

**REFLECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS:
NARRATIVES OF AFRO-CARIBBEAN FACULTY MEMBERS IN
AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Abstract: *Utilizing scholarly personal narratives (SPN) as a qualitative vehicle, this study focuses on the narratives of personal experiences, perceptions of Afro-Caribbean faculty about relationships with white and African-American individuals as primary data. The findings of this study inform educators, social science researchers, diversity specialists, curriculum developers, administrators, and government officials on the contributions, experiences, and patriotic love for the United States of Afro-Caribbean individuals. Multiculturalism and diversity education begins with an honest examination and emic understanding of our varied communities. This study, and the narratives therein, serves as one starting point to engage and understand the experiences of this Black sub-population in American higher education.*

Keywords: *Afro-Caribbean, immigrants, racism, education, multiculturalism*

INTRODUCTION

Often in the United States, Caribbean immigrants are categorized as criminals (Henry, et al., 1996), drug users and traffickers (Rubin & Comitas, 1975), and illegal. Oftentimes

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Caribbean people are typecast as uncivilized savages living in huts on the beach (Stiell & England, 1999). Furthermore, Caribbean women are stereotyped to be worthy only as domestics (Stiell & England, 1999). These crass and unfounded sentiments frequently result in racial violence, xenophobic actions, micro-aggressions, and macro-aggressions as exemplified by U.S. President Donald Trump's reference to Haiti and other African-descendent populated nations as "shithole nations" in January 2018. This gravely erroneous, derogatory and inhumane rhetoric directed at Afro-Caribbean immigrants undermines the legitimacy of African-descended immigrants' contributions to American society. Additionally, the Trump administration terminated Temporary Protected Status (a temporary status given to eligible nationals of designated countries living in the United States) for Haitians, demonstrating that the rhetoric reflects governmental policies (Charles, 2018).

It is incumbent on the voices of Afro-Caribbean populations to repudiate the stereotypes birthed by ignorance, and provide a more accurate context for people in the United States to comprehend the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. The purpose of this narrative study is to explore perspectives and experiences of four Afro-Caribbean faculty members at institutions of higher education in the United States about (a) the immigration experience (b) the contributions of Afro-Caribbean immigrant populations, (c) their experiences with white individuals and (d) their experiences with African-American individuals. The reflections provide insight into the experiences of this minoritized population – stereotypes, racism, Caribbean pride, American pride – and their unbridled determination as they navigate higher education and the larger society.

A Brief History of Caribbean Immigration

The first known record of the migration of Afro-Caribbean people to the United States occurred in the 1790s (*Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, 2008). This particular movement was a response to the Haitian Revolution; however, it abruptly ended in 1809. Following the end of World War I, Caribbean migration resumed and peaked in the 1920s, but was summarily curtailed by the Great Depression (Foner, 2001). Concurrently, severe and restrictive laws such as the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 deterred Afro-Caribbean people from actively emigrating between 1930 and the mid-1960s, (Foner, 2001). After World War II the volume of immigrants increased (*Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, 2008). The Immigration Act of 1965 reversed many of the restrictive laws, catalysing rapid growth in the Caribbean population, solely driven by the aspiration of individuals to enhanced living conditions (Hines-St. Hilaire, 2006; Waters, 1994).

The 1960s indeed was the commencement of accelerated migration of Caribbean people (Zong & Batalova, 2016). From fewer than 200,000 in 1960, the Caribbean immigrant population grew exponentially over the subsequent decades. The population increased to 675,000 in the 1960s, and to 1.3 million in the 1970s. It further increased to 1.9 million by the 1980s, and to 3 million in the 1990s (Zong & Batalova, 2016). By 2009, 8% of all black Americans were Caribbean immigrants. Additionally, their offspring constituted 12% of all black children in the nation (Waters et al., 2014).

Caribbean immigrants constitute 9 percent of the United States' 42.4 million immigrants, and over 90 percent of them originate from five countries: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The three nations with the highest populations are Jamaica (682,000), Haiti (586,000), and Trinidad and Tobago (192,000) (*Caribbean National Weekly*, 2016). Contrary to the negative rhetoric about Caribbean immigrants, most Caribbean immigrants are lawful permanent residents (Zong & Batalova, 2016). However, regardless of immigrant status, studies indicate that both first- and second-generation Caribbean immigrants expect to experience anti-immigrant sentiments, discrimination, racism, and marginalization (Deaux, et al., 2007).

