

AN EXAMINATION OF SUCCESSFUL CARIBBEAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I examined the experiences of successful Caribbean immigrant students and graduates in the collegiate setting at universities in the United States. I conducted in-depth interviews in order to elicit students' perceptions about what factors influence their college aspirations and academic achievement. The findings suggest that a combination of both internal (i.e. personal motivations and ambitions) and external (i.e. family, peers, mentors, organizations, and advisors) influences motivate Caribbean immigrant students and graduates to achieve and be resilient in the face of obstacles (i.e. racism, prejudice, and discrimination) they may encounter during their pursuit of higher education. My research suggests that retaining Caribbean culture, maintaining ethnic

affiliation, and identifying oneself as Caribbean are significant to the success of these Caribbean immigrants. Caribbean immigrant students and graduates engage in dualist cultures— American and Caribbean cultures. Caribbean culture and ideologies are viewed by them as more substantial in comparison with American belief systems. The findings implicate that more ethnic and racial diversity is needed among students and faculty in the American collegiate settings for minority students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have documented how many immigrant families migrate to the United States in search of better life outcomes such as greater economic mobility and educational opportunities. According to Waters (1999), “migration is nothing new to Caribbean islanders; it has been a way of coping with economic and political troubles for generations” (43). In examining the literature, the experiences of Caribbean immigrants are rarely studied. More commonly, Blacks in the United States are assumed to be of African descent. According to Boswell (2003), the United States has the second largest population of Caribbean natives, yet few studies investigate what transpires in these Caribbean households.

Existing research describes Caribbean immigrants as progressive people that are significantly motivated to achieve success in both the occupational and academic sector (Rong and Preissle 2009). Scholars explain that many immigrant families also have successful children that succeed in schooling and are more academically motivated than children from families born in the United States (Tseng 2004). This finding by Tseng (2004) is significant for families as we come to understand the motivational factors necessary for attaining an academic degree. Caribbean immigrant households have

positive characteristics that enable their children to achieve academic success, which will be further investigated in this thesis.

This study is a qualitative analysis of experiences of Caribbean immigrant undergraduate and graduate students who are academically successful at universities or colleges in the United States. The study includes participants from the following Caribbean islands: Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Thomas, and Trinidad and Tobago. The general history of the Caribbean, such as socioeconomic characteristics, was inferred from central commonalities discussed in the literature describing the vast Caribbean (Baronov and Yelvington 2003; Baronov and Yelvington 2009; Conway 2003; Conway 2009; D'Agostino 2003; D'Agostino 2009; Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009; Hillman 2003; Hillman 2009; Pantin 2003; Pantin and Attzs 2009; Randall 2003; Randall 2009).

This study discusses the experiences of successful Caribbean immigrant students and graduates in higher education. The purpose is to gain understanding about the motivational factors in the Caribbean household that enable these students to be academically successful. Through the research, I seek to understand how these Caribbean immigrant students develop and maintain their college aspirations and how their Caribbean racial identity, culture, and family have impacted their personal determination for academic achievement. A goal of this study is to contribute to a new sociological understanding of Caribbean immigrant students and their families because it highlights the racial differences that exist among black ethnic groups. The Black population is not monolithic, and this study will explore the unique experiences of Caribbean immigrant students and their families.

MAJOR CONCEPTS: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND IDENTITY

In this thesis, racial categories are considered American Black, generally labeled as African-American and Caribbean Black, referencing those individuals that identifying with Caribbean descent. Caribbean ethnicity refers to individuals that have ancestral roots from the Caribbean. Caribbean identity is defined as having strong Caribbean values and ethnic ties to one's specific Caribbean island and/or one's pan-ethnic community (inclusive Caribbean). Nationality is attributed to when participants distinctly identify by their specific island, i.e. "I am Jamaican." A pan-ethnic definition refers to people from multiple Caribbean islands discussed as one group, such as when participants state "I am from the Caribbean." In agreement with Lorick-Wilmot's (2010) research, Caribbean identity is salient and "involves being committed to one's ethnic group, being proud of one's cultural heritage, and maintaining a strong sense of ethnic community" (71). Caribbean identity and cultural identity are used interchangeably. A Caribbean identity allows these participants to share in a "sense of Caribbeanness—as a regional identity...heightened when island nationals share similar experiences in America" (Lorick-Wilmot 2010:84). Therefore, participants that maintain their Caribbean values and ethnic affiliation are able to redefine stereotypical beliefs about Blacks and achieve greater socioeconomic outcomes (Lorick-Wilmot 2010). Finally, maintaining a Caribbean identity allows these participants to engage in cultural pluralism (dualist cultures i.e. Caribbean and American) while living in American society.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY IN THE CARIBBEAN

The colonial legacy has impacted the national identity of Caribbean families and how they choose to view, transform, and strengthen their social lives. Because of the colonial legacy of the islands, many Caribbean families culturally value social progress and have encouraged their children to high standards of academic achievement. Despite centuries of oppression on their various islands in the Caribbean, these Caribbean students were able to be academically successful. Their success in part, is due to their Caribbean identity.

The importance of the Caribbean identity requires a closer look at the political and historical background of the islands. This chapter will provide brief synopses about the specific islands identified by the volunteers in this study. Many volumes of information were condensed to the most relevant topics concerning this group and this thesis, such as the general demographics of each specified island, their Amerindian tribes, and their political history as well as the influence of colonization and slavery which has changed the political, economic, and social development of the islands and the Caribbean people.

Information concerning general demographics and population size in the Caribbean were included for readers unfamiliar with the Caribbean. Amerindian tribes (i.e. Arawak, Caribs, Ciboney, and Tainos) are discussed in each specific island because they were the first inhabitants to live among these nations (Bateman 1995; Boswell 2003; Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009; Gord Hill 2009; Government of Barbados 2006; Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011; Wilson 2009).

The reference in this thesis to colonial interest in their land, crops, and resources of particular Caribbean nations is viewed as relevant in understanding the motives of colonists to pursue various Caribbean islands. To fully understand the present state of the Caribbean, one must examine the significant role that colonial powers played in each specific island, their vested interests in those particular Caribbean lands, crops, and labor, as well as their expressed domination, which is evident through the name changes to the islands, engagement in warfare and island exchanges, and the exploitation of the native Caribbean people (Boswell 2003; Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). All of these factors have contributed to the present state of the Caribbean such as the economic structure and educational system. The rule by different colonial powers has left many Caribbean nations stagnated and underdeveloped.

Due to the legacy of slavery in the Caribbean and the inequality (i.e. unjust social, economic, and political practices) that many Blacks encountered by white colonists, many former slaves and Caribbean natives worked for their own civil rights, equality, and

independence (Arthur 2009; Government of Barbados 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The Caribbean Black leaders (i.e. Grantley Adams, Vere Cornwall Bird, and Errol Barrow) are mentioned in the following synopses of specific islands and were instrumental in gaining political power, civil rights for Blacks, and independence for Caribbean nations (Arthur 2009; Government of Barbados 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). This is why discussing these particular Caribbean leaders is relevant to Caribbean nations, its people, and this thesis. Currently, many Caribbean islands are working toward greater economic and social development in their nations, as they are now independent and sovereign states (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011; Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009).

PART I: OVERVIEW OF THE COLONIAL LEGACY IN THE CARIBBEAN

The colonial legacy of the Caribbean has shaped its culture and its people. The Caribbean has been seized and settled by many different nations. A few of the nations are the British, Danish, Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and the United States (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009; Randall 2009; Wilson 2009). Caribbean vernacular and building-names also reflect the previous exchanges in political power among islands in the Caribbean (Boswell 2003). Patois is a common language spoken often in some of the Caribbean islands, and it is “a mixture of French and English words” (Boswell 2003: 35). The Caribbean islands have been significantly affected socially, economically, and politically by the battling of other colonies to control their islands.

These shifts in power to control individual islands have created political instability (D’Agostino 2009). The settlement of these colonial powers in the Caribbean

has also culturally and socially affected the islands by significantly reducing or eradicating many of the indigenous populations (Randall 2009). The slave trade changed the dynamics of the Caribbean, as 5 million African slaves were transported to the islands (Randall 2009). Colonial powers also changed the economic structure in the Caribbean because they created a bourgeois government. Colonial powers confiscated and sold native goods, crops, and labor (Boswell 2009). Many Caribbean islands did not obtain independence until the 1960s through the 1980s (D'Agostino 2003; D'Agostino 2009; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The colonial legacy still affects the present state of the Caribbean because the shifts in power have created long-term instability in these nations and have caused many Caribbean islands stagnation in economic growth and development (D'Agostino 2009).

PART II: THE EARLY COLONIAL LEGACY AND THE PRESENT STATE OF GOVERNMENTS IN SPECIFIC CARIBBEAN ISLANDS

Part of understanding Caribbean immigrants and their national identity is examining the general history of the Caribbean and recognizing its early political legacy. The men and women I interviewed for this study listed ethnic affiliation with several islands: Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Thomas, and Trinidad and Tobago. I will provide a brief synopsis of the political history of each of these islands before they obtained independence. Many of these islands in the Caribbean are members of the Commonwealth, which is “a voluntary association of 54 countries that support each other and work together towards shared goals in democracy and development” (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011). The islands listed by respondents are a part of the Commonwealth of Nations, with the exception of the island of St. Thomas (Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009). The Commonwealth serves as an

international force for equality around the world (Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009).

ANTIGUA

Antigua is located within the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean Sea (Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009). In 2006 the islands of Antigua and Barbuda had a combined population of 84,097 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The majority of the population, over 98%, resides on Antigua (Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009). The Ciboney Amerindian tribe first inhabited the island until 2400 B.C. (Boswell 2003; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Later, Arawak Amerindians migrated from South America and settled on the island (Boswell 2003; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Carib Amerindians were recorded to have invaded the island (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Researchers still debate which explorers first arrived on the island of Antigua, and question whether it was the Spanish or the French (Boswell 2003; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). However, Christopher Columbus is claimed to have named the island in 1493 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). According to the U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (2010), “the English colonized the islands in 1632.” Amerindian populations disappeared shortly after the colonization, because of European diseases and the impact of the slave system (Higman 2011).

Sugar plantations were worked by African slaves from 1674 to 1834 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

Freedmen worked the plantations after emancipation; the laborers were poorly paid (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). These conditions led to the Antigua Trades and Labour Union and later a political momentum (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

The Antigua Labour Party was formed in 1946 by Vere Cornwall Bird (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The Antigua Labour Party was victorious from 1951 until 1971 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). In 1971 the Progressive Labour Movement took office; later, the Antigua Labour Party regained power in 1976 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). Antigua obtained independence in 1981 (Wilson 2009). Vere Cornwall Bird continued political leadership until 1994, when he was succeeded by his son, Lester Bird (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). In 2004, the United Progressive Party won political power and remained in dominance (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Currently, the island of Antigua operates under a parliamentary government (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The executive branch consists of Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, the prime minister as the head of the government, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The legislative branch is a bicameral parliament (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The judicial branch consists of magistrate courts (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

BARBADOS

Barbados is an island located between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Sea (Wilson 2009). The island is “the most easterly island in the Caribbean chain of Islands” (Government of Barbados 2011). In 2001 Barbados had a population size of 268,189 (Hillman 2003). Barbados was first inhabited by Amerindians named the Arawak and Carib around 350 A.D. (Government of Barbados 2006; Wilson 2009). It was initially thought that these Amerindians had disappeared during the 16th century (Wilson 2009). However, the Government of Barbados (2006) through further research was able to conclude the Caribs on this island had migrated to “small colonies in St. Phillip and St. Lucy”.

