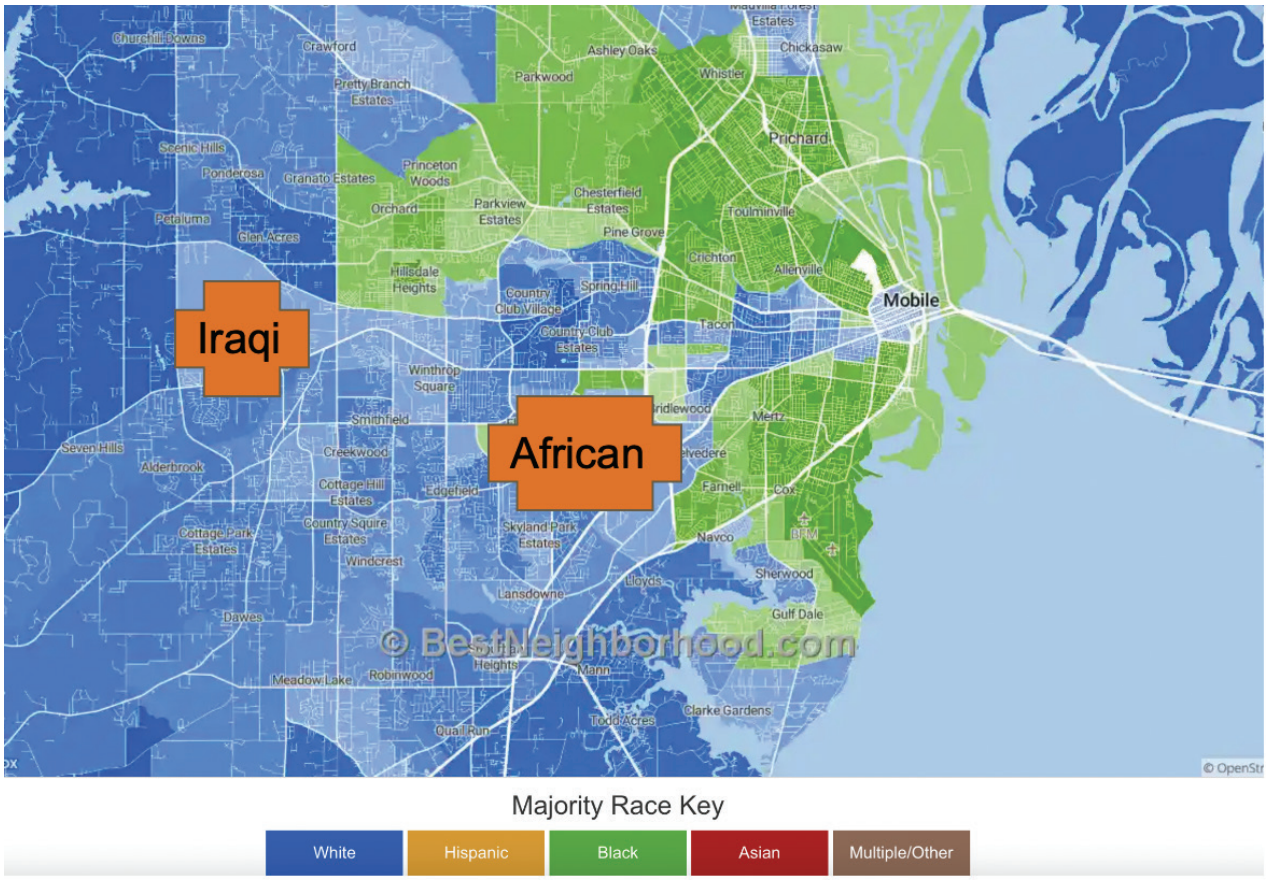


Figure 5: Racial Divisions within Mobile, Alabama[45] (*revised by authors to highlight Iraqi and African refugee communities***)**

Iraqi refugees tend to live in West Mobile's White, middle class communities, while Congolese and Sudanese refugees reside in the predominantly Black neighborhoods of central and southern Mobile. Resettled families typically move from subsidized apartment buildings to individually owned residences after approximately two years of residence in the US; refugee communities reside side-by-side in neighborhood clusters (see Figure 5).

Alabama maintains a historically tumultuous relationship with migration as a historic epicenter of the African slave trade and Great Migration exodus throughout the 1900s. Home to the last recorded slave ship in the United States alongside punitive Jim Crow laws, racial strife is deeply embedded within Mobilian history. In its recent history, Alabama has passed several anti-irregular immigration laws including Alabama HB 56 (2011), which permits law enforcement to investigate individuals' legal status during routine traffic stops and forbids landlords from renting to undocumented persons. While several portions of this law have been blocked, including its proposed ban on public university attendance for undocumented students, the law remains contentious and highlights the state's broader anti-immigrant agenda.

Dwell Mobile

Dwell Mobile is a member of the Hello Neighbor Network, and one of the only post-resettlement service providers in the Gulf Region. Dwell Mobile maintains contact with much of Mobile's refugee community and granted us access to its client base and helped recruit interviewees for this study. Founded in 2015, Dwell Mobile provides post-resettlement services to refugee families throughout the Mobile community. Its programming includes English language education, food drives, at-risk youth development, and citizenship test preparation, and it holds

45 "Race, Ethnicity, and Ethnicity in Mobile, AL," *Best Neighborhood,* accessed August 26, 2022, https://bestneighborhood.org/race-in-mobile-al/.

community events that bridge the cultural gap between refugees and native Mobilians. With Hello Neighbor, this study's findings will assist Dwell Mobile in its development of race-informed programming.

Participants'demography		Participants
		24
Country	Afghanistan	14
	Congo	9
	Rwanda	1
Age (average: 32.3, median: 29.5)	18-20	2
	21-30	8
	31-40	6
	41-50	2
	51-60	2
	unknown	4
Sex	Male	12
	Female	12
Years in the US (y) (average: 2.95, median: 3)	Less than a year	6
	1≦y<2	0
	2≦y<3	3
	3≦y<4	7
	4≦y<5	4
	5≦y<6	1
	6≦y<7	1
	7≦y<8	1
	unknown	1

Figure 7: Sampling Distribution for Pittsburgh, PA Participants[46]

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were resettled refugees and, in the case of most Afghans, humanitarian parolees and Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIVs) between the ages of 18 to 65. Interpretation services were not utilized for this study; thus, participants are limited to those with basic to advanced English skills. We interviewed both men and women, and we aimed to maintain a gender balanced, representative sample.

Pittsburgh Participant Overview

In addition to refugees, Pittsburgh's participants include some Afghans who arrived in the United States under the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. This program provides visas to persons from Afghanistan and Iraq who worked closely with the US military. Although a different legal status, these individuals fled Afghanistan with a well-founded fear of the Taliban regime and have thus been included in this study. In total, upon study completion, 24 total responses were collected (N=24). Respondents included 12 males, 12 females of whom, 14 were Afghans, 9 Congolese, and 1 Rwandan. On average, respondents had spent a total of 2.95 years in the United States and had a mean age of 32.3 years.

