The Role of Black Christians
Within the University

How is the environment judging Christ-like students on campus? People seem not to know how to judge other, whether to judge them their tradition cultural or religion. It can cause a heap of confusion to one and better knowledge to another. I wonder if I haven’t met Black Christians on campus, would my values changed about college? Or, would I see the college the same way? The black students at U of I are mostly from some type of religion background. There are still black students seeking God as a main resource to survive. Are they force to believe that from traditional culture or can they believe for themselves. I can truly acknowledge I myself wasn’t force. I had a choice to connect with culture better through religion. It was clearly by going to church to worship God. Does Christianity relate to family background? I remember at an early age my mother recommitting her membership in church. She had me and my sister to go up there with her at that time parents bring their children to join the church with them. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. Clearly, at that age I was still in my sin not knowing the values. In our mind we think since our parents accept Jesus we automatic accept him under them. As I reach my teenage years I accepted Jesus for myself by confession my own sins. I want to get the point of, how does family cultural background affect the way black students practice and act Christianity on campus? I have identified two of my Christian sisters to experience this journey with. I compare and contrast their everyday life being. Can life be a tradition or your own way of living?
I’m a freshman at U of I. My intended major is Human Development and Family Studies. As a researcher I wanted to randomly answer a question that I never seen no one research before. So I decided to survey nine (8 females and 1 male) and interview 2 (2females) black Christian college students. The surveys intention was to get a large group people to answer some question because I didn’t want to interview each one of them on the same questions. The surveys were to see how young adults between the ages 18-21 identify their values as a person and identify their activeness as a Christian. I soon understand how to clarify their background. So I went to the black house and Impact meeting two days in a row because I knew I would find black students in these two areas that qualified for my particular research. The surveys result helped me take another standpoint. Before my mindset was a black church vs. white church to show the difference between us. But the surveys showed me that black Christians on campus had problems within themselves of judging others, particularly other black people cultures without noticing what effects they left our Christian lifestyle in today’s society. However, the two interviews that I processed were supposed to show how someone’s culture can be so different but religion remains the same. The expectation I wanted from the interviewees’ are the following: one from an African descent orienting home vs. African American descent orienting home, only child vs. siblings, and to figure how culture affects religion structure. Culture can affect your religion style.

Bankole Childhood

I met Nike Bankole through a Christian Registered Student Organization (RSO), called Impact Movement. At first I didn’t know anything about her, but looked as if she was a goofy person. I got closer to her at the Impact Conference in Atlanta. Our sisterhood grew stronger back
on campus by living on one accord with our faith. However, she had a different tradition than other students on campus.

“How was your childhood life?”

I sat at the table across from Bankole asking her question while she eating the chicken I bought her at late night (PAR). I asked her this question to feel comfortable of talking about her cultural background.

Nike Bankole, an agricultural advertising major at U of I and a unique soprano singer, practice Christianity in her everyday life since she was born. She was born in Chicago, but raised by Nigerian decent parents.

“How great,” she said looking hesitant not wanting to answer like I would like her to, “…I mean I had fun in school but I hated it.”

In my mind I thought she was going to address the question about family. It seems to me as if she wanted to move away from that direction.

She continued to talk about school saying, “All Black Catholic high school.” Even though she went to a Catholic school, she identified herself as growing more spiritually. Bankole told me that the Catholic school went on retreats and prayed in the morning. A retreat is an event where you go to learn more knowledge about yourself and religion. The prayer they did as school was in session wasn’t specific to Mary, but it was the national prayer. Example, she gave to me is, “Our Father which art in heaven… (Luke 11:2).” It rushed through my head to agree with a EUI researcher. The unknown author, EUI researcher, argued that Catholicism and Christianity was mainly the same thing. Bankole felt like her Catholic school built her religion strength even more. I wasn’t expecting that answer. I assume she was going to talk about her childhood life with her family not with her school.
Bankole identified her values to be family and God. As I look over surveys that I had Black Christian students take family and God was the top ranking out of 8 surveyed. It showed that family and God are the important resource to follow. One black female survey answered that cultural background reflects her religion. Moreover, we can assure that most family household is religious to uphold their family.