In the 16th century, Barbados was under British rule (Wilson 2009). British colonists sought cash crops such as tobacco and cotton (Government of Barbados 2006; Williams 1994; Wilson 2009). The first settlers brought indentured servants and African slaves for labor in Barbados, and by 1655 they totaled 47% of the entire population (Wilson 2009).

Later British colonists shifted from tobacco and cotton to the sugarcane industry and this brought significant changes for Barbados (Government of Barbados 2006). Small farmers were no longer needed and large production estates grew (Government of Barbados 2011). The British massively imported African slaves and heavily relied on them for free plantation labor (Government of Barbados 2006). African slaves were harshly treated, and they worked on plantation lands under the term *indentured servants* long after 1834, when slavery was officially abolished (Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009; James 1963; Paquette 1988; Williams 1994; Wilson 2009).

The British settlers created their own government and excluded non-property holders and Blacks on the island from political participation (Wilson 2009). This led to a series of revolts between 1876 and 1937, at which time some Blacks became casualties for civil rights (Wilson 2009). After years of political unrest, the Barbados Progressive League, later renamed Barbados Labour Party, was established in 1938 (Wilson 2009). The leader of the organization was Grantley Adams, and his actions led to a series of social and constitutional reforms in Barbados (Government of Barbados 2011). Adams became the Premier of Barbados and later the Prime Minister of the West Indies Federation from 1958 to 1962 (Government of Barbados 2011; Wilson 2009).

In 1962 the West Indies Federation was dissolved because of interisland conflicts and some of the members from the Barbados Labour Party joined the Democratic Labour Party in 1955 (D'Agostino 2009; Wilson 2009). Researcher Wilson (2009) explains that universal suffrage was obtained in 1951. The leader, Errol Barrow, worked diligently for full independence from Britain in the 1956 election (Wilson 2009). According to Wilson (2009), in 1961 Barbados was granted "full internal self-government" (130). Barrow led Barbados to full independence in November of 1966 and became the first Prime Minister of the island of Barbados (Government of Barbados 2011).

Currently, Barbados operates under a parliamentary democracy (Wilson 2009). The government consists of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The executive branch consists of the head of state, the head of government, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Queen Elizabeth II and the governor general are heads of state, the prime minister is the head of government, and the cabinet

consists of several different members (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The legislative branch is a bicameral parliament and the judicial branch consists of magistrates courts (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

DOMINICA

Dominica is located in the southern Caribbean Sea between the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (Boswell 2009). In 2001 the island of Dominica had a population of 73,199 (Hillman 2003). Dominica like many other Caribbean islands was also inhabited by the Arawak and Carib Amerindian tribes (Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). Christopher Columbus noticed the island of Dominica in 1493, but Spanish colonists were wary of settling on the land due to defending Carib Amerindians (Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). In the early 1600s, the French claimed Dominica and began settling the land (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). After constant warfare between the colonists and the Carib Amerindians, the French and British declared Dominica neutral and left the island by the late 1600s (Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

By the 17th century, interest in Dominica had resurfaced, and French settlers began to once again reside on the island (Higman 2011; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The French and British waged war against each other concerning which nation would legally claim the island, and Dominica shifted colonial governments numerous times (Higman 2011; U.S.

Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Dominica was finally ceded to Britain (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). Despite French invasions to reclaim the island, the British were able to achieve permanent dominance by 1805 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

In 1763 the British created a local government that was exclusive to whites and unjust to the Black population (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Similar to other islands in the Caribbean, Dominica had large plantations for cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, coconuts, limes, and sugar (Wilson 2009). However, colonial powers were not able to yield the same economic gains as they were on other Caribbean islands because of the poor communication between landowners and colonial authorities (Wilson 2009).

In the early 1800s, Caribbean Blacks were able to gain some political progress after years of frustration with unjust colonial rule for Blacks with small farm lands (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). According to the U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (2010), “in 1838 Dominica became the first and only British Caribbean colony to have a Black-controlled legislature in the 19th century.” Because of the small amount of power gained by Blacks, political and social tensions heightened between wealthy white landowners and black landowners (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Soon after, in 1896 the Crown colony reestablished their government and dominance,

significantly reducing the political power of Black landowners (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

In the early 1900s, Blacks were frustrated with their lack of representation in the government (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Dominica sought independence and joined the Leeward Islands Federation, which was a coalition of Caribbean islands in northern Antilles until the 1930s (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). In the 1950s the island established the Dominica Trade Union and Dominica Labour Party to work for political authority (Wilson 2009). Later, the island of Dominica became part of the West Indies Federation to continue to strive for independence (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). However, the West Indies Federation was dissolved in 1962, as previously mentioned (D'Agostino 2009). Shortly after, Dominica was claimed by the United Kingdom, and they maintained control of the island until 1978 when Dominica achieved independence (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

Currently, there are two dominant political parties, the Dominica Labour Party and the Dominica United Workers Party; the island of Dominica operates under a parliamentary government (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The executive branch consists of the president as head of state, the prime minister as the head of the government, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The legislative branch is a bicameral parliament (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The judicial branch consists of three magistrate courts, the Eastern Caribbean

Court, and a court of appeals named Privy Council, which is located in London (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

GRENADA

Grenada is an island also located between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Sea (Wilson 2009). According to Wilson (2009), Grenada is within the Windward Islands and is “the most southerly island of the eastern Caribbean” (470). In 2001 Grenada had a population size of 99,000 (Hillman 2003). Grenada was first inhabited by the Carib and Arawak Amerindians (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (2011) indicates that “Carib Indians had driven the more peaceful Arawaks from the island”. The warlike nature of the Caribs would prove problematic for the new settlers (Bateman 1995; Boswell 2003; Wilson 2009).

Christopher Columbus landed on the island in 1498 and named it "Concepcion" (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Later, the French renamed the island “La Grenade” or Grenada (Wilson 2009; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The Caribs did not want the colonists claiming their land (Wilson 2009). They were able to maintain Grenada free from permanent colonization for over 100 years by meeting settlers with fierce resistance (Wilson 2009).

The island of Grenada exchanged hands with the following countries of France and Great Britain (Wilson 2009). Many colonists tried to settle on the island and each group was met with strikes and revolts (Wilson 2009). The English sold the island to the French after many unsuccessful attempts to settle (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of

Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The native Caribs were crudely defeated in the mid 1600s when the French “brought in reinforcements from Martinique” (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

The French maintained control of Grenada for many years until 1762, when the British seized the island (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Numerous wars took place between France and Great Britain after Grenada and the island exchanged hands from 1762 to 1795 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Grenada experienced economic and physical changes in the 18th century with slavery and natural disasters that significantly affected the land and exportable crops (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Nutmeg and cocoa became the new exportable crops because of the fertile soil (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). As previously stated, slavery was abolished in 1834 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

Grenada shifted leadership between 1833 and 1967 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Due to the injustices of slavery and economic turmoil, the people of Grenada sought independence. Grenada joined the Federation of the West Indies (FWI) in 1952 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). After the dissolution of the FWI, Britain again attempted to establish a government and it failed. Ultimately, the British agreed to allow Grenada autonomous decisions over internal affairs in 1967 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Grenada achieved full independence in 1974 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

Currently, the island operates under a similar parliamentary government as that of Barbados (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). Currently, Grenadian citizens have the right to vote in elections (Wilson 2009; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

JAMAICA

Jamaica is another Caribbean island that is located “south of eastern Cuba” and between the Cayman Islands and Haiti (Arthur 2009:572). In 2001 Jamaica had a population size of 2,668,230 (Hillman 2003). However, the first to inhabit the island of Jamaica was the Arawak Amerindians who were a peaceful and non-combative tribe (Boswell 2003). The population of the Arawaks was eventually significantly reduced due to the disease introduced by the Spanish, who first began colonizing the island in 1500s (Arthur 2009). The Spanish colonists brought disease that significantly reduced the amount of Arawaks that lived on the island (Arthur 2009). Many other Arawaks were eradicated by warfare or died during their enslavement (Arthur 2009).

Spain and other countries were interested in the sugar crop that was plentiful in Jamaica (Arthur 2009). Therefore, in 1517 African slaves were first brought to Jamaica, so colonists could create plantations on the island to export large quantities of sugar (Arthur 2009; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The British obtained control of Jamaica in 1670 and maintained their rule for many years (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

In the 1800s political tensions increased in Jamaica under British rule (Arthur 2009). The British allowed dominant positions of government to be segregated by race, and these positions were maintained by elite whites and mixed-race individuals (Arthur

2009). Jamaican Blacks were unable to become upwardly mobile, remained poor, and were exploited (Arthur 2009). Rebellions and strikes followed, and the British government halted each with violent force (Arthur 2009).

As economic tensions increased Jamaicans became more concerned with their well-being and the idea of self-government surfaced (Arthur 2009). In the 1930s and 1940s, the People's National Party and the Jamaican Labour Party were established (Arthur 2009). Jamaicans were able to build political strength, and in 1944 they were able to hold their first election (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Through the work of Jamaican leaders, Jamaica was able to obtain independence in 1962 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011).

Currently, the Jamaican government operates under a parliamentary system that is influenced by the United Kingdom's government (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The government consists of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The executive branch lists Queen Elizabeth II and the governor general as chief of state, the prime minister, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The legislative branch is a bicameral parliament and the judicial branch consists of local courts and a court of appeals (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

St. Kitts and Nevis are also part of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean Sea (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). In 2001, St. Kitts and

Nevis had a population size of 41,082 (Hillman 2003). The Carib Amerindian tribe occupied St. Kitts and Nevis (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). For this study, no records were found indicating what the natives first called their island, now known as St. Kitts; however, Christopher Columbus was the first colonist to name the island— St. Christopher (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). Later, the island was renamed St. Kitts by the English (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). All instances of the original or previous names indicate the colonists' desire to expand their dominance into every facet of native communities.

The English and the French begin colonization of the island of St. Kitts in 1623 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The Carib Amerindians still occupied the island (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2011). The French waged war with the Carib Amerindians from 1636 to 1640 (Rogozinski 1999). The Caribs were eventually defeated (Higman 2011; Rogozinski 1999). The French and English both occupied St. Kitts from 1628 to 1713 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The English settled Nevis in 1628 and maintained rule since the first settlers (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

In the 17th century, these colonial powers imported African slaves to work the plantation fields (Higman 2011). The French and English were also engaged in warfare with one another over St. Kitts (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). This significantly weakened the economy of St. Kitts (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). U.S. Department of

State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (2010), reported that “St. Kitts was ceded to Great Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.” However, the French continued in warfare and seized both islands in 1782 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). In 1783 Great Britain gained permanent ownership of St. Kitts and Nevis because of the Treaty of Paris (Rogozinski 1999; U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

The islands of St. Kitts and Nevis both sought political power and joined the Leeward Islands Federation from 1871 until 1956 and later the West Indies Federation from 1958 until 1962 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party was formed due to social and political unrest (Wilson 2009). Later, the People’s Action Movement and Nevis Reformation Party were also formed (Wilson 2009). St. Kitts and Nevis obtained independence in 1983 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

Currently, the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis operate under a parliamentary government (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The executive branch consists of Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, the prime minister as the head of the government, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The legislative branch is a bicameral and representative parliament (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). The judicial branch consists of magistrate courts (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

ST. THOMAS

St. Thomas is a part of the United States Virgin Islands and in the Caribbean Sea. According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), St. Thomas had a population size of 51,161 in 2000. The island of St. Thomas was first inhabited by the Carib, Arawak, Tainos, and Ciboney Amerindians (Boswell 2003; Europa Regional Surveys of the World 2009; Wilson 2009). Colonists sought mainly the cash crops of sugar, cotton, and indigo (Higman 2011; James 1963; Williams 1994; Schwartz 1985). The Danish West Indian Company was granted a charter and began to create plantations and settle the island in 1671 (United States Census Bureau 2000). In 1671 the Danish brought African slaves to work the plantation fields (Rogozinski 1999). The slave industry became a big industry for white plantation owners in St. Thomas. Denmark claimed St. Thomas in the 1750s (Rogozinski 1999). Denmark abolished slavery in 1848 (Rogozinski 1999).