Mobile Participant Overview

Mobile's largest refugee populations include Iraqis, Congolese, and Rwandans.[47] Accordingly, study respondents were expected to hail from these populations. Due to the relatively small size of Mobile's refugee population, Mobile's sample size was limited. In total, upon study completion, 15 total responses were collected (N=15). Respondents included 6 males (2 Congolese, 3 Iraqis, 1 Nigerian), 9 females (2 Congolese, 5 Iraqis, 2 Sudanese), 8 Iraqis, 4 Congolese, 2 Sudanese, and 1 Nigerian.[48] On average, respondents had spent a total of 6.4 years in the United States and had a mean age of 32.6 years.

3.3 Sequenced Qualitative Methods

On arrival, and for two weeks before interviews began, the researchers explored their respective Pittsburgh and Mobile communities, volunteered with each organization, and interacted with each organization's clients to build a rapport with the organization and the refugee community. Pittsburgh researchers volunteered or joined in events such as the Study Buddy event by Hello Neighbor, the Food Pantry event by Islamic Center Pittsburgh, and the World Refugee Day event at the Schenley Plaza. In Mobile, the researcher established trust with participants via conversations, chaperoning summer camp

46 Because some data was unknown, these numbers were counted as zero in calculating the average, median, mode.

47 "Refugee Resettlement in Alabama," *RCUSA,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019AlabamaRCUSA-1.pdf.

48 Note: although the Nigerian participant is not a refugee by definition, the participant's experiences were deemed similar to those of African refugees. Their responses are thus kept in the study.

events, and childcare pickup. After two weeks of observation, the researchers conducted pilot interviews with Hello Neighbor and Dwell staff members (also resettled refugees). These staff members highlighted any cultural issues with interview questions, which were then modified accordingly. Additionally, researchers worked closely with key informant staff from Hello Neighbor and Dwell Mobile. In Pittsburgh, two Hello Neighbor staff members assisted researchers with understanding participants and their cultural norms: a second-generation refugee from Afghanistan, and a US born White American resettlement provider who both grew up in Pittsburgh and has extensive experience working with refugees in the area. In Mobile, the researcher worked with two key informant staff; the first, a resettled Congolese individual, provided cultural context to all interviews, and the second, a US born, White post-resettlement service provider, introduced the researcher to many study participants.

Researchers recruited participants using the local community networks of Hello Neighbor and Dwell Mobile. In Pittsburgh, the researchers first formed a relationship with a Hello Neighbor employee who later acted as the key informant staff mentioned above and the primary liaison with participants. The employee contacted former clients and refugee friends who they thought would be willing to talk to the researchers. The employee then set up appointments with those chosen families to meet with the researchers. This tactic was used as it became clear that without help from the organization, it would be difficult for the researchers to initiate contact with refugee participants, not only due to geographical challenges, but also because of cultural barriers and language limitations as interpreters were not used. Following the interviews, the researchers employed a convenience sampling technique, which is defined as data collection from an already available pool of participants. Researchers contacted potential participants via WhatsApp, email, or added interviews through individual relationships built with other Hello Neighbor employees and resettlement organizations in the larger Pittsburgh community. Some interviews did result in snowball sampling via participant referral, however most connections were made through Hello Neighbor's client base. All participants

Participants' demography		Participants
		15
Country	Iraq	8
	Congo	4
	Sudan	2
	Nigeria	1
Age (average: 32.7, median: 32)	21-30	6
	31-40	6
	41-50	3
Sex	Male	6
	Female	9
Years in the US (y) (average: 6.4, median: 5)	Less than a year	2
	1≦y<2	0
	2≦y<3	0
	3≦y<4	1
	4≦y<5	1
	5≦y<6	4
	6≦y<7	0
	7≦y<8	3
	8≦y<9	0
	9≦y<10	1
	10≦y<11	0
	11≦y<12	0
	12≦y<13	0
	13≦y<14	3

Figure 8: Sampling Distribution of Mobile, AL Participants

in Mobile were also recruited by convenience sampling via Dwell Mobile's client base; two participants were recruited via snowball sampling as their names were passed along from other respondents. Dwell Mobile staff typically contacted participants via phone on behalf of the researcher, though the researcher contacted a limited number of participants via cell phone messaging. Dwell Mobile contacted its clients who had proficient English abilities, enjoyed talking, and were open to meeting with a researcher. Dwell also implemented the usage of a "Community Liaison" who enabled easier access to members of the Congolese and Sudanese communities. The Community Liaison, who was a man, connected the researcher to participants who were men, and accompanied the researcher to culturally sensitive interviews in which conversations between men and women were deemed inappropriate.

Following recruitment and the expression of verbal consent, (as cleared by the Tufts IRB), participants engaged in a semi-structured, conversation-style interview with a researcher re-

lating to our research questions. We recorded the interviews if participants consented. The researchers used the interview guide we had tested in our pilots and recorded field notes while interviewing participants. Researchers recorded participants' responses and other observations, such as the participants' body languages, tones, and the environments of where the interview took place. Researchers ensured that conversations stayed within the general themes/topics/framework of the information provided in an interview guide. Interviews typically took 40-50 minutes. Data collection was iterative, as we added additional questions as topics were mentioned throughout interviews. For example, many participants in Mobile spoke about their location within the southern US, which prompted the researcher to include a question about participants' perceptions of the South. In Pittsburgh, a majority of interviews took place in participants' homes and/or cafes, cars, and the Hello Neighbor office (dependent on each participant's preference). In some cases, researchers conducted interviews over lunch, dinner, sweets, or coffee. Interviews in Mobile occurred at the Dwell Mobile office and participants' residences.

In both cities, researchers conducted some group interviews with several participants, often families. Throughout the group interviews, researchers paid close attention to the group dynamics and identified the conversation leaders, talkative participants, and quieter participants. When necessary, researchers directed questions towards participants who had few chances to talk compared to other participants. In Pittsburgh, researchers brought host gifts to participants who welcomed researchers into their homes. Culturally appropriate gifts were provided based on conversations with Hello Neighbor, key informants, and cultural research. These contributions typically included a small bag of nuts or fruit. In Mobile, the researcher provided refreshments and sweets to most participants in accordance with respective participants' cultural traditions of hospitality and meal-sharing. In both Mobile and Pittsburgh, most participants were eager to speak about their experiences and welcomed researchers into their homes. Participants did not receive compensation for this study.