When I asked her, why Nigerians are so strong religion belief and why they are different than Black churches? She stopped me before I can finish the question, “at a time Nigeria had evil spirits floating around so Nigerians had to believe in something to live life” she said. This is why Nigerians are strong in Christianity it was the only way to go. There were also other religions in Nigeria, but her parent stuck with one religion and became closer to Nigerians of that kind. I think Bankole wanted me to know that religion didn’t grow bigger out of the blue. I end up receiving some culture and ethnic dimension in depth from interviewee. Her culture values in Nigeria become a part of history in her life.

She believes that her family values were a helpful pathway for her life. To doing so, her values are her parents’ values expectation. In the article, *The Effects of maternal parenting style and religion commitment on self-regulation, academic achievement, and risk behavior among African-American parochial college students*, Abar ett, explained that living in a religious committed parental household will better the student academic grades scores in a standard zone. People are influenced by their parents. I agree because if the parents have reasonable values their child wouldn't convert to atheist or other religions. We can find Bankole to be a witness to that because she was born into Christianity without force. Bankole’s family is astonishing to me.

Bankole’s mother and father are Christians. Her mother was born into Christianity as a child. Opposition was her father, he was born into a Muslim, mother, and Christian, father.
Something unique about Bankole’s grandfather he was Muslim then he converted into a Christian. Her father had a choice of whether to become Muslim and/or Christian. I guess his values align up with Christianity. However, they had the same values as Nigerian.

In addition, it was strange for me to hear Bankole explain that memories of your younger days develop the way a person carry themselves in adulthood. Childhood memories of family help you to learn the mistakes you made as a child. It's hard to change something that's already been installed you. It’s seems to me that Bankole want to expressed that it’s upi to you to keep the cycle or break the cycle apart. People rebel a situation when an experience happens that convince you to judge upon that incident. Bankole addressed, “If your dad abuse your mom while you were a child. As you get older you won't trust men presence. Bankole’s family is astonishing to me.

Bankole’s parents let her choose her own major, which shows their religious values over cultural beliefs. I believe non-religious parents would’ve ignored their child heart desire because school means a lot for the Nigerian culture. They either wanted their daughter and/or son to become a doctor or lawyer. Nigeria is a very poor country. Some Nigerians had birth to their child in America, which meant a chance to overcome poverty. They send money to family back in Nigeria to survive from health issues and poverty. I think if a person has a religion this value change. As I previously stated, Bankole is majoring in agricultural advertising, her parents respect her career. They believe that whatever God have in store for Bankole, it’s the best way.

Bankole in College
Bankole is finally finished eating her chicken I think the engagement was fascinated because we can see eye to eye.

“Here on campus I love to dance but at home I’m shy in front of church.”

She said while giggling as if it was a joke. I believe when we students’ are in college we have more freedom than back at home. For me college was where I explored Christian life because high school, student played around with religion not taking it serious.

See at Bankole church, back at home, they dance in the church because it was part of the culture. Her church has predominantly Nigerians. Before you enter the sanctuary your shoes have to come off because it was a manner of respect to the culture and once you respect the culture you respect the religion rules. It wasn’t that Bankole didn’t come from a dancing family, “I just didn’t want to accept obligation at the church because one thing comes to another and then a pile of responsibilities”. I agreed on this while interviewing her because at my church back at home people start judging you. When you get out of your shy comfort zone church members reaction is that you are wilder in college or you are joyful to be back. The minister starts to wonder if you can
facilitate events. Students couldn’t say no because people indicate that you denied of giving back to the community as promised (from culture values).

When in college Bankole experience what I call “independency” where she express her personality outside her Nigerian culture. She is more opened in college to see African American culture as her own. She claims to be custom to both cultures. She realized that she can adjust her culture and religion here on campus. Her academic in college can show that she has balance culture; and her spiritual strength can show her religion balance. However, there is another interviewee that experience Christian roles on campus in a different approach.

Williams’ Childhood

Unlike Bankole, I met Tyriana Williams through a friend from the summer. When I got introduce to her she was a calm and kind person. I got a little closer to her through Impact Movement too. It was honor to interview a special person.

Tyriana Williams, a junior majoring in Sociology, she is the Liaison for Impact Movement bible study. Liaison is known to be the President of an organization from the language of Impact servant board. Williams’ is the only child from her parents indifferent from Bankole who have siblings.