Slave revolts ensued after continual mistreatment and the exploitation of slave labor (Higman 2011; Rogozinski 1999). The abolishment of slavery brought detrimental effects for the plantation economies on many Caribbean islands (Higman 2011; Rogozinski 1999; Schwartz 1985). In 1917 Denmark sold the islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix to the United States for 25 million dollars (Higman 2011; United States Census Bureau 2000). According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), “during World War I, fear that Germany might occupy the islands provided the final impetus for the United States to purchase the islands from Denmark.” Currently, the island of St. Thomas is a part of the United States Virgin Islands and is an external territory (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009).

Natives of St. Thomas and other Virgin Islands are citizens of the United States but are not allowed to vote in the presidential elections because of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands of 1954 by the United States Congress (U.S. Department of the Interior: Office of Insular Affairs 1954). Due to the shifts in power on the island of St. Thomas, they and many other islands in the Virgin Islands did not seek to obtain independence because they were unable to be self-reliant after the devastating consequences of colonization and plantation-based economies (D'Agostino 2009; Randall 2009).

The government of St. Thomas consists of the executive branch which includes the United States President, a governor, lieutenant governor, and board of commissioners (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009). The legislative branch consists of the president of the senate and assembly, and the judicial branch consists of the Superior and Supreme Courts of the Virgin Islands and the United States Federal Court of the Virgin Islands (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2009).

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad and Tobago is located in the southern region of the Caribbean Sea (Wilson 2009). In 2001 the population in Trinidad and Tobago was 1,309,608 (Hillman 2003). Trinidad and Tobago were first inhabited by the Carib and Arawak Amerindians (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). Christopher Columbus arrived on Trinidad in 1498 (Wilson 2009). In the late 1500s, Spanish settlers began to colonize the island (Wilson 2009). In 1783 the Spanish government created permits for colonists to develop the land; the government also gave additional acreage for colonists that brought slaves (Wilson 2009). Colonists sought cash

crops such as coffee, cocoa, and sugar (Wilson 2009). Settlers made large economic gains from the slaves that worked the plantations built on Trinidad and Tobago (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009).

In 1797 the United Kingdom seized Trinidad, and they formally obtained the island in 1802 from the Spanish (Wilson 2009). The French, Dutch, and British waged war against each other to obtain Tobago and the island shifted between these countries 22 times (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). In 1814 the British officially obtained Tobago, and although slavery ended in 1834 slaves were forced to work on plantations as indentured servants (Wilson 2009).

In 1888 Trinidad and Tobago were colonized into one colony because the sugar economy in Tobago faltered (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010; Wilson 2009). In the 1930s, many labor and political movements arose on these islands from the poor economic conditions (Wilson 2009). After political leaders in the Caribbean were able to obtain universal suffrage, they set the precedent for various islands to dispute authorities for full independence (Wilson 2009). Trinidad and Tobago leaders were able to operate their own local government and gained full independence from Britain in 1962 (Wilson 2009).

Currently, Trinidad and Tobago is a republic of the Commonwealth (Wilson 2009). The Trinidad and Tobago government operates also under a parliamentary system, and consists of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The executive branch consists of the president as head of state, the prime minister as the head of the government, and the cabinet (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The

legislative branch is a bicameral parliament (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010). The judicial branch has an independent court system and a court of appeals named Privy Council which is located in London (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2010).

Colonial shifts in powers has had significant and detrimental effects on the indigenous and black populations, Caribbean culture and language, political power and nation instability, economic conditions, and the state of development among the different lands. The colonial legacy of slavery and exploitation in the Caribbean has also had long-term effects on the opportunities of Caribbean families. Social opportunities in the Caribbean are enduringly connected to race and class.

More significantly, the colonial legacy in the Caribbean has impacted the economic and educational opportunities of Caribbean families. According to Slater (1977), many Caribbean islands remain “underdeveloped, multiracial, highly stratified society with a large economically marginal base” (42). These social and economic conditions have immense effects on Caribbean households and the opportunities they can provide for their children. The consequences of colonialism are still prevalent in the Caribbean educational system because the age of compulsory/public education ceases much sooner in the Caribbean. Educational opportunities in the Caribbean are still significantly related to income as well as related to the capability of parents to afford their children’s education beyond the compulsory age. This has created inequality because it has greatly reduced the levels of education an individual can acquire and their opportunity for upward mobility in society.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the economic and educational aspirations of Caribbean families will be addressed as well as their aspirations for social mobility. Caribbean immigrant families have strong cultural and social values for economic and educational attainment. Many families also teach these beneficial values to their children. Caribbean immigrant families are resilient in their determination for upward mobility. The following literature will demonstrate these central themes.

Caribbean immigrant families who migrate to the United States come from a variety of social classes, from professional, upper- and middle-class residents to lower unskilled workers; however, regardless of these social classes, many Caribbean immigrants experience a variety of social barriers in transitioning to American culture, though success is usually attained (Baptiste, Hardy and Lewis 1997). Although these families come from different economic backgrounds, they are resilient and bring with them a distinct set of cultural values that promote economic and educational attainment. The median income for Caribbean Blacks is \$41,328 (Rong and Preissle 2009). Caribbean Blacks have higher incomes and more college attainment than do U.S. born blacks (Rong and Preissle 2009). Economic attainment is a value for many Caribbean immigrants that enter the United States. This is a significant finding as Caribbean Blacks

experience more social and cultural barriers than American Blacks in transitioning to American culture (Grossman 2003).

Caribbean immigrants do not let these social and cultural obstacles hinder their progress at achieving economic or educational success. Caribbean immigrant families also have strong work ethic that has positive effects on the academic achievement of their children. Rong and Preissle (2009) explain that the “children of immigrant [parents] have the lowest [school] dropout rates across all race-gender groups” (109-110). It may be the case that children of Caribbean immigrant families do not take for granted the opportunities afforded to them in the United States. According to Dadoo (1997, cited in Rong and Preissle (2009), hybrid cultural identity theory helps to explain, “why Black Caribbean immigrants may have justification for greater achievement motivation that many native-born urban U.S. Blacks lack” (196). Hybrid cultural identity theory suggests that an individual can retain dualist cultural identities while living in a mainstream American society. For Caribbean immigrants, ethnic identification and culture has empowered these individuals to strive for greater economic attainment and social mobility.

Caribbean families infuse strong values of academic achievement in their children because they are aware of the lack of opportunities they face in their own home countries. A large number of Caribbean students never have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond 11 years of age in their home countries (Blom and Hobbs 2008). This phenomenon exists because public education in the Caribbean is more privatized and tuition based than in the United States. American public students have access to free

education until 12th grade, whereas for many Caribbean students public education ceases much sooner.

Compulsory education in the Caribbean varies drastically, depending upon the island. General levels of education in the Caribbean usually consist of pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2009; Government of St. Lucia 2000). Pre-primary consist of ages 3 through 5 (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2009). Primary school consists of ages 5 through 11 (Government of St. Lucia 2000). Pre-primary and primary schools are available both publically and privately. The purpose of primary school is mainly to ensure literacy (Evans and Davies 1997). Secondary school consists of ages 12 through 16 (Government of St. Lucia 2000). Tertiary school consists of ages 17 and up (Government of St. Lucia 2000). Secondary and tertiary school is almost exclusively privatized (Government of St. Lucia 2000). Because most Caribbean countries cannot afford to provide for education beyond primary school, they must pay for their children's education beyond primary school or prepare their children for work in the labor-market (Evans and Davies 1997).

Because the path toward higher social mobility is very difficult in the Caribbean, many choose to migrate to the United States where social mobility is more easily achieved. For rural Caribbean families, education beyond primary is simply unrealistic. Some Caribbean youth enter the labor-market ill-prepared without the financial resources to obtain higher education (Blom and Hobbs 2008). According to Blom and Hobbs (2008), although many children leave school with up to 11 years of education the majority leave with "no diploma or marketable skills" (4-5). It is because of this

educational inequality that many Caribbean immigrant families migrate to the United States for what Weber called “life chances” (Johnson 2000:175). America has a larger global market for many Caribbean immigrants to obtain greater opportunities.

Many Caribbean students who migrate to the United States still encounter academic barriers in the American schooling system. The transition from Caribbean schooling to American schooling can be very problematic as each country has their expectations of proper academic language. Nero (2000) explains that there are linguistic differences between Caribbean Creole English and Standard American English, causing adjustment difficulties for Caribbean students. As these students adhere to their Caribbean schooling of formal English and pronunciations, non-Caribbean educators assume that these students were not taught the expected form of English. Cultural differences in the English Standard cause non-Caribbean educators to misperceive the abilities of Caribbean students and can result in their misplacement in remedial courses. According to West-White (2003), “Many students will spend a year, or more, taking such classes that will not count toward graduation, but are required for the student to pass in order to begin taking the more traditional freshman and sophomore college writing classes” (226). Labeling these students as undertrained learners can have damaging effects on self-esteem for students that were “at the top of their classes in their home country... [and] now find themselves placed in lower level, skill and drill intensive courses” (West-White 2003:225-56). These lower academic tracks discourage the learning opportunity of these students rather than fostering their academic achievement.

Some foreign-born Caribbean students also encounter communication difficulties when they attempt to speak American English. Nero (2000) explains in his study that

students “felt the need to be formal” in order to create favorable impressions with educators (493). Formal behavior defined as students being able to properly speak Webster’s English without a Caribbean accent. The students’ assimilation to American culture is not just a personal goal for acceptance but accentuates a problem that exists in education—ethnocentric educators. Foreign-born students can be undermined and alienated from their own culture in the American classroom (Magary and Bower 1966). In a summary of previous research Nero (2000) states that Anderson and Grant; Coelho; and Solomon findings “showed that linguistic difficulties and [mis]placement in ESL classes were two factors...responsible for the academic underachievement of Anglophone Caribbean students in Canadian schools” (487). Caribbean immigrant students face obstacles in obtaining a higher education whether it is their homeland or here in the United States. Although many Caribbean immigrant students encounter these barriers toward their academic achievement, many still become academically successful. However, few studies or research exists that explores the achievements or obstacles faced by Caribbean families in the United States. Therefore, this study seeks to reduce literature gap concerning Black Caribbean immigrant families. No studies have explored experiences of successful Caribbean immigrant students in the American schooling system.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Limited research exists in the United States that acknowledges the diversity in the Black population and more specifically Black Caribbean immigrants. The academic literature that examines Blacks in North America is over-generalized. The research does

not take into account that Black ethnic groups experience both similar and also different social realities from each other.

This study will explore the perspectives of Black Caribbean immigrants. There is substantial literature describing the experiences of Black Americans, but no sociological research has explored Black Caribbean immigrant experiences. Caribbean scholars have helped to improve this gap that exists in the American discourse. American scholars explain the Black population with a macro-level lens instead of further examining the distinctions between groups. The literature is also biased that it focuses on the negative experiences of Blacks and while disregarding the positive attributes of this community.