Interviews were immediately (or within one day) transcribed using Microsoft Word's dictation software. Any identifiable information from the interviews linking back to a specific individual was redacted and/or not transcribed. In addition to the data from interviews, researchers also kept a journal to record their own free observations of the cities, people, organizations, and events they attended. The data from these journals were used to record the informal encounters and city descriptions discussed throughout this analysis.

3.4 Study Limitations and Sampling Bias

Several limitations and biases emerged throughout the data collection period. This study's primary limitations, many of which are city-dependent, are highlighted below.

Sample Bias

In both Pittsburgh and Mobile, researchers recruited participants largely through the Hello Neighbor and Dwell Mobile client networks as well as through other community-based organizations. These pre-existing relationships might have meant that participants were hesitant to express some views because of the researchers' affiliations with the organizations.

In each city, our samples consisted mostly of Afghan, Congolese, and Iraqi resettled refugees. Thus, our study results are much less indicative of other refugee groups, such as Burmese or Ukrainians. We interviewed both new arrivals and refugees who had been resettled for a long time. The length of refugees' stay in the US ranged from 5 months to 7 years, and the average of the length is 2.7 years. It is possible that long-stayers have forgotten about their experiences on arrival, while more recent arrivals have had less time to formulate thoughts about and experience with racial dynamics.

Our study's focus on racialized experiences could have meant that some participants were more or less likely to participate. For example, refugees with negative experiences might have wanted to talk about these experiences. Others might have declined to participate based on concerns about speaking on the topic. As with all research, those with more outgoing, talkative personalities might have been more likely to

engage with the researchers and invite the researchers into their homes.

As with all qualitative and exploratory research, our results cannot be generalized to broader refugee populations, either in our case study cities or the wider US.

Race as a Sensitive Topic

Few people want to acknowledge their own racial biases or express them freely. Participants might thus speak guardedly in interviews or play down their own actions and thoughts. In Pittsburgh, one participant said that refugees are "scared about talking about [race]" to outsiders. The researchers assured the interviewees that all answers were confidential and scrubbed of identifiers.

English Language

We did not use formal interpreters in this study. Though we sometimes used Google Translate to communicate specific phrases, the lack of interpretation assistance meant the study's sample is limited to refugees who could speak English. In some cases, when we talked to families, we had a family member provide impromptu interpretation, but for the most part, those with little English might not have fully understood our questions. The RiT Project has historically avoided the need for interpreters by training refugee researchers or others from the community who speak the language. However, given timeframe restrictions, organizational capacity, and specific IRB clearance, the RiT project was unable to provide or train translators for this study. As a general rule, and certainly in research on sensitive topics, it is advisable to train people who speak the relevant language to conduct the research.

The "Interviewer Effect"

The interviewer's age, gender, and level of experience[49] alter the ways in which participants engage in a study. Our researchers were all women in their mid-twenties: two were U.S. born and White and one was Japanese/East Asian. Our identities might have altered our participants' responses. Men and women could have replied differently reflective of the researchers' gender, or participants might have been hesitant to reflect their true feelings about White or Asian groups within the United States.

3.5 Reflexivity

Researchers' intersectional identities and experiences impact the way that they collect and analyze data. This means unanticipated or unconscious biases can arise within the study. Below, each member of the research team reflects on their background and its impact on their research.

3.5.1 Pittsburgh

Charlie Williams

I am a US born, White woman from California's Central Valley region. I grew up influenced by Western economic and educational models and privilege. While not an immigrant myself, I did grow up with stories about my great-grandparents who came to the United States in search of opportunity. I have intercultural living experiences from studying abroad in Spain and working briefly in Senegal. My work in Senegal was influential on my desire to work towards a decolonized mindset and adopt an accompaniment philosophy in my vocation. I feel connected to this research and its aims, as I hope to work as a practitioner in refugee resettlement in the future. I seek to better understand newcomers' experiences in order to offer more equitable resources for refugees in the United States.

Yumeka Kawahara

I am an East Asian woman (Yamato ethnicity) from Sapporo, Japan, and spent most of my life there. While Japan is a homogeneous country, I was exposed to various cultures as I traveled overseas at least once a year since I was a year old. I lived in Paris, France from 2019 to 2020 for my studies, where I experienced COVID-induced racism and had to hide that I am from Japan (or East Asia) to avoid discrimination. Moreover, I worked with refugees in Paris during my stay but had to leave them behind and go back

49 "APA Dictionary of Psychology: interviewer effect," *American Psychological Association,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://dictionary.apa.org/interviewer-effect.

to Japan as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened. This experience made me realize what it really means not to have a safe home to go back to, and strongly impacted my thoughts on racism and being a minority in society. In August 2021, I moved to Boston, USA to study refugee integration processes and the role of NGOs. In this study, I was aware that my own opinion on US racism could affect participants' answers, therefore I paid close attention to be as impartial as possible during interviews.

3.5.2 Mobile

Lucy Mastellar

I am a Polish American, White woman from the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan. I grew up in a diverse community and was encouraged to embrace other cultures at a young age. My grandparents' own stories of anti-Polish discrimination throughout the twentieth century drew me to this study. I have hands-on experience navigating refugee and asylum crises in Greece and at the United States-Mexico border, where I noted differential detention treatments between White-passing migrants and migrants of color. I have lived in Paris, France, and Athens, Greece. As a former Analyst with the United States government, I hope to inform more expansive and racially equitable asylum policies.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

Our study sought to explore how refugees learn about and/or replicate racial dynamics in the United States. Through often lengthy and in-depth interviews, we explored how refugees developed (or "constructed") their understanding of race and race relations in the US, at the pre-migration, transit, and post-migration stages, through media, personal experiences, and observations of others.

Our interview data were analyzed through an open coding process. As this study is exploratory, much of this process involved the development of themes and subthemes. We noted emerging themes and organized significant quotes/data via Microsoft Excel tables. The interview data from each city were analyzed separately, and city-specific reports were initially created, then combined in order to triangulate findings and identify common themes across both cases. The Table below shows the theme and sub-theme categories we devised, based on our data.