Forging a New Life: Contributing in the Face of Discrimination

Afro-Caribbean immigrants seek the shores of the United States, like most immigrants, in search of a better life (Hines-St. Hilaire, 2006; Waters, 1999). This new journey has its own tribulations and historically Afro-Caribbean immigrants wrangle with their interactions with both white American and African-American populations (Deaux, et al., 2007; Pierre, 2004; Waters, 1999). These strained relationships cause many Afro-Caribbean immigrants to experience isolation and frustration. Whether this isolation is the catalyst for, or simply a by-product of, the process of migration, black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa oftentimes overtly distinguish themselves apart from African-Americans. This social distancing is known as racial positioning (Blumer, 1958; George Mwangi, 2014; Pierre, 2004; Solorzano, 1998; Waters, 1994) and is enacted by rooting their identities in national origins and ethnic characteristics. This racial positioning can exacerbate the strained relationship with African-Americans.

White Americans commonly view Afro-Caribbean immigrants as exotic and “different from the African-American” (Rong & Fitchett, 2008). But eventually, the Afro-Caribbean immigrants themselves become racialized as black. This racialization is usually via the immigrants being the target of racism and racial violence (Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Hernton, 1992; McConahay, et al., 1981). The immigrants find themselves caught between a number of worlds – their identity-rooted Caribbean world, the immigrant-

navigating-a-new-society world, a newly discovered racialized black world, and an unaccepting white world. Their immigrant experience thus becomes a cacophony of uncomfortableness. This uncomfortableness, ironically, can produce positive outcomes for the Caribbean immigrant. According to Rogers (2004), Afro-Caribbean and African-Americans do not readily form a unified ethnic bond because of the lack of a social mechanism to create one. However, the lived experience of racial violence and the inescapable reality of their second-classism in the United States seal the understanding that an individual's blackness is indeed their social station (Pierre, 2004). Emerging from the common wrath of American racism is the black collective paradigm which is poignantly echoed in Jamaica's Marcus Garvey's "Pan-Africanism" philosophy and Trinidad's Kwame Ture's "Black Power" idioms.

Despite social marginalization and racialization, Caribbean immigrants incessantly discover avenues to contribute to society in the United States. Highlighting the accomplishments of notable Afro-Caribbean immigrants is pride-inspiring to some, buttresses the aspirations of others, and elicits change in those previously oblivious to the positive influences of Caribbean people. Importantly, it must not be discounted or underemphasized that thousands of unheralded Afro-Caribbean people work hard every day, impacting the lives of millions, and striving to make the United States a better nation. The work of these immigrants helps to forge a nation that is more accepting of differences, a nation that explicitly recognizes its multifaceted immigrant history, a nation that acknowledges its multicultural roots, and a nation that benefits from the multitude of ideas from varied peoples. Intentionally emphasizing Afro-Caribbean contributions to the United States is evidence of the interwoven symbiotic nature of Caribbean and American cultures. Excellent examples of these contributions come from Haiti, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica.

Haitians have long had a presence and history in the United States, dating back to the 18th century. Early Haitian migration consisted of people from Saint Domingue, the first free black nation in the world. Saint Domingue was a wealth-producing French colony, which, at one point in history, produced 40 percent of the world's sugar and almost half of the world's coffee through the exploitation of enslaved Africans (Zéphir, 2004). These particular migrants contributed to the fight for human freedom and democratic ideals in the United States. On October 9, 1779, 750 soldiers from Saint Domingue fought alongside American soldiers against the British at the Siege of Savannah, in Georgia during the American War of Independence (Louis, 2012).

Immigrants from the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago have always found innovative ways to contribute to the American landscape through entertainment, government, and social movements. Stokely Carmichael, later known as Kwame Ture, is the Trinidad-born activist credited with coining the term "Black Power". Carmichael

migrated to the United States at the age of 12. While a student at Howard University, he advocated for voting rights for blacks in America and later served as the chair of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and a leader in the Black Power movement. His work and community involvement in the civil rights movement ultimately paved the way for the establishment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Additionally, Trinidad-born Larry R. Felix served as the director of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing from January 2006 until January 2015. Felix started with the Department of Treasury in 1983 as an account manager and eventually worked his way up to the director position.