This study explores the perspectives of Caribbean immigrant students that are successful in American universities. Researchers should recognize the traits of successful Blacks in the United States without a segmented view of their social lives and make known that positive qualities do exist in Black families. There are many successful Blacks in the United States, both native and foreign-born. It is essential that the academic world acknowledge these successes and also comprehensively explain all aspects of this racial group.

CHAPTER IV

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

I will discuss and analyze the current theories that help to provide understanding of the Caribbean immigrant experience in American society. In my opinion, assimilation theory is not applicable to this particular study. Cultural pluralism theory, feminist theory and intersectional theory are seen as relevant and supported in this empirical study.

ASSIMILATION THEORY

Assimilation theory maintains that individuals must fuse their belief and cultural system to match dominant culture (Johnson 2000). Assimilation theory assumes the relinquishment of the cultural identity to accept the dominant culture. Many sociologists propose that the way to understand the immigrant experience is to evaluate their lives with the assimilation perspective. These scholars assume that upward mobility is inherently achieved from the assimilation of immigrants to American culture, values, and lifestyle. I argue that individual assimilation is never fully complete. This study is supported by Lorick-Wilmot's (2010) research which states that "Caribbean immigrants and their families experience assimilation along different pathways—segmented assimilation" because they retain their Caribbean identity (91). This study questions the validity of these assumptions in the relationship to Caribbean immigrants in American society. Although the assimilation perspective may apply to some ethnic groups, the

universal application to all immigrant groups is inaccurate and over-generalized.

This study instead argues that Caribbean immigrants have similar social values to Americans such as economic attainment and desire for educational achievement. Caribbean immigrants do not need to assimilate to normative American values when they already embody many of the same values. Scholars should be careful in attributing the social mobility of Caribbean immigrants solely due to assimilation. The labeling of this phenomenon in this manner does not acknowledge the positive social values and characteristics associated with many Caribbean immigrants.

As discussed previously, Caribbean immigrants value many similar ideologies to Americans such as education and economic success. Caribbean immigrants also bring cultural values that act as motivational factors for achievement. Scholars must recognize these differences between these immigrants and other ethnic groups to obtain a greater understanding of Caribbean families. Assimilation theory cannot explain the cultural pluralism that exists among these immigrants and contributes to their attainment. Dualist theories appear to be more valuable in examining the accounts of Caribbean immigrants.

CULTURAL PLURALISM THEORY

Cultural pluralism is the idea that individuals with a recent immigration history can live in a dualistic cultural society (Johnson 2000). They are able to maintain their unique cultural heritage and values while also meeting the cultural norms of dominant society. According to Reitz and Sklar (1997), in a culturally pluralist society “the retention of ethnic attachments may actually become an asset rather than a liability, yielding economic benefits for minority-group members” (234). Caribbean immigrants in the United States are able to maintain their Caribbean identity while also engaging in

normative behaviors of larger society. Cultural pluralism theory is unlike assimilation theory because cultural pluralism theory supports a dualistic culture, without the need of merging individual belief and cultural systems.

Cultural pluralism theory suggests that Caribbean immigrants are able to maintain their Caribbean identity. The cultivation of the Caribbean identity acts as a motivational factor for social and academic success. The maintenance of identity allows Caribbean immigrants to reflect upon their cultural and immigration history, and appreciate their Caribbean nation and desire to become more successful than they were in their homeland. Foner (2001) states “limited opportunities for advancement... have long spurred West Indians to look abroad for economic and better job prospects, improved living standards, and ways to get ahead” (4). The Caribbean historical and colonial legacy is key to understanding their identity and their appreciation of their own culture. Some Caribbean immigrants are aware of their families’ relation to the first Caribbean Indian tribes, the Arawak and Caribs. With each individual Indian Tribe comes a history of protecting their land against settlers, the struggle of survival, and the passage of their Caribbean Indian culture to their later offspring (Young 1993).

Many Caribbean immigrants are also aware of the lack of political power that reigned over many Caribbean islands during the time of slavery (Young 1993). According to Pons (2007) “together with the slave system, the sugar plantation dominated Caribbean economic history for almost 400 years” (310). It is the historical legacy of the Caribbean people to thrive despite encountering a series of oppressions upon their islands. A similar reflection to the Caribbean identity is the African-American identity. African-Americans experience some cultural pluralism because they have dualist

identities. African-Americans have a culture primarily associated with being black such as the historical legacy of slavery as well as the culture of being an American citizen. I will use the perspective of cultural pluralism to analyze whether or how Caribbean students retain their racial and cultural heritage after immigrating to the United States.

FEMINIST THEORY

I use feminist theory as a foundation for studying Caribbean students in higher education. Feminist theory supports the notion that sociologists should study actors from their point of view or standpoint in the social structure (Ritzer 2008). Hill-Collins (1990) explained that the “commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black women’s standpoint” (22). Race can be used to understand a particular group’s standpoint. Therefore, this study uses feminist theory to examine the Caribbean standpoint and how Caribbean students experience schooling in the United States. A specific feminist theory is intersectional theory which incorporates multiple social classifications for evaluating an individual’s or groups standpoint. In studying African-Americans, Hill-Collins (1990) argues that the intersectionality of social class, gender, sex, race, and ethnicity is significant to understanding the individual experience and the differences among social groups in the social world.

INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

I use intersectional theory to demonstrate the differences among what some scholars consider to be one racial group, the black population. In this perspective, researchers should make this ethnic distinction between Caribbean Blacks and other black populations because some previous studies have discussed Black populations monolithically, ignoring the diversity among these different groups. Acknowledging the

diversity among these black populations, and evaluating these ethnic groups from their experience provides for greater knowledge and accurate analysis of these populations. Intersectional theorists such as Hill-Collins (1990) have supported the claim that researchers must always attend to the differences among groups. Hill-Collins (1990) explains that “black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women” (22). For example Black and white women both can experience income discrimination based on gender, but Black women also encounter a greater oppression due to racial discrimination. Therefore, Hill-Collins (1990) uses the concept “matrix of domination” to illustrate how people encounter numerous oppressions (225). In this study I will use intersectional theory to explain that not all Caribbean Blacks are of African descent and that some have mixed Caribbean ancestry, and this offers a unique standpoint worthy of investigation. According Rong and Preissle (2009), “the first inhabitants of the Caribbean were indigenous people” and some of these ethnic tribes have survived the course of history (178). Therefore, grouping all black populations into one unified group also ignores the inequalities that are exclusive to each of these groups.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to explore the perspectives of Black Caribbean immigrant students and graduates that are successful in education in the United States, I employed a qualitative approach. I conducted in-depth interviews of successful Caribbean immigrant students and graduates who attended different universities across the United States, which will remain anonymous to protect the identity of the participants. 14 interviews were conducted through e-mail and one was face-to-face. The goals of these qualitative, in-depth interviews were to gather information to answer my research questions, learn more about Caribbean immigrant students and their families, and reduce the literature gap concerning Caribbean immigrants. The requirements for inclusion in the study were: 1) having Caribbean ethnicity from birth or parents from specific islands, 2) being 19 years of age or older, 3) having a 2.5 Grade Point Average or higher, and 4) being a college student with at least 24 credit hours or a graduate from a 4-year college or university in the United States.

I solicited potential subjects from leaders in Caribbean organizations, minority organizations (e.g. multicultural offices), and flyers on American university campuses. I solicited universities that had a specialized Caribbean department for subjects. The

organizations and departments were found through online searches for Caribbean and minority organizations and departments.

Recruitment included one to four methods (e-mail, phone, flyer, website) depending upon the available information on the website, and how the organization or department chooses to proceed. All my recruitment methods included information about the study, the online website (*caribbeanstudy weebly.com*), and my contact information. I used the website as an informational source for all potential participants. The study website provided information about participant eligibility, specifics about the interview process, examples of interview questions, and consent forms for potential candidates to review before participating. The site also included my contact information, disclosure of my Caribbean ethnicity and justification for my topic interest, as well as links for Texas State University and the Institutional Review Board. I also used the website to obtain consent from e-mail participants. All online communications and the study website were confidential and password protected. I was available to answer any study questions during the recruitment and interview process.

I recruited organizations for students by using e-mail and phone. Organization leaders were sent an e-mail notification letter explaining the details of the Caribbean research study (including the study website link), the need for their assistance in informing their group members of the study to gain participants, an attached flyer, and my contact information. During the solicitation process, I noticed that some of the contact information from some organizations was outdated, and I was not able to contact a few organizations.

The “gatekeepers” for access to the participants were organization leaders. Some organizations had a delayed response in contacting me about the study because they did not regularly check their group e-mail. However, when these organizations contacted me they expressed great interest in the study. Organization leaders had the authority to decide whether or not to inform their members about the Caribbean study. Organizations also decided the method of how they would inform their members. They could have used any of the previously discussed solicitation methods. Most commonly noted by potential participants, was that their organization leaders had sent an e-mail to their group members about the Caribbean study along with their desire for members to help a fellow Caribbean student. The best method of solicitation occurred through Caribbean- and minority- organizations.

I also solicited volunteers from university departments with specialized Caribbean programs. I contacted these university departments by the same methods as Caribbean and minority organizations. I was the least successful at obtaining interviewees from university departments because they were not as willing to help me find participants. Various departments directed me to several other departments through the university without offering proper assistance or guidance for obtaining participants. The department personnel appeared uncomfortable with taking responsibility or appearing liable for my research study.

Although flyers were sent as e-mail attachments, I cannot verify with any certainty whether or not flyers were printed and placed throughout all organization offices, university departments, or campuses. The organizations did use other methods to

inform potential respondents such as e-mail notices. I can verify that flyers I placed throughout campuses did not receive any response.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions so that I could obtain answers to detailed questions related to being a Caribbean immigrant, having a Caribbean family, the importance of the Caribbean identity (considered in this study as a pan-ethnic or specific island national identity), and the motivational factors and techniques for their success in higher education (refer to Appendix A for the interview guide). The following questions are examples of interviews questions: Why do/did you want to become a college graduate? Why is this important to you? Why do you think you're successful at school? Is being Caribbean an important part of your life? Do you feel having Caribbean values has helped you through college? To be more specific, I asked questions concerning Caribbean ethnicity, Caribbean identity, Caribbean values, family, immigrant experience, college experiences, possible difficulties in college, support systems, and utilized techniques for success in degree attainment. The purpose was for me to understand and share their Caribbean histories and obtain authentic accounts of their immigrant experience in the American collegiate setting.

In face-to-face interviews, participants and I discussed and signed the informed consent forms. The face-to-face interview were audio-recorded (n=1). For non-local students outside a 2-hour driving radius, I used e-mail interviews (n=14). The respondents received a confidential e-mail containing the interview questionnaire, after I received their consent notification.

I used this sampling method because this Caribbean population usually resides in the eastern region of the United States (Logan 2007). Utilizing this e-mail method I was

able to obtain my sample from diverse organizations that these participants would likely join. I also was able to be more successful at finding my sample by expanding my search radius beyond the southern region.

The respondents that were available for these interviews consisted of 14 females and one male. All claimed to have maternal or paternal Caribbean lineage. The majority of the respondents were also born in the Caribbean. Some listed mixed ancestry because some parents were from different islands. The participants listed ethnic affiliation with the following islands: Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Thomas, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The sample was diverse. Majors listed were mainly in colleges of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Business. The sample included one sophomore, five juniors, and three seniors in undergraduate programs (refer to Appendix B). Six respondents were graduates with Bachelor's degrees (refer to Appendix B). Three out of these six graduates were pursuing post-graduate education (refer to Appendix B). Out of the three graduates pursuing further higher education two were enrolled in doctoral programs and one was enrolled in a Master's program.