	Themes	Sub-themes
Pre-Departure	Knowledge of US Diversity and Pre-Arrival Views of the US	• Limited Understanding of Diversity • School • Media • Word of Mouth • Travel
	Knowledge of US Racism	• School • Media (News and Social Media) • Returning Relatives • Books
	Knowledge of, and Experience With, Racial or Ethnic Hierarchies	• Colorism • Discrimination • Genocide • Conflation of Race, Ethnicity, and Tribe
Journey and Transit	Learning stereotypes about the US and US racial groups	• Word of Mouth • Media (Posters, Television, Movies) • National Sentiment
	US Cultural Orientation in Transit	• Pre-Departure Orientation with UNHCR • Cultural Orientation Research Exchange (CORE)
	Discrimination in Transit	• Due to Ethnicity • Due to Accent • Due to Immigration/Legal Status
Arrival and Post-Resettlement	Learning About Race at School	• Bullying • Curriculum • Word of Mouth
	Learning About Race Through Media	• Television • Books • Newspapers • “Black Lives Matter” Posters • Social Media
	Learning About Race Relations Through Social Interactions	• Public Spaces • Everyday Interactions • Microaggressions
	Learning About Race Relations in the Workplace and Bureaucracy	• Observations • Harassment • Government Forms and Bureaucracy
	Personal Experiences of Discrimination	• Islamophobia • Language accents • Lack of communication on race relations within refugee communities
	Conflation of Race and Ethnicity	• N/A

Figure 9: Themes and sub-themes of collected data

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Pre-Departure

Countries of origin provide an initial introduction to race and racial dynamics. Refugees' experiences with ethnic and race-based discrimination within their home countries impact the ways in which refugees view and conceptualize race. Refugees have some or no knowledge of US diversity, racial or ethnic relations, and racism prior to their home country departures. Refugees' pre-arrival understanding of race is likely to impact their formulations of racial dynamics once in the United States. Hence, for purposes of this study, it is useful to understand refugees' pre-migration experiences with discrimination and racial hierarchies.

Knowledge of US Diversity and Pre-Arrival Views of the US

We began by exploring our participants' knowledge of diversity in the United States before their arrival in the country. We hypothesized that this knowledge is likely to influence refugees' perceptions of US racial and ethnic groups, and how they interact with other ethnic groups upon arrival in the United States.

Respondents in Pittsburgh and Mobile reported varying degrees of knowledge about US diversity. In Pittsburgh, most respondents were aware of this diversity. As one respondent noted:

> *"Yeah, they say in America...everybody living [there], I mean, 'cause you meet Chinese. You meet every kind of people. I knew about it."*
>
> – Congolese man, Pittsburgh

However, few participants in Mobile expressed pre-arrival knowledge of US diversity. Most participants believed that the US was predominantly White; those who mentioned USdiversity tended to believe that the US is solely Black and White. Few Mobilian respondents understood the extent of diversityin the US, especially concerning Asian and Hispanic representation. Neither Iraqis nor African respondents indicated knowledge of Asians and Hispanics; only respondents with family members in the United States indicated an awareness of ethnic diversity within the country:

> *"We did not know Asian, Mexican lived [in the United States]. Only after we come and see this."*
>
> – Iraqi woman, Mobile

> *"I did not know anything about the people in America."*
>
> – Congolese woman, Mobile

One Congolese respondent attributed this lack of awareness to the lack of American media diversity:

> *"American media often portrays white people, which results in the notion that all Americans are white."*
>
> – Congolese man, Mobile

In both Pittsburgh and Mobile, respondents shaped their pre-arrival perceptions of the US through school, media, travel, and community conversation. Perceptions varied by age, education level, and country of origin. Most respondents' biases against Black Americans typically developed via word of mouth:

> *"We sometimes hear that the black are.... you know [shakes head 'not good']."*
>
> – Iraqi man, Mobile

Most participants had general knowledge of other countries and cultures. Nearly all participants knew about Asian, European, and Hispanic peoples, though few participants recognized that these groups also lived outside their regions of origin. For instance, one Sudanese respondent described learning about China in school, though she never learned about the Chinese diaspora.

Regardless of respondents' knowledge of US diversity, nearly all participants viewed the United States as the "land of opportunity" prior to their arrival. Positive portrayals of the US via social media, television, and word of mouth influenced respondents' views of the US much more than their understanding of racial dynamics. The allure of the US overshadowed any other perspectives, including about race.

Knowledge of US Racism

We asked participants if they had known about US race relations before coming to the US. Again, their responses varied by city. Most Pittsburgh participants said they had not known about US racism before their arrival. Only three Afghans said they had known about it, one said he knew because he is an academic. One participant from Congo said she had learned about the slave trade in school, but had not known about modern US racism:

> *"I knew only about the slaves. We learn that in school. In history. A chapter about the trade de noir (slave trade)."*
>
> – Congolese woman, Pittsburgh

In Mobile, several participants noted their knowledge of US racism pre-arrival. They had watched protests on the news and/or heard about racism from family members in the US or through social media, television news, and returning relatives. For instance, one Iraqi participant thought that White people had a strong aversion towards Black people since that was what he/she saw on the news before coming to the US. In Pittsburgh, more African participants knew about US racism before their arrival compared to Iraqis. There was also a generational difference regarding the awareness of racism in the US in the pre-migration phase: younger participants were more aware of racial injustice, because they were on social media.

> *"In Africa, we hear about racism. Everything through social media. We also have people who travel to America, they come back [to Tanzania, where he was a refugee] and tell us about racism in America."*
>
> – Congolese man, Mobile

Some participants in both cities noted their learning of racism through books. In Mobile, an Iraqi refugee read about the tension between White and Black people in the US via history books. One Afghan male in Pittsburgh noted that he had read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and learned about racism in the US.

> *"There is a book called Hate a Mockingbird [later confirmed as* To Kill a Mockingbird*]. I read that, but there's a lot of history [on American racism]."*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

While some knew about "Black and White" racism, no participants reported knowledge of anti-Asian or anti-Latinx sentiments within America. Participants saw racism as a Black and White phenomenon.

Knowledge of, and Experience with, Racial or Ethnic Hierarchies

In reflecting on their home communities prior to migration, participants in both cities said life experience depended on skin color, physical appearance, and/or ethnicity. Some saw this as overt expressions of racial hierarchy; others saw it as simply surface level observations.

Iraqi participants in Mobile noted that Black Iraqis have been present in southern regions of the country since the ninth century, with many tracing their origins to East African migrants and enslaved people.[50] Respondents viewed this population as a "servant" class and did not seem to recognize that this view contributed to systematic discrimination and marginalization. This view of racial dynamics manifests as colorism[51] and a desire to be lighter in Arab regions. Participants put less emphasis on race as a system of division in their lives, instead focusing on economic and political divisions. This view of race is illustrated by one participant noting:

> *"There's an underlying desire to be lighter. It's not discrimination with Arabs, but people want light skin."*
>
> – Iraqi man, Mobile

In Pittsburgh, participants, particularly our Afghan participants, had more to say about violent and overt racial oppression in their countries of origin. Several Afghan respondents said the reason their country was facing conflict was due to racism amplified and utilized by the Taliban to gain power. They said discrimination occurred

50 "Black Iraqis," *Minority Rights Group International,* accessed August 24, 2022, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/black-iraqis/.