Jamaica is no stranger to contributing to the American way of life. Jamaica's contributions can be seen through Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the largest mass movement of Black people in U.S. history. Garvey's Pan-African philosophy influenced the views, oratory, and strategies of Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, shaping the Civil Rights Movement. However, there are countless other Jamaicans and Jamaican-Americans who contribute to health, education, entertainment, government, social movements, and the food industry. Notables include Yvette Francis-McBarnette, pediatrician and a pioneer in treating children with sickle cell anemia; Colin Powell, 65th United States Secretary of State, 12th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and 16th National Security Advisor; Susan Rice, 24th National Security Advisor; David Paterson, 55th Governor of New York; Ronald Blackwood, first black individual elected mayor in the state of New York; pioneering journalist, Gil Noble; US senator Kamala Harris; renowned actor Harry Belafonte; and gold medal Olympian Usain Bolt.

Conceptual Framework

Although the core of this narrative study is rooted in the counter-storytelling aspect of Critical Race Theory (CRT), there were a number of works that guided the development and evolution of the study. Johnson's (2016) ideas of wrestling with racism; Warner's (2012) remaking of identity; Pierre (2004) and George Mwangi's (2014) examination of the "black and black divide" between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and African-Americans; and Waters (1999) social tension between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and white Americans are all concepts that informed the direction, development, and design of this study.

CRT's counter-storytelling is a well-established approach for conveying the lived experiences of individuals who are usually excluded from the larger, more promoted, or dominant narrative of a particular environment (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In essence, counter-storytelling emphasizes and legitimizes the experiences of seldom

acknowledged subgroups of a given population (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Parker & Villalpando, 2007).

Johnson (2016) discusses the idea of Afro-Caribbean immigrants wrestling with racism. She asserts that native-born American blacks possess the vernacular and social capital to navigate racial violence in this society, whereas foreign-born blacks do not. Afro-Caribbean immigrants usually fit into a more socioeconomic and class division paradigm with respect to societal structure, whereas colour and race are the dominant social structures in the United States. Therefore, Afro-Caribbean immigrants experience a societal paradigm shift with respect to addressing racism. Because of this shift, Afro-Caribbean immigrants usually engage in remaking their social identities (Warner, 2012). In their new environment, blackness is social detriment; and the overt effects of slavery and colonization are an ongoing negative status United States. These immigrants have to ultimately redefine themselves in this new white space (Anderson 2015).

Pierre (2004) and George Mwangi (2014) both examine the “black and black divide” between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and African-Americans. Pierre (2004) discusses the erroneous perception by some Afro-Caribbean immigrants that they are diametrically opposite culturally and ethnically to African-Americans. This perception is harmful and perpetuates the colonial ideologies of dividing populations to maintain the power of the colonists. George Mwangi (2014) discusses the role of ethnic positioning by Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the perpetuation of divisions in the black population. However, she does acknowledge the beauty of the diversity and complexity within the black population. Lastly, Waters’ (1999) ideas of the tensioned relationships between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and white Americans are used to collate the ideas of the racialized systems that exist: that “blackness” is regarded as a lower tier of citizenship regardless of nation of origin; and the Afro-Caribbean population has been subject to racism and racial violence.

METHODS

Scholarly personal narratives (SPN) were used for this qualitative exploration (Nash, 2004; Patton, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the written stories of the four participants acted as primary data or counter-stories. The study design encouraged the participants to share, in great detail, their experiences freely, without language, expressive or vernacular boundary. Narratives were developed by the participants independently with no coercion, unconstrained, and no limits on narrative length. The participants were instructed to use their own personal, professional, and cultural lenses to define their realities, construe meaning, and validate their experiences as Afro-Caribbean individuals navigating the field of higher education and the larger society in

the United States. The study protocol adhered to guidelines constructed by Nash (2004) and Nash and LaSha Bradley (2011).