Fourteen participants had Grade Point Averages of 3.00 and higher. Only one respondent had a Grade Point Average below 3.00, with a 2.70. The undergraduates had a mean Grade Point Average of 3.20. The undergraduate low range was 3.00 and the high range was 3.58. The graduates had a mean Grade Point Average of 3.13. The low range was 2.70 and the high range was 3.60.

Although qualitative studies do not involve formal hypotheses, I expected to find some evidence of cohesive Caribbean immigrant families and strong educational and

social aspirations for Caribbean immigrant students. I used open-coding for data analysis. I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. Interview transcripts were labeled by pseudonyms. I read, and re-read interview transcripts and wrote reflective notes.

I recognized patterns among the responses while interviewing and also while reading the first interview transcripts. I wrote notes within the transcripts about these similar ideas. After reading each e-mail interview, if needed, follow-up questions were sent to e-mail participants to clarify responses and enhance the data. I utilized this technique for e-mail participants because they did not have face-to-face contact. I incorporated these follow-up questions appropriately into their individual interviews. For face-to-face interviews, follow-up questions through e-mail were not necessary because I could immediately ask a participant to explain their idea further.

After I completed all the interviews, I read through each of the interviews, wrote further detailed notes, and highlighted similar interview quotes. Thematic patterns emerged from interview topics. I wrote a general list of topic ideas mentioned in the responses. I created thematic categories based on the importance of interview topics to participants (i.e. when they elaborated on why certain topics were important to them, significant expressions and gestures in face-to-face interviews, and the indication of capitalized words in e-mail interviews) and the response frequencies. I searched for all related data for each category.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS

What motivates Caribbean students to be academically successful? How do these Caribbean immigrant students develop and maintain their college aspirations? How does their Caribbean ethnic identity, culture, and family influence their personal determination for academic achievement? I identified six main themes: (1) Caribbean family values, (2) family unity, (3) immigration and identity, (4) reaching the “Caribbean dream,” (5) social networks and mentors, and (6) overcoming adversity. I discuss each of these themes below.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CARIBBEAN FAMILY AND INHERITING FAMILY VALUES

The Caribbean family unit plays a significant role in the socialization and development of the children (Evan and Davies 1997). Evan and Davies’s (1997) research describes that cultural norms help to explain the social value that parents ascribe to their children. Regardless of income, children are still seen as highly valuable in family units (Evan and Davies 1997). In this study, cultural norms and the roles of Caribbean parents are essential to understanding the aspirations of Caribbean immigrant students and their success in academia. Caribbean families set the foundation for the success of their children.

This study suggests that Caribbean parents impart many beneficial social norms and values to their children. Parents have a significant effect on how their children are socialized and how they learn to value the social world. McMillan and Reed (1994) explain that “resilient students have adults—usually a parent...with whom they have trusting relationships...Students respect these adults because they obviously care about their welfare” (139). Therefore, students are more accepting of parental ideologies. In this research, participant responses indicated that they have a strong sense of moral and social values taught and infused by their parents. Respondents described Caribbean values such as a close-knit family, a sense of Caribbean culture and pride, social manners and discipline, respect for elders, high-level of education and achievement, and leadership and responsibility.

In discussing the importance of family values, Elizabeth stated, “Family is one's first priority. One value that my father instilled in us is that you can never turn your back on your family.” Several respondents described how maintaining ties to the family helped them whether one is nearby or abroad. Ashley explained how she formulated her social values from her Caribbean family values. When I asked Ashley whether or not being Caribbean was a significant part of her educational success, she stated, “Yes, because it is my culture and heritage! My belief system is based on the one that my Caribbean parents taught me, which does not always fall in line with the American belief system.” The excerpt by Ashley reflects how many Caribbean students view their Caribbean ethnicity as salient and engage in cultural pluralism by recognizing that their Caribbean belief systems differ from American ideology.

Likewise, Elizabeth responded:

It is extremely important. I think it is one of the things that define me and my life experiences. Being Caribbean has helped to shape who I am and everything about me, from the way I dress, to the food I eat, to the music that I listen to and the way I talk. My family is extremely important to me and my success as a person.

The data suggest that these Caribbean immigrant students have a high-level of consciousness about how their families have helped them to be academically successful.

The Caribbean immigrant students have an awareness that they are not taking on this journey alone.

When I asked Marie about the importance of her Caribbean ancestry, she stated, “It is an extremely important part of my life, even though I have never been to either of my parents' home countries.” Marie showed a strong sense of belonging to her Caribbean heritage instilled from the social values of her parents even though she was not raised in the Caribbean. Cultural values can transcend borders and still be passed on to future generations. This finding illustrates how parental belief systems can be adopted by their children and have beneficial effects on their lives.

In many Caribbean families and on Caribbean islands, the social norms and values for children are governed by multiple entities such as the family, neighbors, the educational system, or any older adult. Anne explained this further, “Never a day went by that I didn't know that the BUS DRIVER, PRINCIPAL, CROSSING GUARD, or ANY ADULT [sic] could get me in so much trouble if only they muttered the words, ‘Wait tell [sic] I tell your mother!’” When discussing the importance of parental values and childrearing, Nina explained:

My mother is still strict, like British strict. Everything needs to be nicely pressed. To this day I cannot leave the house unless everything is ironed.

Have your clean nails. We had nail checks, socks checked, ribbons checked at school at assembly. You had to walk half a mile in a dusty road, but your socks still had to be clean when you got to school. You had to still look presentable.

When I asked Anne about the importance of morals and manners, she stated, “I believe that there are cultural mannerisms (RESPECT) [sic] that were embedded in me as a child... To this day, I would never disrespect any of my elders—not my mother, grandfather, or any adult on the street.” The students and graduates in this study indicated that the moral values taught by their Caribbean parents had an effect in their interaction with others in society and their high-level of discipline in their commitment to education.

Education and academic achievement was another family value that the participants described. Parents’ levels of education ranged from no college to graduate degrees. Three respondents had parents without a college education. The participants indicated that the parents that did not attend college could not afford to do so, even though they wanted to attend college. Two respondents lived in households with parents that attended some college. Ten lived in households that had at least one parent with a graduate degree. The level of parental education can influence student aspirations and motivation for academic achievement.

In shaping an individual’s goals for academic achievement, parental aspirations can translate into student motivations. Kimberly’s response about family values and education depicted why many Caribbean parents’ value education, “I think education is important in my family, because in their own eyes, the poverty and destitution that they saw in their childhoods, education was the key to being successful and escaping that kind of future for their offspring.” When I asked Angela about the importance of education to her family, she stated:

Yes! My mother stayed home to make sure that all of her children were doing the best that they could in school. She taught us all to read and write and was instrumental in helping us with our homework even to today (she reviewed a paper for my class up to last week). From this, I learned that education was an important part of our lives and I have always strived to be as successful as possible in my classes... My mom talks about education on a daily basis.

Jessica explained that her parents strongly value education. Some of the participants were appreciative of the sacrifices that their parents made by choosing to immigrate to the United States. Natalie described her motivation for degree attainment, "My Caribbean values keep me grounded and remind me that this is not just my dream I am working towards. I am repaying my family for all the sacrifices they have made to allow me to achieve my dreams." Many other participants displayed appreciation for their parents similar to Natalie. The participants viewed working toward and achieving a college degree as substantiation of familial respect, gratitude, and Caribbean pride. Caribbean parents are a significant factor in why these Caribbean students and graduates have aspired to be successful.

Many respondents explained that they were first taught leadership skills within their family. They emphasized the importance of such skills as ways to gain academic and social success. Elizabeth reported, "[I]t was always instilled in us to be leaders, never followers." Some of the participants also felt a strong sense of duty to their Caribbean countries because they were aware of the fact that not every student in compulsory education has the opportunity to obtain a college degree. This consciousness about the Caribbean stems from the cultural awareness about the current state of many Caribbean islands. The participants displayed characteristics of leadership and responsibility in their commitment to education. Sara explained, "Many of them are not able to attend colleges

or universities because they can't afford it. Yet I am being granted that opportunity, so I'm making the best of it." Elizabeth also responded similarly, "[E]ducation is the key to success and we should not waste the opportunity. Our ancestors and parents gave up the opportunity for education so that we could have a better life and have the opportunity to be educated." The findings suggest that understanding how to be responsible and learning how to become a strong leader in society was significant to the success of these Caribbean students and graduates in higher education.

The findings indicate that Caribbean families share both similar and different ideologies and values in comparison with American families (broadly defined here). Some of the interviewees claimed that their unique Caribbean culture influences their beliefs about education. These different values and ideologies are a multicultural worldview, a greater desire to be morally respectable, and having self-discipline. Distinct cultural customs include language, music, and dance. In examining cultural values and differences, I explored the participant responses and their techniques for being successful in college. Mary explained her advice for prospective Caribbean students, "Stay focused on their purpose for coming to college, hold fast to their roots / culture. Do not become consumed by the American way of life and its culture of consumerism." Caribbean immigrant students and graduates in this study highly regard the values that they were taught because they believe that these ideologies and how one chooses to interact will influence social mobility. According to Elizabeth, a Caribbean student can be successful if they stay closely tied to their family and culture:

LISTEN TO YOUR PARENTS! [sic] They know what they are talking about! They tell you to study because they love you! And please, please, don't follow the crowd. The party girl never becomes the Fortune 500 CEO or the Supreme Court Justice. There aren't any pictures of Barack

Obama or Hillary Clinton passed out wasted on Facebook. Think about your future in everything you do. Make your family proud. Don't let their sacrifices be for nothing. They left everything they knew to make a better life for you, don't let it be in vain. And network! The Caribbean community is a small one, and a Caribbean person in a position of power is almost always willing to help out a young Caribbean brother or sister trying to make it. Be someone they want to help. Stand out in school, join every organization, make an impact, and remember your priorities. And don't ever let them see you sweat. Yuh too bad for dat [sic]!

Elizabeth's advice to Caribbean immigrant students is both practical and helpful in terms of the mindset that students should have when entering higher education. These ideologies stem from the Caribbean social values, family, personal experiences, Caribbean and colonial history, and Caribbean immigration history. These excerpts from Mary and Elizabeth show that Caribbean students can engage in cultural pluralism and that dualist cultures (Caribbean and American) can coexist. Further examining Mary's advice for other Caribbean students' she states, "Do not become consumed by the American way of life and its culture of consumerism" which may suggest that assimilation to the American lifestyle is not ideal for every Caribbean immigrant.

UNITY IN THE CARIBBEAN FAMILY

Respondents described how their many Caribbean families provide social and financial support for their educational pursuits. Social support includes emotional support such as listening or self-esteem building, providing information, mentoring, problem-solving advice, or actions of assistance such as helping with homework assignments. Many Caribbean students and graduates are able to find role-models and/or mentors within the family for comfort and safety. Financial support includes monetary contributions to any student expenses such as the immigration application and processing fees, tuition, and living and travel expenses. These types of support are especially

relevant and significant for Caribbean students that immigrated unaccompanied to the United States. Social support provided by the family has allowed these students to maintain their commitment to education. Financial support has given these students the financial means to obtain a college degree. Sirin (2005) explains that parental income is a significant factor in examining the “social and economic resources that are available to the student” (419). The support that Caribbean families provide to their children is instrumental in evaluating why Caribbean students are academically successful.