51 Defined by the *National Conference for Community and Justice* as, "A practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin". https://www.nccj.org/colorism-0.

at all levels of society, which emphasized difference on physical features in addition to tribal affiliation. For example, one Afghan man went into detail about his experience being unable to advance in his career due to ostracization in an ethnic quota system used in military academy examinations. Another Afghan woman shared:

> *"Wherever I go, everyone thought I was from Japanese... Everyone asked me if your parents are really from Afghanistan."*
>
> – Afghan woman, Pittsburgh

It is important to note that in conversations in both cities' participants conflated the terms "race," "ethnicity," and "tribe". Often the three words were used interchangeably when describing their experiences. One participant claimed the Taliban's power grab was due to racism, another claimed this grab was due to tribal differences. These participants both recognized that differences based on skin color, language, religion, and culture exist. This conflation occurred in conversations with all our participants, whether they were new arrivals or had been in the US several years. One refugee who has been in the US for six years appeared to have more awareness about the distinction in the terminology.

One Afghan ethnic group, the Hazaras, stood out in speaking about their intimate experiences with racism. The Hazaras have faced centuries of targeted and systematic violence at the hands of the state. Many are Shi'a Muslims, a religious minority in the region, and have an Asiatic appearance.[52] Prominent Afghan scholars such as Mehdi J. Hakimi have demonstrated through legal frameworks that Hazaras are victims to crimes against humanity. Additionally, many international organizations are advocating to recognize this violence as genocide.[53] A particularly well-educated Afghan man spoke of this racial violence:

> *"They [international organizations] try to formally recognize that there are certain groups in Afghanistan that are systematically targeted. The women in the hospital were targeted. Children at school were targeted. [They] specifically selected and took them down [slaps hand down] and cut your head before all the people and take the videos and publish that. They [Taliban] will do it... What's happening in Afghanistan against Hazaras within 300 years? This is a kind of crime against humanity and the international organization try to recognize..."*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

We wondered whether the Hazara Afghans' acute experience with ethnic and racial persecution back home has led to a heightened awareness of racism in the United States, and it seems to suggest so. It is possible that this experience with racism at home has given some populations a framework to understand racial prejudice that bridges foreign and US definitions of marginalization.

5.2 Journey and Transit

During their journeys, refugees might personally encounter discrimination and racial stereotyping for the first time. This discrimination impacts how they view themselves and their own racial and/or ethnic identities. Their perceptions of the US can also be shaped during their journeys. Refugee camps and transit cities are sites where refugees formulate new ideas of US racial dynamics via word of mouth, media, and interactions with peers. We therefore wanted to explore this period of our participants' experience.

Learning Stereotypes about the US and US Racial Groups

During their journeys, refugees learned stereotypes about people of color in the US, particularly about Black Americans. When asked if they heard anything about people of different skin colors and cultures in the US, Afghan participants in Pittsburgh stated that through word of mouth in refugee camps they heard Black Americans were dangerous.

> *"When I was in [refugee camp], people were saying that those people [Black Americans], that they are lying. There are very aggres-*

52 Mohammad Hussain Hasrat, "Over a Century of Persecution: Massive Human Rights Violation Against Hazaras in Afghanistan," *OHCHR,* February 2019, accessed August 24, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/Call/mhhasrat.pdf.

53 Mehdi J. Hakimi, "Relentless Atrocities: The Persecution of Hazaras," *Michigan Journal of International Law,* Vol. 44, (2022), Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4121751 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4121751.

> *sive... sometimes they are fighting or they can steal something from you or they can stop you in your car, 'give me money'."*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

What Afghan refugees heard reflects the negative stereotyping of Black Americans pervasive in US media portrayals of race and crime historically.[54] Refugees who reported learning about these stereotypes emphasized they had an open mind to discern their own perceptions of people in the US. As one Afghan female put it:

> *"When we were in the... camp... they told us 'In the United States there is Black people, they are very bad. They have guns.' ... We told them we don't have any idea about it because we are refugee... We are not from this country; we have to make our mind..."*
>
> – Afghan woman, Pittsburgh

Similar responses were recorded in Mobile, where Iraqi participants noted similar portrayals of Black people in Jordanian and Turkish media. In one instance, also in Mobile, two recently resettled Congolese men pointed to a group of Black Americans in a poster, noting to the researcher that these US citizens were "very bad" and "thugs with guns." When the researcher asked these men about their beliefs, they said they were scared of Black Americans due to their media portrayals in the refugee camps where they had spent time.

Respondents who transited through Turkey reported high levels of anti-US sentiment, whereas respondents in countries like Lebanon, Uganda, and Tanzania reported more positive perceptions of the US. In both cases, transit country media and national sentiment helped shape refugees' perceptions of the United States.

US Cultural Orientation in Transit

In discussions of US diversity, several participants in both Pittsburgh and Mobile attributed their knowledge of US diversity to their pre-departure orientation (PDO) sessions with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and US Department of State. These orientations, conducted in-person for most Arab and African participants, discuss cultural complexities prior to refugees' stateside arrival, and aim to "help refugees develop realistic expectations."[55] The PDOs proved informative for many participants:

> *"They taught us [about diversity] in preparation classes in Tanzania. They show these people on the television and in the books so we can see photos of these people."*
>
> – Congolese woman, Mobile

In Pittsburgh, some Afghan refugees learned about diversity through a welcome guide provided by the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE). Like the PDOs, the guide seeks to acquaint refugees with the United States pre-arrival. Although it illustrates the different races and cultures in the US, the guide does not discuss any challenges that refugees might face integrating into their communities on the account of their skin color. Instead, the resource takes on a more positive light, heavily emphasizing all people are created equal under American law.[56]

Discrimination in Transit

Refugees learned about diversity and racism during their journey to the US through their individual experiences with discrimination in transit countries. Some participants encountered discrimination over their ethnicity and legal status. For instance, a Rwandan refugee who spent most of her life in Kenya faced tensions due to her ethnicity (in Kenya, people can tell someone's ethnicity from their family name). Some people cannot get jobs due to this identification. An Iraqi refugee who lived in Turkey before Mobile mentioned that her son was bul-

54 Mary Beth Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous': Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the 'Criminalization' of African American Men," *Journal of African American Studies* 7, no. 2 (2003): 3–18. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819017.

55 "Orientation programs and processes," *UNHCR,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/placement-reception-orientation/orientation-programs-and-processes.

56 "Welcome Guides," *CORE,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://coresourceexchange.org/welcome-guides/.

lied at school due to her family's legal status as a refugee. A Congolese refugee in Pittsburgh also experienced discrimination related to their immigration status during their journey.

> *"They be asking you for passport. We were refugee, so we didn't have the passport. Yeah. So, whenever you go like in the town, if you don't have any passport, you* may *go to jail."*
>
> – Congolese man, Pittsburgh

A refugee from Congo who lived in Tanzania before Pittsburgh experienced discrimination because of his Swahili accent. An Iraqi refugee faced discrimination because of his skin color in Turkey, where he spent four years before resettlement.