Sampling and Participants

Purposeful self-study sampling (Patton, 2014) and convenience sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) were used. Purposeful self-study sampling is the investigation of a person's experience while simultaneously being the researcher (Patton, 2014). All the participants were available, self-recruited, and willing to participate in the study and, as such, the concept of convenience sampling applies (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The four participants are Afro-Caribbean individuals who were either born in the Caribbean or parented by two Caribbean individuals. All the participants are faculty members at predominantly white institutions of higher education in the United States and earned their undergraduate and graduate degrees from American universities. They self-identified as either Haitian, Jamaican, or Trinidadian. Two participants self-identified as women, and two self-identified as men. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity purposes.

Procedure and Analysis

The instrument was developed utilizing concepts from Johnson (2016) Warner (2012) Pierre (2004), George Mwangi (2014) and Waters (1999). The instrument was divided into four sections entitled (a) personal experiences and perceptions, (b) race and race relations, (c) career as an educator, and (d) wrap up. The final section was designed specifically for participants to share any additional thoughts, ideas, issues, or experiences they wanted to which were not elicited through the instrument's prompts. The prompts provided participants the opportunity to reflect and uninhibitedly write on experiences they considered relevant to their lives as Afro-Caribbean individuals living in the United States. The process, informed by Nash (2004) and Nash and LaSha Bradley (2011) guidelines, provided the opportunity and structure for the participants to reflect on their experiences, personal encounters, feelings, emotions, individual interactions, and group interactions in the educational field and greater society. Prior to the participants' engaging with the material, the instrument was given to an independent researcher in the cultural studies field to evaluate the accurateness of wording, soundness of the procedures and process of analysis.

Completed narratives were anonymized by the lead researcher and later distributed amongst the four participants, who were simultaneously researchers in this study design. Each individual independently coded the narratives using open coding. Axial coding was subsequently used to derive emergent themes. The researchers met to

deliberate on their individual findings. These active, and combined participant-researcher role, allowed further clarification and contextualizing of the narratives. The meaning of specific quotes, pertinent statements, and segments of the narratives was thoroughly discussed. Through this cyclical, critical, and rigorous analysis, major themes emerged pertaining to lived experiences of the four participants.

Trustworthiness

The study was designed to ensure trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Self-analysis for this SPN study was considered the central design strength. The cyclical nature of the analysis provided ample opportunities for participants to explain, support, describe and expound upon the meaning of information shared within the narratives. This intense member-checking and cross-examination exercise enabled the researchers to tease out precise meanings and link the findings with reality in order to demonstrate the authenticity, thereby fortifying credibility and confirmability. The nature of this study makes transferability of the data contextual. Therefore, individuals seeking to utilize the findings of this study for future research must consider the original and outlined contexts of the data and participant-researchers.

Positionality

Positionality is extremely important when propagating people's realities, lived experiences and shared experiences (Bourke, 2014). For this study, the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) of ethnicity, culture, nation of origin, academic station, minority status, and immigrant knowledge lends credibility to the experiences expressed in the narratives, and the findings. Plural positionality (Louis et al., 2017) also played a vital role in this study because participants were also the researchers. Thus, the lens of participant-researcher is critical when contextualizing the process, data, analysis, themes and findings. The following vignettes cover the background of the four participant-researchers:

Anne-Marie was born in the Caribbean and emigrated to the United States at the age of 16. She attended primary and secondary schools on the island. She earned all of her degrees from universities in the United States, and has lived in the country since her arrival. She is currently an American citizen, and a faculty member at a large predominantly white public research university. She is extremely proud of her Caribbean heritage, and uses it to broaden and deepen teaching, learning, and research on international and transcultural issues in higher education. She has lived in the United States for over thirty years.

Selwyn is an Afro-Caribbean male who was born in the Caribbean and emigrated to the United States at the age of 20. He attended primary and secondary schools in the

Caribbean, worked for a number of years in the Caribbean nation. He earned all of his degrees from universities in the United States. He is a faculty member at a large, predominantly white public research university, and is married to an African-American woman with whom he has children who were born in the United States. He has lived in the United States for over twenty years. He is proud of his Caribbean heritage, but is also equally proud to be an American who contributes to his community.