In addition, participants explained ways that Caribbean parents provide emotional support. When I asked Myla about who provided her support, she explained, “My mother has provided me with both financial and emotional support. I doubt I would have made it through college without her.” Sara also discussed familial emotional support. She stated:

My family is who has been most supportive of me achieving my academic goals. Being the fact that they go above and beyond to make sure that I stay I [sic] school. They make sure everything is going right, so I don't have to stress and give up about anything.

Parents are able to provide emotional support through encouragement, listening, and empowerment. Students are aware that they have help and resources in their parents, siblings, and extended family. Participants indicated that parents and other family members provided encouragement while they were pursuing a college degree.

Caribbean parents and other family members were also identified as important mentors. When I asked Lauren about who was her most important mentor, she responded:

My mother is my more important mentor to me as she has instilled in me all the values I hold dear today. My mother taught me that learning is a lifelong journey and showed me that I can learn from every experience and everyone that I interact with. She also represented a positive, faith driven career woman who shared her love for life with everyone she came in contact with. These are all traits I try to emulate daily.

Marie stated, “My parents would be the closest thing to my mentors. They provided me guidance academically and helped me develop general professional skills...My mother is my greatest mentor. She has taught majority [sic] of the things I need to know to prosper.” Parental mentorship was a crucial form of emotional support. For these participants, parental mentorship and guidance was essential for their academic success.

For these participants, this type of support served as a protective factor for Caribbean immigrant students working to achieve a college degree in the United States. Because these Caribbean parents made themselves available for their children by providing guidance and emotional support such as encouragement, they were able to reduce the possibility of a negative outcome for their children.

Many Caribbean families also provide financial support for their children to pursue and obtain a college degree. Respondents indicated that many of their parents are employed and work diligently to provide a substantial portion of funds for their children’s education. Parental income was important to the participants’ pursuit of higher education. Eight of the participants indicated that they received some form of financial support from their families. When I asked Elizabeth about financial support, she explained, “When I do have a job, I try not to ask them for money, because I want to stand on my own, but there are times when I don't have any money, and if I call my parents they will supplement me with enough to make it through.” Ashley also explained the types of support she receives from her family, “My parents provided me with financial and emotional support. They dedicated themselves to assisting me in any way necessary to ensure my success and completion of college.” Marie described her familial support, “My family provided every kind of support imaginable. My parents provided the

financial means for me to attend college for most of my undergraduate career. They continue to assist me financially, through graduate school.” Other participants also noted that their parents agreed to parental loans so that they could pursue a college degree. Financial support had a significant influence on the participants’ ability to afford their education and persevere in obtaining a college degree. In examining familial financial support, it is necessary to address the immigration process, because for some Caribbean immigrants, immigration plays a key factor in obtaining greater social opportunities.

PATH TOWARD THE CARIBBEAN DREAM: IMMIGRATION AND THE CARIBBEAN RACIAL IDENTITY

Caribbean immigration is an essential part of discussing socioeconomic success of many Caribbean students and graduates. Many Caribbean people immigrate to other countries with the goal to attain greater opportunities (Waters 1999). Obstacles that some Caribbean immigrants face are practical such as economic costs. For many Caribbean immigrants the rewards of immigration include greater social, economic, and educational opportunities.

Some Caribbean parents have economically helped their children by immigrating to the United States. When I asked Myla about her family’s motivation for immigrating to the United States, she explained that both her parents chose to leave their island for greater opportunities for the entire family, so she could also obtain a college degree. Anne also explained to me that her family chose to immigrate for both educational and economic opportunities that would be more challenging to achieve than in the Caribbean. Anne explained that her family moved to acquire residency and this allowed her to be eligible for in-state tuition.

Segments of Natalie's interview revealed a consistent theme —providing greater opportunities for the family—in my research concerning parental immigration. When I asked Natalie why her parents came to the United States, she stated, “My parents came to the United States to have a better life. They wanted to provide their children with opportunities they could only dream of.” Several respondents said that their Caribbean parents displayed characteristics of selflessness in their reasons and motivations for leaving their islands.

Several instances of personal sacrifices have also been reported by the participants about their families. Elizabeth stated that her grandparents were the individuals that first came to the United States in search of occupational opportunities. She explained her family history and how her grandparents first immigrated without their children. Her grandparents could not afford to bring themselves and their children at the same time. They had to accrue income in the United States before they could afford the immigration application and processing fees for the rest of their family. Elizabeth stated that eventually her grandparents were able to afford to bring their children from the Caribbean.

This conversation intrigued me to research the question—What is the immigration process and how much does it cost for Caribbean immigrants to immigrate to the United States? The immigration process in the United States is complex and costly (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services 2010). An agent at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2011) reports that to enter the United States there must be a justifiable cause. Visa applications are processed in many stages (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of

Consular Affairs 2011; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services 2010).

Concerning this research study, the main justifications for entrance into the states for these participants and their families would most likely be academic or employment.

According to the U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs (2011), there is a series of fees for petition, application, and the processing of temporary and permanent immigrant visas. Some Caribbean immigrants in this study reported that they immigrated to the United States without family, to obtain an education. In this case, a Caribbean immigrant student that was accepted into an academic program would most likely apply for a temporary “non-petition-based nonimmigrant visa” (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). This type of visa would be a category F-1 student visa, and this application would require a nonrefundable fee of \$140 US dollars and a variable issuance fee dependant upon the country of origin (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). A current passport, photograph, application form, receipts from the associated visa fees, transcripts, diploma, a signed I-20 form from the accepted school, standardized test scores, and evidence of financial support are required to apply for a student visa (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011).

Considering that some of the Caribbean immigrant students in this study indicated that their parents immigrated to the United States, these parents most likely applied for permanent immigrant visas. The justification for entrance into the United States would mostly likely be from a relative or employment petition (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). A relative-based I-130 petition for an immigrant visa would require an initial fee of \$420 US dollars for the sponsor petition, an application processing fee of \$330 US dollars, an affidavit of support fee of \$88 US dollars,

immigrant visa security surcharge of \$74 US dollars, variable medical examination and vaccine costs, and other miscellaneous costs (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). The expected fees sum to \$912 US dollars. A current passport, two photographs, application and registration forms, affidavit of support form, civil documents, and medical examination forms are required to apply for this type of visa (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). It also may be required that the visa interview or documents be translated and transcribed (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011).

There are three different types of employment-based petitions but initial employment petition fees range from \$405 to \$1500 US dollars and a processing fee of \$720 US dollars (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). A current passport, two photographs, application and registration forms, evidence of financial support, civil documents, and medical examination forms are required to apply for this form of visa (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011). Priority and preferential employment-based petitions require individuals with “extraordinary” or “exceptional” abilities, or are highly-skilled professionals, such as scholars, researchers, multinational executives, and those with an advanced degree (U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs 2011).

Because the immigration process is difficult for Caribbean immigrants, this helps us understand why Caribbean immigrant parents have strong values concerning the education of their children studying abroad. The values that Caribbean families instill also stem from their own immigration history and the social and economic sacrifices they have made leaving their home countries.

Because of these social sacrifices—leaving behind familiarity, their nation embedded in culture, and other friends and family that remain on their islands—Caribbean immigrant parents instill strong Caribbean values and an awareness of their immigrant history. Discussing economic sacrifices, Caribbean families have to save funds to afford the immigration process for each member seeking to enter the United States. One United States dollar is more than double to one Eastern Caribbean dollar (Bloomberg 2011). Reflecting on the previously discussed immigration costs, a relative-based petition has an expected cost of \$912 US dollars per person, that is \$2462.40 in Eastern Caribbean currency (Bloomberg 2011). As explained prior, a student visa has an expected cost of \$140 US dollars, which is \$378 Eastern Caribbean dollars (Bloomberg 2011). These types of visas do not include their unspecified costs. The reader can recognize that there are significant economic differences. These immigration costs can serve as a problematic issue for those desiring to enter the United States from islands with Eastern Caribbean currency. However, immigrants from Caribbean islands owned by the United States have the US currency.

Immigration also plays a key role on how Caribbean immigrants define their Caribbean identity. This study recognizes that an individual's racial identity consists of many parts and can be viewed in different ways. Research by Itzigsohn and Giorguli and Vazquez's (2005) indicates that "immigrants' racial identities are multiple and flexible" (74). Symbolic-Interaction theory allows us to understand that individuals can make meaningful choices about their lives (and racial identity) among social constraints, i.e. rigid racial classification system (McCall 2006). Immigration fosters new definitions of "what it means to be Black" for Caribbean immigrants (Lorick-Wilmot 2010:91). Lorick-

Wilmot (2010) explains that Caribbean immigrants adopt “a broader sense of Black pan-ethnic identity” (91). This pan-ethnic identity allows them to create new and favorable definitions of Blackness, maintain their cultural customs, as well as discount negative stereotypes of Blacks (Lorick-Wilmot 2010).

The research by Lorick-Wilmot (2010) is consistent with my findings that Caribbean immigrants value their cultural heritage and construct their own self-definitions about their racial identity and ethnicity. For these Caribbean immigrants their Caribbean identity is most valued. Lorick-Wilmot (2010) explains that “many immigrants choose to hold on to island traditions and maintain a Caribbean identity consciousness” (91). In this study the Caribbean identity is shaped by the Caribbean family, cultural values, language, food, music, and the engagement in traditional beliefs and customs. The Caribbean culture is the primary culture (versus American culture) that influences these Caribbean immigrant students and graduates to be successful. The framework of this research views Caribbean immigrants as culturally pluralist. They are able to engage in dualist cultures without disregarding their own Caribbean identity.

The participants indicated that cultural factors also influenced their motivation for academic success. Caribbean identity and Caribbean culture serve as protective factors because they impact how the students live in the social world. In discussing identity, it is crucial to examine how students identify their ethnicity to others. Kimberly explained how she identifies her ethnicity, “Caribbean, I think that because I grew up in another country for half of my life, Black was the dominant population. Everyone was just Jamaican.” According to Marie:

It depends on the person with whom I am speaking. Sometimes I say African Caribbean and some times I say "West Indian", or simply "Black".

It depends on the level of understanding the person with whom I am speaking has about ethnicity and about the Caribbean and its people.

Nina expressed her frustration about non-Caribbean people making assumptions about her identity. She stated, “I say I’m West Indian. Or I say I’m from the Caribbean. And then I let them assume, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or whatever they are going to assume. I just let them do that, unless they ask.”

Anne described how she went about explaining her multiracial ethnicity:

Ethnicity-wise, it depends on who's asking... Some are trying to figure out why I have "slippery hair," why I have an accent, or why I'm "light-skinned." So usually I have to give a mini-lesson. I'm a Caribbean-American.... I have an accent because I was raised in the US Virgin Islands (which is US territory) so I am a citizen {blue passport}, and my grandmother is white (which is why I'm "light-skinned with slippery hair"). [sic]

The responses by Marie, Nina, and Anne reflect how some Caribbean immigrant students deal with the ethnicity conversations by non-Caribbean people. The findings suggest that the participants have to address multiple topics in explaining their ethnicity to Americans, such as where the Caribbean is located, naming various islands located in the Caribbean, their citizenship or family citizenship status, and their heritage to explain physical ethnic attributes— non-kinky hair, light skin, dark skin, or mixed ancestry.

Some Caribbean immigrant students are compelled to help others understand their ethnicity, while other participants choose not to go in as much detail or explain to non-Caribbean people about their ethnicity. Marie stated that she explained her ethnicity to others based on their “level of understanding”. Anne said she gives “a mini-lesson” about her ethnicity when she notices individuals are “trying to figure out” why she looks different. Those that do not choose to give less details about their ethnicity, may be

frustrated with the lack of multicultural understanding or may be tired of having to constantly repeat themselves about their ethnic and cultural history to others.