> *"In Turkey, they treated us differently because our skin was darker. They were racist there."*
>
> – Iraqi man, Mobile

These experiences influence participants' knowledge of racism pre-arrival and influence how participants better understand racism upon arrival in the United States.

5.3 Arrival and Post-Resettlement

On arrival in the United States, refugees encounter US racial dynamics and interactions firsthand. Observations of and interactions with US born citizens shape refugees' racial perceptions over time. For some refugees, the US provides an entirely new racial context that challenges their pre-migration beliefs. Refugees also question their own identities as they encounter US stereotypes and discrimination. As time progresses, refugees continue to encounter new racial experiences and learn about race via schools, media, and the workplace. In both Pittsburgh and Mobile, our participants talked about how different spaces played a significant role in influencing their attitudes and societal understanding.

Learning About Race at School

Participants most commonly experienced bullying. Both refugee students and parents spoke about hearing racial slurs, being made fun of for their accents, or being ostracized because of their culture. Though research on religious and race-based bullying is still limited, refugee children experience bullying higher than recorded averages.[57] A US Department of Health and Human Services study notes that, in the US, nearly 29% of immigrant youth experienced bullying in schools, compared to 24% of US-born students.[58] Discrimination at school impacts how refugees make meaning of the new racialized environments in which they live.

> *"I remember my senior year, playing soccer, it was the time of my life. But I remember the white people screaming, 'Go back to Africa! You're a monkey.'"*
>
> – Congolese man, Mobile

> *"She [kid from class] used to be very mean. ... like, she was OK with other kids. Only me, my sister, and two other Afghan kids. She was saying bad word... in English"*
>
> – Afghan woman, Pittsburgh

In Mobile, participants also learned about negative ethnic stereotypes via bullying and ethnic mislabeling. As one participant notes:

> *"My other son, a kid saw him in the bathroom and didn't let him out because he was a 'dirty Mexican.' Why would my son be Mexican? I did not think Mexicans were bad in America, but I realized some people think they are."*
>
> – Iraqi woman, Mobile

A Mobile respondent also noted that teachers treated her son differently in class, specifically calling him out for alleged bad behavior. This participant attributed her son's treatment to Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim bullying is widely reported in schools throughout the United States; according to a nationally based sample, over 42% of Muslim students report experiencing

57 "Race, Ethnicity, National Origin and Religion," Stopbullying.org, last reviewed December 10, 2021, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/groups.

58 Brandy R. Maynard et al., "Bullying Victimization among School-Aged Immigrant Youth in the United States," Journal of Adolescent Health, (2016), 58 no. 3:337-44.

discrimination and/or bullying in school environments.[59] In schools, anti-Muslim discrimination influences the ways respondents develop their own understandings of racismin the US.

Refugees also learned about race relations in school through their curricula. In Pittsburgh, refugee children and university students studied the history of the civil rights movement and slavery in the US. Talking with classmates also helped refugees make meaning of different racial categories. For example, a Congolese respondent stated that he didn't understand that "White" and "Asian" were separate racial categories in the US until a fellow student pointed it out:

> *"I was asking, 'why they talking about that [different races]? They look the same?' And they [classmates] say 'no, you can call him White, but you can't call him White.' And I was like 'why?' 'Because they are not from the same country.' And I was like, 'where did he come from, the White guy?' And they were like 'he from here. But he is from Asia...'"*
>
> – Congolese man, Pittsburgh

Learning About Race through the Media

Refugees learned about race in the US through digital and print media such as television, books, and newspapers. Particularly when asked about their knowledge of racial justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, refugees pointed to news stories as a significant source. Many refugees resettled in Pittsburgh arrived in late 2019 or early 2020, just before the news was covering George Floyd's murder by police officers in Minneapolis, and the nation's response.[60] Although this event is credited as a hugely influential moment of US racial reckoning,[61] most of the refugee participants had only a general understanding of racial divisions in this country and did not understand the significance of racial justice movements through media alone. A few refugees who saw Black Lives Matter posters in town tried asking their friends or neighbors what the posters meant, but this was unusual and did not lead to a better understanding of racial justice compared to other participants.

Social media did seem to contribute to a deeper understanding of race complexity in the US. Several participants in both cities said they were disturbed by videos they saw on Facebook and TikTok. Witnessing videos that depicted violent police stops or stories about discrimination led refugees to make meaning of racism, by recognizing patterns and searching for common denominators between recorded encounters:

> *"Yeah 'cause nobody comes to me and says, 'hey somebody is racist this guy, this guy, the White people are racist', no, no, no, it's just something we found on the Internet. Then we say, 'oh, look at this, what happened? What is happening, like why?'"*
>
> – Congolese man, Pittsburgh

Given that Facebook has over 2.9 billion users[62] and TikTok has 1 billion and growing,[63] social media are powerful shapers of people's views. While social media has been used for political engagement and social activism, it also has a more sinister side.[64] For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was partially credited for an uptick of anti-Asian hate.[65]

59 "American Muslim Poll 2022: A Politics and Pandemic Status Report," *ISPU,* accessed August 28, 2022, https://www.ispu.org/public-policy/american-muslim-poll-2022/.

60 Evan Hill et al.,"How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *The New York Times,* May 31, 2020, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html.

61 Eliott McLaughlin, "George Floyd's Death Ignited a Racial Reckoning That Shows No Signs of Slowing Down," *CNN,* August 9, 2020, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/09/us/george-floyd-protests-different-why/index.html.

62 "Facebook Statistics and Trends," *Datareportal,* updated August 15, 2022, accessed August 25, 2022, https://datareportal.com/essential-facebook-stats#:~:text=Number%20of%20Facebook%20users%20in,)%3A%202.934%20billion%20(July%202022)&text=Number%20of%20people%20who%20use,)%3A%201.968%20billion%20(July%202022)&text=Share%20of%20Facebook's%20monthly%20active,%3A%2067%25%20(July%202022)&text=Size%20of%20Facebook's%20global%20advertising,2.168%20billion*%20(July%202022).

63 "Tik Tok Statistics - Updated Aug 2022," *Wallaroo,* last updated August 13, 2022, https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/#:~:text=TikTok%20is%20available%20in%20over,be%20on%20TikTok%20right%20now.

64 Brooke Auxier, "Social media continue to be important political outlets for Black Americans," Pew Research Center, December 11, 2020, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/11/social-media-continue-to-be-important-political-outlets-for-black-americans/.

65 Caleb Ziems, Bing He, Sandeep Soni, and Srijan Kumar. "Racism is a Virus: Anti-Asian Hate and Counterhate in Social Media during the COVID-19 Crisis," arXiv.org, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2005.12423.