Richard is an Afro-Caribbean male who was born in the United States to parents from the Caribbean. In primary and secondary schools, Richard identified as an American (African-American) but began to self-identify as Caribbean-American when he attended college. He is an American citizen who currently views himself as a black man of Caribbean descent. He is proud of his Caribbean heritage and expresses it at home, at work, in his work, and in his community. He is also proud to be an American who is trying to get America to live up to its ideals. Currently he is a faculty member at the large predominantly white public research university and is also married to an African-American woman.

Candace was born on a Caribbean island and migrated to the US as a pre-teen. She has been educated in the United States from middle school on to her doctorate degree. Candace spent most of her years living in a major multicultural city within an established West Indian community in the northeast. It was not until pursuing her doctorate degree at a large public southern university that she was faced with an onslaught of overt and covert racism. She is currently a tenure track professor at an urban university in the northeast. Candace has lived in the Northeast, the South and the Midwest.

FINDINGS

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the narratives: (a) fundamental black racism (b) congenial and cautious (c) tensioned affinity and (d) embracing American tenets. The following sections describe the themes that emerged including pertinent and representative quotes from the participants in order to highlight the themes.

Theme 1: Fundamental Black Racism

The participants shared their experiences of being the subject of racial discrimination, verbal assault and demeaning actions from white Americans. They communicated that these racial macro-aggressions and micro-aggressions sometimes contained anti-immigrant sentiment. However, fundamentally, racism against black people was the impetus for the negative actions by white individuals towards every Afro-Caribbean participant. The stories were graphic, violent, and dehumanizing. The participants also

stated that these racially charged events were common throughout their lives as children, in school, in graduate school and in their workplaces at institutions of higher education. They recalled instances of name calling, physical threats, and verbal condescension. Richard shared his childhood memories:

And I was subjected to racist bigotry on a daily basis, mostly from White students, and poor treatment from teachers. I was regularly called “Nigger”, “Blackbird” and “Spear Chucker”. I remember white girls in elementary school being revolted because my gums were darker than theirs, being picked on because I was black. One day on my way home from school a bus with mostly white and Filipino kids from around my neighborhood chanted “Richard is a Nigger”. I remember fighting with a white Italian kid after Intermediate school literally feet from my house and a car pulled up beside us and teenagers jumped out with baseball bats and threatened to beat me up and told me “Go home, nigger”. So I literally felt like an alien growing up... feeling terrorized, at times.

Unfortunately, like Richard, Anne-Marie experienced racist actions in the field of education as a student. She remembered:

I experienced [racism] first-hand in graduate school, when a white professor repeatedly commented on my academic performance, and remarked, ‘You are so smart and focused. You are not like other black students’. Although one may initially regard this as a compliment, the underlying sentiment was racist alluding that black students are not ‘smart and focused’.

Participants also shared racial incidents as faculty members. They endured racism from both their faculty peers and students. Candace referred to an encounter about her simply attempting to use the faculty restroom. She wrote:

The discrimination has always been based on me being a Black person and not necessarily because of the Caribbean piece... At work while entering the faculty bathroom with my key in hand a white woman attempted to bar me from entering. She never apologized when I identified myself as a faculty member, instead resorting to saying she thought I was a student. Students do not have bathroom keys; but clearly her stereotype of “what a college professor looks like” did not allow her to interpret the situation accurately. At the time I was extremely angry... This experience has been repeated as I enter offices that are managed by white women.

In a more deliberate manner, unlike Candace’s encounter with the expression of latent racial stereotypes, Selwyn experienced calculated discrimination from students. He wrote:

At one institution, there were White students who decided not to register for my course because I was a black faculty member, even though it was a course that they were required to take. I think my negative experiences as an Afro-Caribbean faculty member are rooted more in my black heritage rather than my immigrant status.

From the narratives it is clear that the discrimination that the Afro-Caribbean participants experienced was linked to racism against black perpetrated by white individuals as opposed to overt anti-immigrant sentiments.