The interview data suggest discussions about ethnicity were a complex process because some individuals were unaware of the Caribbean islands and others would mistake them as African American. Some participants noticed that many entities and people categorize them as African American. To avoid the hassle, some Caribbean immigrant students explained that they just state Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American to make people feel more comfortable or relate to them. However, when they were asked to elaborate further, many participants explained their exact immigrant history. Ashley stated, "I will say that I am black and if I am asked about my background I will explain that my mother is Jamaican and my father is British." The findings indicate that these participants feel that American bureaucracy is not diverse in their expression of racial categories. For example, racial categories listed on employment and admission applications. Itzigsohn and Giorguli and Vazquez (2005), explain that "encountering the American system of racial classification leads immigrants towards the need for racial self-definition within a limited number of socially recognized categories" (74). Therefore, it is problematic when American people assume others' racial ethnicity.

Despite this difficulty, Caribbean immigrants still value their racial ethnicity and Caribbean heritage. This finding is consistent with previous literature explaining that "some national-origin groups are more likely to embrace racial/panethnic labels" (Feliciano 2009:150). To explain further, Caribbean students that are foreign-born or have Caribbean immigrant parents (born in the Caribbean), are more likely to identify their racial ethnicity as a national identity (Feliciano 2009). When I asked Natalie about

the importance of her Caribbean identity, she replied, “I feel a sense of pride and strength when I state that I am Caribbean, especially Jamaican. I feel that my people are strong, ambitious [sic] and beautiful.” When I asked Jessica about her Caribbean identity (island national identity) and culture, she said:

I'm really proud to be Jamaican. Jamaicans are among [sic] of the most beloved people of this world... I want to continue to learn patois and learn traditional/modern Jamaican dances. I need to learn to cook more Jamaican dishes so I can keep the traditions of my family alive.

Edward said, “I enjoy having a different accent, different customs, different culture, and different food. It sets me apart but also makes me more content not coming from such a busy and easy American lifestyle.” Sara also explained why being Caribbean is an important part of her life (pan-ethnic identity), “Being Caribbean is an important part of me and my family life because the lifestyles, morals, and rituals are so much different from the Americans. We tend to respect and understand the differences yet the similarities and it brings individuals more closely.” The participants believed that their Caribbean identity and belief system were essential in maintaining their educational discipline while pursuing a college degree. Caribbean ethnic affiliation and culture is relevant to understanding the academic achievement of Caribbean students and graduates. The findings of this study indicate that a student’s Caribbean identity and culture are significant because it gives these participants a sense of cultural belonging and social standards to uphold while living in American society. Shields and Behrman’s (2004) research explains that the children of immigrants have strong family and cultural values that deter them from participating in deviant activities. The findings of this present study are important because the participants felt that by having these cultural factors they were able to be academically and socially successful. Caribbean families provide the

foundation (attitudes, values, culture, and tools) for the academic success of their children. As stated before, Caribbean families and other outside influences strongly influence a student's motivation for academic achievement.

WORKING TOWARD "THE CARIBBEAN DREAM"

Why do these Caribbean students and graduates aspire to be academically successful? Respondents have a combination of internal and external influences that motivate them to achieve and be resilient in the face of obstacles they may encounter during their pursuit of higher education. McMillan and Reed's (1994) research explains that resilient students have "an internal locus of control and healthy internal attributions, taking personal responsibility for their successes and failures and showing a strong sense of self-efficacy" (139). In this study, internal influences are reflected in a student's self-determination for degree attainment and their personal motivations and ambitions for the future. External forces (family, peers, mentors, organizations, and advisors) help to shape, inspire, and reinforce achievement ideologies.

The students I interviewed have both internal and external influences for being academically, economically, and socially successful. When I asked Natalie about why she desired to become a college graduate, she replied, "I want to be the first of the children in my family to graduate college and make my parents proud. I also want to 'make something of myself'! I have dreams of going to medical school." Kimberly also discussed why she wanted to become a college graduate, "It was important for me to be a graduate, because to me it meant securing a better future. And growing up in Jamaica, I think it was hammered into my head, that you needed to be well educated [sic] to be successful." The participants believed that by pursuing a college degree, they would learn

marketable skills, receive training, and become competent in their field. Marie described how she became a college graduate and discussed her internal and external influences:

I wanted to become a college graduate because it would allow me to work in one of the professions in which I was interested from the time I was a child...which all require more than a Bachelor's degree. It was important to me also because my family (especially grandparents).

Marie's internal influences are expressed as the personal ambitions she had as a child, while her external motivations are expressed through her family members, especially her grandparents. Myla explained, "I want to be able to have a good job in the future. It is important because I want to have a lot of money." Personal ambitions are significant motivators in understanding a student's academic achievement. These students understood that if they were academically successful and maintained their high academic performance, they may have better chances of obtaining other opportunities for themselves in the future.

In examining the internal attributes necessary for academic success, respondents listed many similar qualities such as being studious and ambitious, being self-disciplined, and having time-management skills. Angela explains why she is successful in college, "I am successful because I am dedicated to my program." When Myla was asked about why she is successful at school, she stated, "I study a whole lot and manage my time wisely". According to Angela and Myla, they need to not only have the encouragement of family (external influences), but they need a practical approach to success. For instance, they need to be organized with and prioritize their time and energy by putting their studies ahead of simple pleasures such as going out to clubs or parties. Lauren, a senior in college, also described why she is successful:

I believe I am a successful student at my school because I take the initiative to make change, I have the foundation to carry through and hold up my responsibilities, and I am driven. I have always been a student athlete, and with the pressure of being in the Honors Program and a collegiate athlete I knew the importance of time management. I also seek help when necessary. I realize I can not do it alone and have not accomplished all I have, alone. I am assertive and voice my concerns and issues the minute they arise.

Lauren explained that her academic success begins with her foundation, her Caribbean family (external influence) and she builds with internal traits such as leadership, diligence, and time-management. Lauren's response illustrates how you cannot just desire to be academically successful, but you must take initiative to build your own future.

External influences (family, peers, mentors, organizations, and advisors) are also important in examining why Caribbean students and graduates are academically successful. As discussed by McMillan and Reed (1994), resilient students use their time positively. In this current study, many Caribbean students use their time positively by being members of multicultural and academic organizations and/or being employed. Many cultural organizations empowered students to be academically successful.

Elizabeth explained, "I am a part and leader of many cultural organizations. I think that has given me a well-rounded perspective on the experiences of many different types of students, and allowed me to think outside the box." Ciara stated:

These organizations do motivate me. I am part of a social sorority, which gives me social support, and we have to uphold our first principle of academics in order to be in good standing.... And I am part of several cultural organizations, which motivate me to achieve in order to be a good representation of my people.

When students use their time positively they are more likely to be empowered to academically achieve (McMillan and Reed 1994). External influences are important because they help us to understand why Caribbean students retain their educational

ideologies and continue desiring academic success. The Caribbean students and graduates in this study exhibit resilient traits necessary for academic achievement. These resilient traits are evident through self-determination, perseverance, and personal ambitions for a future that has greater opportunities available to them than what is possible without a college degree. My study reveals that these students took an active role in attaining their degree as evident from several who were assertive and voiced their concerns.

A HELPING HAND: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS

Students I interviewed indicated that support networks, in particular, having mentors in and outside of the family, have helped them to maintain their college aspirations. Mentors included parents, extended family members, peers, organizations, and academic advisors. Mentors provided students with advice, empowerment, and in many cases served as role-models.

Many respondents described that the mentors with the greatest impact in their lives were women. This finding of women as empowering role-models is relevant to feminist theory (broadly defined). Bolles (2009) explains that “*Independent* is a word often used to describe West Indian (Caribbean) women and how they carry out their responsibilities” (276). The data allude to being taught by resilient Caribbean women. When I asked Anne about whom she considered her mentors, she responded, “In terms of mentors, I look up to my grandmother, mother, aunt, and older sister. I admire women of strength.” Anne further elaborated and stated:

My grandmother has always been my "quiet" in the storm. She always had this grace and strength. She kept me strong in my Faith and made sure I stayed grounded (She recently passed away). She always had a way of praying reverently and giving advice that kept the family together in turmoil.

Females are commonly leaders in maintaining the family unit and, for Anne and other respondents, women often passed down family values.

Participants also noted many other support networks such as friends, Caribbean peers, student organizations, and academic advisors. Angela explained that one of her two greatest mentors in her life was a friend:

He has been my biggest personal mentor. I could go to him with any personal issue that I have had and he does not judge me but is real with me. He has lots of past experiences that he draws on to help me with my personal issues. I appreciate having him in my life because I know that he wants the best for me.

When I asked Elizabeth about her most mentors, she replied, “My most important mentors have been other students right at my school who I could look up to. Many of them were Caribbean or Caribbean-American like myself, and I was able to identify with them and be more comfortable with them.” Ashley also discussed an important mentor in her life:

I belong to an achievement program and we are given an academic advisor and she has acted like a mentor to me. She was absolutely critical to guiding me through the process of applying and entering graduate school as well as pursuing research work as an undergraduate student.

The interview data illustrate the various support networks identified by students and graduates as contributing factors for their academic success. Respondents described the influence of family, friends, organizations, and academic advisors.

The findings indicate that the participants have many support and social networks that help them remain positive throughout their college experiences and be academically successful. Students I interviewed are motivated to achieve a higher education because of their internal goals, Caribbean families and their infused social values, as well as support

networks. These support systems appear instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining student achievement ideologies.

PERSEVERANCE THROUGH ADVERSITIES IN COLLEGE

While responses indicate that these students are academically successful and able to persevere through difficulties, they also indicated challenges that some encounter. Respondents described several financial and adjustment challenges related to immigration history, diversity concerns, and racial issues stemming from the historical legacy of racism and discrimination toward African Americans in the United States.

Students encountered several financial difficulties Studying abroad for Caribbean students can also create immediate financial obstacles. Participants indicated that there were discrepancies in the cost of attendance such as living and food expenses that surpass provided financial aid. Financial obstacles that students reported were tuition fees concerning non-state residency, international tuition fees, having large educational loan contracts, and binding academic or athletic scholarships. There are out-of-state and international tuition fees that are of greater financial cost than the fees of American students. Obtaining education abroad for international students is costly. International tuition rates were often three-fold the cost of tuition for American students. Another problem concerning financial difficulties is that international tuition fees and loan contracts are expected in US currency. As discussed in a previous chapter, one US dollar is about 2.7 Eastern Caribbean dollars. Financial agreements made to pursue education in the United States may create further problems in the future, concerning the repayment of those loans. Students with educational visas are expected to return to their home countries after obtaining their degree. Therefore, the funds that they will use to repay their loans

will be obtained from earnings gained in the Caribbean, which means that they would have to use more of their income in the Caribbean to meet the financial obligations to the United States.

Attempting to meet these financial obstacles can lead to other problems, such as time-management issues related to being enrolled in school full-time and having a full-time job. Respondents also reported having difficulties in maintaining a social life, which is important for Caribbean immigrants that arrive in the United States without family or friends. Students indicated that they overcame immediate financial obstacles by obtaining employment, working two jobs, or obtaining supplemental income from their parents. This allowed them to obtain additional funds for basic living costs. When I asked Myla if she experiences any difficulties in school, she said, “Yes, it is really hard to pay for school. Working two jobs and going to school is really tough. I hardly get a chance to sleep or even take care of myself. Sometimes, I get extremely upset and feel like quitting. I hardly have a social life.” Nina reported, “...a few financial problems here and there but that’s why I got a second job. That was great but now its time management. This semester I almost killed myself as far as workload.” Although the majority of respondents had a substantial amount of funds from their parents and others had educational loans, some Caribbean students still experienced a discrepancy in the funds needed for educational and basic living expenses. Despite these financial difficulties, many of the participants were able to maintain their academic success. These findings illustrate the self-determination of many Caribbean immigrant students to obtain a college degree.