Learning about Race Relations Through Social Interactions

Everyday social interactions influence refugees' perceptions of race and their positions within society. Refugees encounter racial interactions on buses, at grocery stores, and in many other public spaces. Though some refugees encountered verbal assaults, our participants spoke more about microaggressions. One Iraqi participant in Mobile noted that people in stores stare at her when she wears the hijab, though no one has ever exhibited hostile behavior towards her. Another Iraqi participant had a negative interaction with the New Orleans police, which influenced his perception of the US police force. A Pittsburgh respondent observed racial groups on the bus:

> *"Black people on the back of the bus who say 'open the door' with no respect to the driver. I don't see this happen between people of higher level [richer]."*
>
> – Afghan woman, Pittsburgh

In Mobile and Pittsburgh, respondents who lived in predominantly Black housing projects had negative experiences which influenced their perceptions of Black Americans:

> *"We lived in a Black community, and we met a lot of lazy Black people who drank all day. We saw how it was hard for them to keep a job because of their circumstances."*
>
> – Iraqi man, Mobile

> *"My friends told me 'Please be careful about your son because one of my neighbors last night was attacked by the Black people.'"*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

This anti-Black sentiment existed among ethnic groups, including Africans. In fact, specifically in Mobile, many African participants commented on tensions between African and Black Americans:

> *"In my experience, the Black people are angry and have big ego. They cannot say sorry. They want to be above everyone."*
>
> – Congolese man, Mobile

While some participants held negative perceptions of Black Americans prior to their arrival, most participants developed their views through direct interaction with Black Americans. Mobilian participants did not mention biases against other racial groups, and some formed positive views of other groups through interaction. An Iraqi respondent noted the similarities between Mexican and Iraqi cultures and developed an admiration for "hard-working" Mexicans. Another participant enjoyed trying various cuisines, including Chinese and Mexican food, and developed an appreciation of these cultures via food. Several respondents noted their diverse friend groups and positive interactions with other ethnic groups, which also increased their desire to interact with other ethnic groups. One Iraqi said his Black and White neighbors were "good people," based on his encounters with them. These everyday interactions shaped refugees' positive and negative perceptions of other races and cultures in the US.

Learning about Race Relations in the Workplace and Bureaucracy

In both Pittsburgh and Mobile, refugees observed people at work and noticed racial differences and discrimination. An Afghan refugee in Pittsburgh who works in a place where the majority of the workers are from Latin America saw the Latin Americans being discriminatory towards US coworkers. For example, he mentioned that the Hispanic coworkers "want to make problem(s)" for the US coworkers, and make the working environment advantageous for them, not for the coworkers from the US.

Participants experienced harassment and judgements at work due to their race and ethnicity in both cities. For instance, an Afghan participant in Pittsburgh who worked as a driver faced race-induced physical violence. His client hesitated to get in his car by calling him "*Bangladesh*," and when he tried to ask where the client wanted to go, she punched him from the back seat of his car. A Rwandan participant who worked as a telephone operator also shared her story of being asked if she was "*calling out of the United States*" and judged by a client because of her accent. In Mobile, a colleague of an Iraqi refugee verbally harassed him regarding his race and ethnicity.

> *"A redneck guy I worked with asked if I was going to blow him up."*
>
> – Iraqi man, Mobile

Participants from Afghanistan in Pittsburgh said they thought more about race when they filled out forms for US government bureaucracy. They identified themselves as Asian or White in most cases but were unsure of their "official" race according to US categorization.

> *"I'm always confused about that. Since Afghanistan is located in the center of Asia and I always tick . Asia.... (B)ut most of our friends thought Asian is belonging to Chinese, Japanese, Korean and North Korean people'... I always write Asian, other people write White."*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

Personal Experiences of Discrimination

Refugees' personal experiences of discrimination varied between US cities and ethnic groups. For instance, Arabs and Afghans in both cities encountered Islamophobia in public spaces:

> *"A white guy, young, probably 18, 19 years old... he start calling me "Al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden. Operation Al Qaeda.... Allahu Akbar..."*
>
> – Afghan man, Pittsburgh

For African refugees, language and accent-based discrimination occurred in both cities:

> *"Sometimes I don't feel good, they is laughing when I am talking, like that."*
>
> – Congolese woman, Pittsburgh

> *"We get bullied for how we sound, the accent... other students mimic us on how we sound."*
>
> – Nigerian man, Mobile

Many participants did not internalize these experiences, but they shaped the ways in which participants viewed themselves within their adopted society. An Iraqi participant in Mobile noted that she became aware of Islamophobia only when she herself experienced it, and was confused:

> *"If we were terrorists, why would we come to Alabama? You know, what is here?"*
>
> – Iraqi woman, Mobile

Societal stereotypes and discriminatory practices forced many participants to reexamine their identities and place within the landscape of the US.

Most participants in Pittsburgh said that they do not talk about racism in the US with others, including their own community members. One Congolese participant said that he hears about racism through social media but does not talk about it with his family and friends. Another Congolese participant said she does not talk about it with others as she does not want to pass down the hate and negativity to future generations. One said:

> *"No [I don't talk about it with others] ... For me, it's very important to look for a way to finish those things [racism], and not let them grow.... And the only way to correct the future is not planting those seeds in young people."*
>
> – Congolese woman, Pittsburgh

Conflation of Race and Ethnicity

Refugees had difficulties differentiating the concept of race and ethnicity pre-arrival and afterwards. In Pittsburgh, our participants were unsure about the difference between race and ethnicity, as ethnicity matters in their countries of origin rather than race and they were not familiar with the difference between the two concepts. Many refugees used the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably. For some participants with advanced levels of English, it wasn't until the researcher's defined "ethnicity" as a social group defined by similar language and culture that participants used ethnicity more specifically.

> *"If you are Pashtun, .. it's possible, but not like 100 percent you can get married to Tajik or Hazara, just they are different race."*
>
> – Afghan woman, Pittsburgh

The responses from our participants in Pittsburgh suggest they have not yet learnt about complex racial topics such as racial justice movements and the difference between ethnicity and race in the US.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Nearly all participants in both Pittsburgh and Mobile saw the US as the "land of opportunity" before coming to the US. However, their knowledge about US race relations, racism and diversity was much less well-developed. Some participants (mostly in Mobile) learned about race relations pre-arrival via social media, television news, and returning relatives. Pre-arrival knowledge about US diversity was also mixed; most refugees in Mobile had a preconceived idea that the US was predominantly White. Our participants also varied in how they viewed racial hierarchies in their home countries with some, particularly Afghans and Iraqis, recognizing skin color as part of a racial hierarchy.