Theme 2: Congenial and Cautious

From the narratives, the Afro-Caribbean participants expressed open-mindedness, friendliness, and overall positivity regarding their relationships with white people. Equally important, however, was the sentiment of extreme caution based on their lifelong encounters with racism; and racist interactions were generally with white strangers. They all said that they had developed numerous close and trusting relationships with white individuals both inside and outside of the workplace. They also said that cultural awkwardness sometimes existed even with their white friends, but generally the basis for their relationships was common respect for each other. Richard wrote:

Overall, I believe I have a good relationship with Whites. I have a range of experiences with white people in the United States. Currently, I work at a predominantly white institution. I am also part of an antiracist interfaith organization in [my current hometown] that is predominantly white. In my personal life I am sure to surround myself with white people who are antiracist and/or espouse antiracist beliefs to ensure that I am not relegated to racist treatment or sentiment in my intimate relationships.

Thus, a conscious effort is made by the participants when choosing or deciding to interact with white individuals. Their actions were calculated based on their previous experiences. Selwyn commented:

With respect to white people, I have some really good relationships. Overall I have no problems with white people. Many of my negative incidents originate from strangers or people who have actively set themselves apart as individuals who do not “appreciate” diversity. But I have many white friends and colleagues that I interact with and personally do not have issues. I am cautious because I understand social dynamics and the manner in which their subconscious dominant paradigms can sometimes superimpose themselves on people of colour. Therefore, I ensure that that does not occur with me. So I do err on the

side of caution not because of blatant racism but because many times people of the dominant culture are oblivious to how they encroach on other groups' beliefs and actions.

Candace also alluded to the notion of white strangers being a locus of white racism; and that it was indeed part of her internal social processing. She declared:

There are whites who I do not trust (and rightfully so). There are whites who I am extremely close to and who have helped me and defended me at times. The ones I do not trust are the ones who have made comments or their actions have led me to believe that they are prejudiced.... The way in which I interact with others is always based on my experiences with them as individuals. Not solely based on what I've experienced from others who may look like them.

Thus from the narratives it is clear that the discrimination that the Afro-Caribbean participants experienced was linked to racism against black perpetrated by white individuals as opposed to overt anti-immigrant sentiments.

Theme 3: Tensioned Affinity

Affinity to, and with, African-Americans was vividly expressed in the narratives. The participants were very clear that their status in the United States was inextricably tied with African-Americans and the idea of "blackness" as a platform for commonality was readily proclaimed. The participants felt akin to their African-American counterparts but did refer to their experience with tension from African-Americans themselves or via white individuals indicating a difference between the two groups. Candace shared her memories of middle school with name calling from African-Americans, "Coming to the United States as a twelve-year-old child with an accent meant that I was teased and referred to as a 'coconut' mainly by Black Americans". This was reflective of the divide that existed between the groups culturally even though "blackness" was a commonality. Selwyn experienced being "slighted" at times by African-Americans but in the workplace. He commented, "Sometimes by African-American faculty I am not regarded as a member of the 'Black community' ... I don't think it is done with mal-intent but I am regarded as NOT one of them at some key junctures".

Ann-Marie's experience highlighted that the differences between the groups were perpetuated by the sentiments and actions of white individuals. But she also alluded to the fact that some Afro-Caribbean individuals also held similar philosophies. She wrote:

A long-standing issue, which has created inter- and intra-group obstacles that beg to be called out here...is the prevailing notion that Caribbean immigrants are superior to African-Americans. This perception of superiority is held not only by many Caribbean immigrants, but often reinforced implicitly and explicitly by

white Americans, when they seek to pit one group against the other around educational attainment, social mobility, and a mental model of how people or groups ought to be.

These quotes indicate that, from the participants' experiences, a rift exists between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbean immigrants and that either group can be the wielder of negative sentiments. However, what was interesting was the comment about the perpetuation of the divide by white individuals.

Regardless of the divide, the Afro-Caribbean participants expressed a very close camaraderie with African Americans. The positive aspect of the cultural differences was the opportunity to exchange knowledge about the cultures to each other. Candace told a story about her graduate school experience:

Also while in my PhD programme I became very close to the African American students; they introduced me to grits, frog legs and gumbo. I learned their ways of being and at Thanksgiving we gave and received from each other's cultures. This coming together allowed us to hold it together against the structure of white supremacy that oftentimes tried to bulldoze us... I think we also need to look at similarities between our experiences and those of our brothers and sisters across the African diaspora.