“How is your childhood life?”

We were sitting in the African American Cultural Center couches just relaxing. I asked her this question because I notice that Bankole didn’t respond like I want her to.

“I didn’t grow up in a spiritual home that was strong because my family history in church was said to be hypocrites”, she said.
I was wonder, why she inferred her family religion struggles first instead of talking about school like Bankole. I noticed that Williams’ and I are from an African American descent orienting home. I expect her and Bankole to refer to family first. But assumption of Bankole response was denied of my thought. I can truly say that African American descent values family than school.

“I got baptized at six years old not knowing that much about the religion”, she said.

Williams’ experienced what most African American children experience about Christianity. Suh, a EUI researcher ideal article *The Role of Religion in the Lives of Hindu Students*, believed that students were brought up in their religion. I agree because we were forced or assumed to be saved (accepting Jesus as your Savior) because it was part of the church tradition. If you weren’t a part of Christianity you were looked down on. But Williams’ didn’t actually know what meant to be saved because she found herself not walking as a Christian in her younger years because in the household her family didn’t show an “example of Christ walk.” However, Williams started to go interest in Christianity from the U of I campus.

**Williams’ in College**

Williams got introduced more about Christ from the Impact Movement servant team. She ended up going to the different events that had on campus and then later joined them. She felt like she broke her parent cycle of religion by making her own foundation with Christianity. It helped her family to grow as her research possessed positive ways in Christianity.

I asked her, “What is the difference between black churches and white churches in community?”

“White churches are more theological resource while black churches improvise their sermons”, she said. I believe improvisation can be a big problem because parts of it are thoughts.
In Kim’s EUI project *What do you look for in joining a Church? Asian Americans and Christianity*, she was exploring and researching about how Asian Americans interact within church denomination. This is where Black people separate into different tradition, which causes other people to feel inferior in church.

Williams’, “what made you join the cycle of Christianity?” I said.

“I start joining different community activities on campus”, she said. I acknowledge that Williams has joined different organization here on campus to grow more spiritual such as: Dance for Christ, Impact Movement, member of a church in Champaign, and leader of a youth department. I see this to be different from Bankole because Williams’ show her activeness through activities support.

**Activeness**

As you can see from the graph here Bankole and Williams’ rated their activeness as a 10 (between 1 and 10, 1 being a weak activeness and 10 being a strong activeness) Williams’ activeness is shown through the knowledge she didn’t get at a young age. So, her process is growing everyday doing different activities. Bankole’s activeness is shown through her parents and family by the path of maintaining her values. They’re one year apart from each other in age trying to reach the same goal but in different ways. Their culture affects their ability to grow and age of wisdom. Just because Bankole is younger doesn’t mean she have less wisdom than Williams. In their eyes wisdom is better than knowledge and age doesn’t matter in the case of growing spiritually.
I learned that culture can conflict with religious background. Culture can affect people outside the group by you sticking with custom rules of your culture expectations. Black churches are known to function in an old tradition ways. The ministry will be conducted into interpreting the Bible in a culture aspect. It can destroy what the Bible and religion’s mission for the church. I notice sermons (teaching from the Bible by ministers) presented in church take away what God intentional plan for the Black community. As you can see from Williams’ story the family broke the religion cycle from church being unacceptable. I recommend that Blacks Christians should accept all Christians inside and outside their traditions. It will make Black students acknowledge that Christian don’t judge their own kind. As Williams’ told me, “people are ignorant of respecting other Blacks social life,” I agree because I notice everyone don’t get a chance to experience religion at a young age. So they grow up trying to learn to fit in the religion culture expectation. But some Black Christians don’t accept them to participate in religious activities because other Christians judge them upon their first impression, which is the mindset of considering culture lifestyle. It causes most new Black Christians to not join churches and different Christian organizations. I learned that Black Christian students receive judgment by the way we live our lives as a child and the values we choose along the way. We can clearly say that some people pick their religion over their culture background. It’s not more so the religion, but it’s the culture that makes the tradition set for the next generation. The balance of black culture and the religion isn’t known to be on one accord which intentional set a tone for the bond we have for each other.
Outside of the campus community these issues occur. I think we should see to this issue on a higher level than just the campus environment. It all starts with one person standing to correct it and not run away from it.