



Yet Another Racist Travel Ban

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On November 26, 2021, President Joe Biden issued "[A Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)". The impetus for the proclamation was the November 24 report from the Republic of South Africa of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2. Reactions to the unknowns of the named Omicron variant reported from South Africa spiraled quickly to travel restrictions on seven additional countries, a decision that raised again the historical presence of racism in the planning and implementation of US foreign policy.

The proclamation prohibited travel into the United States for immigrants and nonimmigrants, and of noncitizens of the United States who were physically present in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, beginning on Monday, November 29, 2021. Noted in the proclamation as a rationale for the travel restrictions is the "extensive cross-border transit and proximity in Southern Africa." Along with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Russia, and Japan also imposed travel restrictions on these same African countries.

These new travel restrictions came within two days of the self-reporting by South Africa to the World Health Organization of this new variant. Ironically, while South Africa was the first to report the new variant, [the variant was already present in Europe a week before South Africa's reporting](#). Once again, United States foreign policy has been enacted with prejudice. The reporting of the variant in Europe has not sparked the same alarms or garnered the same restrictions on travel to the United States, raising questions regarding the reasons for the travel restrictions and the speed with which they were imposed on these southern African countries. Also raised was the discriminatory nature of the travel restrictions, specifically discrimination against Africans.

The United States' immigration policies have a history of denying access to

communities of color coming from Africa, Asia, and the Americas (including the Caribbean), while making ways and exceptions for Europeans to cross borders into the United States. The obvious is to be stated: the United States has imposed a travel ban preventing Africans from coming to the United States. This comes mere months after the Biden Administration was criticized for its response to Haitian migrants seeking entry to the United States. Many were deported, others returned to Texas, while yet others were held in detention centers.

Concern for the spread of the COVID-19 virus is being exploited with the travel restrictions under this presidential proclamation. There has been public outcry demanding the lifting of these travel restrictions. In the meantime, the Netherlands, which identified cases of the Omicron variant before it appeared in South Africa, did not report these cases and issued travel restrictions against the eight southern African countries.

Once again, racism has been witnessed in the highest seat of government in the United States and across predominantly white countries, which have taken the occasion of this new variant to keep Africans out of western Europe and North America. This is a racist, fear-driven response that once again disenfranchises African countries.

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