The idea of cultural exchange and cultural linkage was also very real to Selwyn. He wrote:

African Americans were always in "awe" of my Caribbean roots and my way of life. So to be able to have that exchange with my college peers was always a pleasure to me. I got to know them better and they got to know me. And I really appreciated the openness of my peers. Being around someone who is willing to learn about you and your culture is refreshing... I have built a wonderful bond with African-Americans and I realize that we are connected in numerous ways historically and currently. Like our ancestors, we are on that boat together, linked and cannot escape the negative blanket of being categorized as a nuisance to society.

Richard echoed the same deeply rooted bond with African-Americans. In fact, he credited his bond to his religious affiliation as well as his spousal choice. He views himself as one with the African-American community and the bond of blackness transcends cultural nuances between the groups. He said:

I have strong relationships with African-Americans. I am married to an African-American woman. I am part of her family. Part of our children's heritage is African-American. I am a member of a historically African-American church that

counts Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth as its historical members – African-Americans who were antiracist and dedicated to freedom and equal rights for people of African descent in the United States and elsewhere.

Affinity, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding with “blackness” as a platform were the overarching sentiments of the participants. They felt one with their African-American counterparts while still being proud of their Caribbean heritage.

Theme 4: Embracing American Tenets

Every participant expressed love, respect, and belief in American values and the proverbial “American way of life”. Regardless of the racism they endured throughout their lives, the participants articulated reverence for the United States and hope that the ideals of the nation would supersede any negative encounters. Richard said that he believed that his actions and those of the Afro-Caribbean immigrants that he encountered are “consistent with many expressed American beliefs and values, such as industriousness, individualism, caring for family, the value of education”. Selwyn indicated his belief that Afro-Caribbean immigrants stood by and respected the Westernized capitalist system of the United States. For this reason, he does not impose contrary views that make it difficult to assimilate to the nation. He stated, “most Caribbean immigrants do not have a problem with the value system or the way in which America operates. I think they adapt well to American culture and way of life”.

Anne-Marie took a more wide-eyed approach to her emigrating to the United States, which took the values of the nation at face value. Her belief was encapsulated in these words:

I felt like Lady Liberty was opening her arms to welcome me, a foreigner to this great country... I always thought of America as the land of opportunity, where dreams became reality, and the sky was the limit. This grew more real after reading about Caribbean immigrants in U.S. black history.

Candace espoused freedom of expression, a beloved American value. Her appreciation of this value and interweaving it with her love for the Caribbean and her new home was a wonderful example of the experience for immigrants. She said, “I love my country, I love where I’m from, and I love the United States; for me America is a place where I can express that”.

The narratives shared around the four themes of fundamental black racism, congeniality and cautiousness, tensioned affinity, and embracing American tenets, illustrate the complexities around current rhetoric about Afro-Caribbean immigrants living in the United States. The four participants, while clearly expressing their

immigrant experiences, also demonstrate the love of their native land and the United States that is now their home country.

DISCUSSION

President George Washington stated, “I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong”. For many Afro-Caribbean immigrants their hopes lay in words such as these espoused by one of the nation’s founding fathers. However, while not representative of the entire Afro-Caribbean population, the results of this narrative study demonstrate a mixed bag of experiences and sentiments for the Afro-Caribbean immigrant participants. Their lives as immigrants in the United States reflect hard work and a commitment to American values. Yet, they all experienced barefaced racism from white individuals in the educational field and the greater society. They have all found themselves a home in the African-American community, but a home in which cultural difference and sporadic episodes of mistrust and exclusion can cause discomfort. The emergent themes of the study codify and align with the extant literature and research pertaining to black immigrants.

Afro-Caribbean immigrants being perceived as hard working and industrious aligns with Bellows’ (2011) declarations via the U.S. Department of the Treasury and Griswold’s assertions of the diligent nature of immigrants to the United States. Afro-Caribbean immigrants are contributors, just like any other immigrant group, to the economy, viability, innovation, and sustenance of the nation. They contribute to the American way of life in terms of technology, the arts, education, and in many blue-collar labor-intensive fields. They fiscally add to the economy rather than the erroneous sentiment that they are draining resources from the nation.