During their journeys, in both countries of transit and refugee camps, refugees learned about racial stereotypes and gained knowledge of different races, ethnicities, and US racism via word-of-mouth and social media. In refugee camps, participants learned about negative racial stereotypes, particularly towards Black Americans. Some participants carried these stereotypes to the US, fearing Black Americans on arrival in the United States. Participants who had spent time in refugee camps reported fewer personal experiences with racism than those in transit cities. Direct cultural immersion within transit country cultures proved difficult for many, particularly for Arab participants in Middle Eastern transit countries. Participants experienced discrimination based upon their accent, skin color, legal status, and ethnicity in countries of transit.

Once participants were screened and approved to settle in the United States, most respondents learned about US diversity via government-issued pamphlets, books, and pre-arrival orientation courses. These resources provided simple explanations of racial groups within the US, though racism and racial dynamics were not discussed. Thus, in transit, refugees generally learned about diversity in the US via formal government and informal channels, while racism was typically introduced as a concept via more informal channels.

In Pittsburgh and Mobile, our participants overwhelmingly upheld the idea that the US is a welcoming place and viewed the US's diversity positively. In Pittsburgh, several participants appealed to a common "humanity" which they believed should prevail over differences in skin color. One notable difference was that African refugees in Mobile expressed more dissatisfaction about Black Americans through integration experiences. Afghans in Pittsburgh maintained confusion about the racial "group" under which they were classified.

Themes for Future Research

A refugee's experience and education about US racial relations is likely contextual, depending on their region or city of resettlement. However, our research was only exploratory and did not enable us to do a proper systematic comparison of our two cities. Future research could conduct such comparisons, especially between resettlement cities in different regions of the US. Several new themes emerged during our study, which are worthy of further research:

English Level and Learning about US Race Relations

Our interviews with refugees in Pittsburgh revealed difficulties understanding and navigating the complex racial context of Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the language barriers. For example, according to a Congolese refugee in Pittsburgh:

> *"On the TV they were talking about it (Black Lives Matter) [but] we didn't understand much about it"*
>
> - Congolese man, Pittsburgh

In Pittsburgh, those who said they experienced racism tended to have higher English ability compared to those who do not. This is possibly because English skills help them understand situations when they encounter or witness discrimination. Older participants with limited English and who were not working had less experience of racism as they rarely left the house. Social interaction in host communities coupled with higher English abilities help refugees learn about the construction of race.

Further research is needed to explore the relationship between English language skills and how refugees learn about and experience race relations in the US.

Pity and Racism

A resettlement practitioner in Mobile noted the role of pity towards refugees, particularly in the South. The practitioner believes that some US born individuals victimize refugees and *"aren't able to view [refugees] as autonomous people who can make their own choices...we need to challenge this victimization persona."* Perhaps some people from the US have hidden racist attitudes towards refugees because they feel pity towards refugees. It is possible that refugees experience lower levels of racism, along with a false sense of welcoming, simply because some US born individuals pity them. When a researcher described this study, a White volunteer noted, *"I feel so bad for them, it's so sad. That's why I help them, [refugees] need my help."* If these sanctimonious attitudes affect refugees' experiences and autonomy, additional analyses could be useful in assessing the role of pity and resettlement.

The North/South Divide and Resettlement Experiences

Geographical divides impact study responses. Though this study found relatively few correlations between resettlement location and racist experiences, further research will be helpful to assess broader resettlement experiences within the South. Several participants in Mobile noted the South's reputation as a hotbed for racism and intolerance, yet few participants expressed higher rates of mistreatment due to their geographic location. However, the urbanity of Mobile could have an impact on refugees' experiences. Studies in smaller Southern cities might very well yield different results; therefore, further evaluation of refugees' resettlement locations and corresponding integration experiences is required to accurately assess resettlement within the South.

Homegrown Ethnic Biases

In an interview with an Afghan refugee in Pittsburgh, a participant mentioned that their ability to access social services was hampered because of perceived prejudices held against their language and ethnic background among others in their refugee community. In the refugee's opinion, other Afghans (from other ethnic groups) carried over ethnic prejudices, which continues to be a point of tension for this community in the US. While only raised by one refugee, this conversation begs the question if this phenomenon occurs in other refugee cultural groups as well, and to what extent this division could hamper a refugees' integration. If resettlement agencies are unaware of the nature of this division, organizations can inadvertently be contributing to lack of community cohesion by not working with diverse enough cultural liaisons. Luckily, with more research, organizations can create tools and strategies to better support their clients, expand the languages they offer for translation/interpretation, and can grow their cultural sensitivity. This area of inquiry is worth considering in the future.

Research with Refugees from Other Backgrounds

This study's research participants were limited to Afghans, Congolese, Iraqis, Sudanese, Nigerian, and Rwandans. White refugees from Ukraine or Bosnia learn about racism in the US differently. In fact, the research literature suggests that Bosnian refugees in the US report minimal levels of discrimination whereas Black Muslims encounter both racially charged and religious prejudice.[66] Future research should have a diverse body of participants to further examine this point.

Legal Status and its Impact on Perceived Racism

Our study was limited to refugees or those with Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) and had a clear legal status and pathway to citizenship in the United States. A similar study of those holding less clear legal statuses, such as undocumented

66 John RB Palmer, "Patterns of settlement following forced migration: The case of Bosnians in the United States," Working Paper Series 35, Interdisciplinary Research Group on Immigration, Spring 2018, https://repositori.upf.edu/bitstream/handle/10230/34262/GRITIM_WP_35_2018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

populations, asylees, or new immigrants could reveal very different experiences with race and learning about race relations. Would undocumented individuals feel comfortable expressing dissenting opinions given their fragile placement in the US? Do undocumented persons or asylees have access to the same "spaces of encounter", like schools or the workplace, where they can learn about race in America? These are just a few of the questions that persist and could be expanded upon in a future iteration of this study to see if different immigrant groups have different experiences with race in the United States.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how refugees learn about race and US racial relations before, during, and after their journey to the United States. While definitions of race vary between cultures, once in the United States, most refugees develop an awareness of US race relations via societal interactions, media, and through their own experiences of discrimination. Prior to arrival, refugees in both cities gained knowledge of US race relations through school, media, travel, and community conversation. However, the degrees of knowledge they have are heavily dependent on each refugee's education level, age, and country of origin. Some refugees learn about race relations while in transit to the United States, particularly refugees who transit via refugee camps. Though some pre-arrival programming introduces refugees to US diversity, these resources do not discuss the complexities of US race relations.

This study's findings demonstrate that race is a highly contextual concept, typically formulated via informal channels, such as personal experiences and word-of-mouth. Further, despite significant cultural differences between the North and South of the US, this study found that a refugee's resettlement location does not significantly impact their understanding of race relations. Though this study's findings are preliminary in nature, they provide additional context to refugees' formulations of race as a concept.

We, as researchers, stress the importance of developing broader pre- and post-resettlement programming to help refugees fully understand racial dynamics within the United States. We recommend that the Hello Neighbor Network use our research to develop such programming, and we also recommend a continued investigation of our research topic.