Struggling relationships with both white and African-American populations are also a distinctive takeaway from this study. Every participant experienced the dehumanizing racist actions of select white individuals (Johnson, 2016; Waters, 1999). It represents the stereotypes, subhuman treatment, and unjustified judgement that many blacks face in the United States (Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Stiell & England, 1999). The anti-black racism is not unlike experiences reported previously in the literature (Hernton, 1992; McConahay et al., 1981). However, equally noteworthy is the fact that the participants do not hold the entire white population accountable for the actions of the ignorant few. They established positive, close and meaningful relationships based on each individual’s character and belief system. This receipt of black racially charged micro-aggressions and macro-aggressions established a platform of empathetic camaraderie between Afro-Caribbean participants and their African-American counterparts. Although racial

positioning (Pierre, 2004; George Mwangi, 2014; Deaux et al., 2007) did not seem to be a noted aspect for the participants, the idea of affinity through blackness was extensively expressed. This cohesion via blackness seems to be a product of both their racialized status ascribed by white Americans (Waters, 1999) and their more overtly positive and accepting relationships with African-Americans.

Regardless of the struggle, racism, non-acceptance, and subdominant status experienced by the Afro-Caribbean participants, they all professed love, admiration, and dedication to the American values encapsulated in the nation's tenets. Indeed, this parallels the experiences of most immigrant groups according to Farkas (2003). Emigrating to the United States, in itself, is a living testament to their belief in the welcoming and aspirational values espoused and projected by the United States. President George W. Bush said:

It says something about our country that people around the world are willing to leave their homes and leave their families and risk everything to come to America. Their talent and hard work and love of freedom have helped make America the leader of the world.... America remains a beacon of liberty and the most hope-filled society this world has ever known.

The narratives of this current study fervently exhibit the participants' belief that the United States is still regarded as a land of liberty and hope, even in spite of the rhetoric from the current President of the United States – a dangerously inaccurate rhetoric which potentially erodes the contribution and hardy works of immigrants of African descent. The stories contained in this study attest that Afro-Caribbean immigrants are willing to work and readily love America despite discrimination, adversity, psychological badgering, noxious racism and personal affronts. Indeed, their stories profoundly echo President John F. Kennedy's conviction that "Everywhere, immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life".

CONCLUSION

Just as political rhetoric influences public policy, so can new insight inform future policy, practice, and praxis in the field of education. This study gives educators, in both K-12 and higher education settings, a crucial glimpse into a number of pertinent issues. These include the difficulty of immigration, valuing the contributions of immigrants, blackness in America, pervasive white racism, social stratification, and national ideals. The study's results lend to initiating honest discussions on the white society's attitudes to black immigration. The insights expressed in this study call for more research and a nuanced examination of race and racism the field of higher education and the society in the United States. However, what is thoroughly articulated is the intersectional experience around xenophobia, race, acceptance, and survival in the United States through the lens

of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Educators can further serve their students, via interaction and pedagogy, with a keener lens on social and cultural identities combining race, culture, and immigrant status.

Indeed, Caribbean immigrants have made significant contributions to the growth and development of the United States in education, engineering, the health professions, law, social and behavioural sciences, and science. It should be remembered that in 2006, a bill was passed in the U.S. House and Senate and signed into law, declaring “National Caribbean Heritage Month in the United States” (Persaud, 2016). Unfortunately, human beings are often quick to label or dismiss someone, some place, or something without thought about the human condition in our world. Before we disparage groups of people or countries, we must examine ourselves and recognize the various systems of privilege and oppression that continue to be pervasive and poison the contributions of all of our immigrant populations. Therefore, with the current rhetoric being displayed nationally directed towards undocumented immigrants, let us remember to stop and gather the facts. The illegal acts of a few individuals do not give anyone or any leader the authority to disparage entire groups of people or countries. However, it is the duty of educators to engage in critical, accurate, and ongoing scholarship about the communities within the United States so that they can disseminate correct information and subsequently engage in multicultural discourse and advocacy with their students and colleagues. This study provides an initial platform to actively acknowledge and learn about the lived experiences and perceptions of a segment of the American population that is oftentimes invisible, misrepresented, or misunderstood (Louis et al., 2017).

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