Many Caribbean students expressed how they effectively and efficiently met financial obstacles by taking action to find solutions to their problems. Marie, a college graduate and doctoral student, discussed her financial challenges:

For undergraduate school my parents paid for school and I had a part-time job on campus (limited by my immigration status). After my freshman year, I had employment in Housing/Residence Life that provided on-campus housing. For graduate school, I have an assistantship that waives my tuition, and housing, and I pay fees and other school expenses out of pocket.

Marie's response expresses difficulties that many students may encounter while being employed and also a full-time student. However, in Marie's case and other Caribbean immigrant students they also have to deal with the difficulties of being far away from home and adjusting to a new American culture, which is so removed from their own Caribbean culture. Marie's response depicts how she and other Caribbean students are resilient in their pursuit of education. Despite the difficulties of being employed and being a full-time student, Caribbean immigrant students are able to persevere through these challenges and are even more than successful at accomplishing their goals than the average student. Respondents appear to exemplify characteristics of resilient students by taking personal responsibility for their own success (McMillan and Reed 1994).

It is common for first-generation college students to experience some challenges in understanding what to expect in college and what roles they are required to fulfill. When I asked Kimberly, a college graduate, about what adjustment difficulties she had experienced in college, she replied, "In terms of emotional preparedness, none of my immediate family members had attended university in the US or went to college away from home. So there was no one in my family to ask questions about things to expect,

how to adjust....” Angela, a college graduate and Master’s student, also discussed her transitional difficulties coming to the United States:

Having my family with me during the transition to the US was quite important. Starting college in the US was quite traumatic. Even though we interacted with Americans in the islands, I remember feeling traumatized by being surrounded by only white people on my first day of college. Also, they all had on the same clothes - JEANS - which was quite strange to me. Worst of all, they ALL looked the same to me. I was truly out of my element. I cried to go home the first day on campus. However, I survived because my parents were close by. [sic]

Angela described feeling “traumatized” on her college campus because her school lacked cultural diversity. Her variants of the word “trauma” bring out a powerful image of exactly how she felt on that day about the lack of diversity. She was not just bothered but she was emotionally distressed about this issue, and the only thing that helped her overcome this difficulty was her family. Angela’s response depicts a larger issue that exists in American society—expectations of assimilation--when she stated that “they all had on the same clothes” and “they ALL looked the same to me.” Similar to Angela’s experience, other participants with recent immigrant history also experienced this culture shock when living in American society. Commonly, Blacks often compose a small proportion of the entire student body on American college campuses. In the Caribbean, Blacks are the dominant population. However, when entering the United States many Caribbean immigrants find that positions of power and social systems are often operated by whites. Therefore, when Caribbean immigrant students are pursuing higher education, they find that many students and faculty do not racially look like them and infer that American Blacks do not occupy as many positions of power. The reference that American Blacks do not hold many positions of power appeared to be quite an anomaly

for Caribbean immigrants because in their home countries, Caribbean Blacks hold many positions of power and Caribbean Blacks are the dominant population.

Respondents indicated another difficulty that they experienced in college—the lack of cultural diversity. These social realizations were upsetting, particularly for Caribbean students with recent immigration history. Myla discussed diversity issues on campuses:

We have 43,000 students; however, African Americans only make up about 1,500 of those students. I think they should find a way to get more minority students into the school. I know for a fact that they encourage minority students to go to the branch campuses instead of main campus.

Other respondents were also disappointed about the lack of diversity their universities. These findings may suggest that Caribbean immigrant students desire multicultural experiences on college campuses and in the social world.

Another challenge described was racism and discrimination on university campuses. Some of these experiences appear to reflect the historical legacy of racism and discrimination toward American Blacks in the United States. When I asked Mary about what she disliked the most about her university, she replied, “The sense of segregation between Blacks and whites. Though there is some integration, it is evident that whites are still very unwilling to integrate or vice versa.” She elaborated further about why she felt segregation remains, “Because people are taught to be by their parents, the society is still immature in terms of diversity, they don't travel enough and so their experience of anything different from what they know is nil or close to that, or pure ignorance.” Ashley answered likewise:

Students may treat me differently because they assume that I am “ghetto” or from a low-income area and thus not as competent...Students may talk to me in Ebonics assuming that I do not know how to speak proper

English. I think many of the white students at my school come from small towns in which they have never had interactions with minorities. The only images they have of minorities, specifically black people, are ones in which minorities are “ghetto” and only speak Ebonics.

Ashley mentions the word “ghetto” in her interview, which often means an individual that participates in street mannerisms i.e. slang language, and/or usually wears baggy or slouched clothing. Ashley’s quote illustrates the significance of race and language in the academic setting. How the use of “ghetto” talk i.e. street language or Ebonics in academia can lead to misperceptions by whites about a student’s abilities or social class background. More significantly, Ashley’s response denotes a larger problem that exists in American society—that simply having Black skin can affect how whites respond to, treat, and/or label people of Black ethnicity. Ashley’s response shows how whites, specifically students, have stereotypical images and conceptualizations of Blacks in the United States. Whether or not a person is of African or African American or Caribbean descent, they can still be inaccurately labeled by whites because they are simply Black and thus treated differently. This can create problems of hostility in the academic classroom, which would present as another academic barrier for Caribbean immigrant students. As Ashley and other respondents explained they do not want to be labeled by these stereotypical images or negative conceptualizations by whites of American Blacks. Lorick-Wilmot’s (2010) research explains that Caribbean immigrants “often distanced themselves from negative stereotypes by employing different and more positive meanings associated with a Black racial identity that diverge from mainstream understandings of race” (91-92). Ashley explained how she felt about being labeled, she stated: “It fueled me to prove them wrong and excel even more than I already was in my classes. I began to realize that college was an experience that opened my eyes to just how close-minded some people still are in

today's society.” While some students might become discouraged by this kind of prejudice and discrimination, Ashley and other participants in this study reported that they often disregarded these negative experiences, and became increasingly motivated to be successful as well as disprove these individuals’ inaccuracies about Caribbean Blacks’ intellectual and academic abilities.

The interview data indicated that they have experienced situations of racism, prejudice, and discrimination from whites due to their immigrant history and cultural distinctions such as accents, dress, and hairstyles. Anne, a college graduate, reflected on her experiences of discrimination on her college campus:

Students thought I was ignorant due to my accent. I only had one negative experience with a teacher who singled me out frequently because I was from the Virgin Islands. I believe he was trying to be "culturally aware," but instead, most times, it seemed that he looked down on me.

When I asked Anne further about her feelings concerning this experience, she replied, “Thankfully, I’m from a racially diverse family so I’m not as sensitive to discriminatory acts towards me. Negative thoughts push me to prove others wrong through my actions.”

Lauren also answered and stated:

What I like least about my school is the intolerance and lack of understanding of some members of the student body. As diversity is very prominent and widely celebrated, many students still refrain from interacting with international students and make unkind and ignorant remarks to these foreigners.

The responses by Anne and Lauren illustrate the resiliency of Caribbean students to persevere through negative encounters of racism, prejudice, and discrimination and maintain their drive for achieving a college degree.

The findings suggest that Caribbean immigrant students also encounter some challenges similar to other American students, and they include financial difficulties. However, the findings indicate that the economic barriers that Caribbean immigrant students experience while attempting to obtain a college degree, is often at a greater financial cost than American students. This also may imply that Caribbean students that are international students or out-of-state residents may have significant financial debt in the future due to educational loan contracts. Despite these foreseen challenges, many Caribbean immigrant students understand the value of obtaining a college education and agree that having a college degree outweighs the potential financial risks. Racial diversity is important to Caribbean students and the lack of multiculturalism on college campuses can be present as problematic issues for Caribbean students. In spite of these financial, social, and problematic racial issues and obstacles, participant responses demonstrate the determination of many Caribbean immigrant students to overcome such difficulties and continue to be academically successful on college campuses. More significantly, these findings are important to recognize because they show that not only are Caribbean immigrant students and graduates able to overcome difficulties in higher education to obtain a college degree but that they are also able to do so while excelling in their academic studies.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study is one of the first studies to examine the experiences of successful Caribbean immigrant students in higher education. I used a qualitative approach to obtain insider point-of-views and detailed accounts from Caribbean immigrant students and graduates about their lives and learning experiences in higher education. The major themes observed were that Caribbean immigrant students and graduates develop their collegiate aspirations through a combination of internal influences such as personal goals and ambitions and external influences, and primarily, their Caribbean families.

The findings suggest that Caribbean immigrant students have a high-level of consciousness about all the reasons they have become successful. A key to their academic and social success is never forgetting where they come from, their Caribbean family, Caribbean nationality, culture, and legacy. Remembering the sacrifices of their family has helped these Caribbean immigrant students to remain disciplined in their academic studies and be appreciative of their afforded opportunities. Caribbean immigrant students and graduates recognize that there are a series of factors that contribute to their success: individual motivation and ambition, infused family values, the Caribbean family, Caribbean culture and immigration history, national pride and resiliency, as well as support networks such as the extended family, peers, organizations, and advisors, and

having a personal and/or professional mentor. The findings of this study suggest that having social resources in college is important to the success of Caribbean immigrants.

Retaining Caribbean culture and maintaining ethnic affiliation is significant to the success of these Caribbean immigrants. The findings suggest that Caribbean immigrant students value their cultural identity, while engaging in dualist cultures. For these Caribbean immigrants, their Caribbean culture and ideologies provide more substance in comparison with American belief systems. In other words, Caribbean immigrants' culture is significant because it is primary compared to American culture and their culture is also, to them, viewed as an integral and essential aspect of their personalities and identities.

The findings from this study provide a greater knowledge about the resiliency of Caribbean families. This study contributes to the limited research discussing Caribbean immigrant students and graduates in higher education. The study helps the discipline to understand the reasons why Caribbean immigrant students and graduates are able to be academically successful in American schools. My research also enhances our overall knowledge about Caribbean immigrants and their characteristics that allow them to persevere through obstacles they encounter in the United States and/or abroad.

There are many strengths to my study. First, I am a Caribbean-American researcher. Being of similar ethnicity I feel that it has helped me to gain access and rapport with the participants, as well as allow me to better understand this Caribbean population. Secondly, the data collected from this study is authentic, meaningful, and substantial because it is rich in detail and utilizes the viewpoint of Caribbean immigrants about their own experiences. Thirdly, the qualitative approach utilized in this study

allowed me to observe participant's textual wording and see how they interpret and view their lives.

In examining limitations of this study, the sample was predominantly female and only had one male respondent. The sample size was small (n=15). However as this research study was formulated in the south, which in itself may be viewed as a geographic limitation, and this population usually resides in the eastern region, obtaining 15 participants can be viewed as successful. Qualitative studies cannot be quantified or generalized to the greater population; generalization was not the goal of this study. The goal of this study was to find Caribbean immigrants, to gain their perspectives about why they are successful in academia, and to better understand Caribbean immigrant families.

This study could be further enhanced by extending research to all Caribbean nations and also by having more male respondents. This research serves as a framework for future studies, as limited research qualitatively or quantitatively examines this particular group. More Caribbean researchers are needed in the field to accurately assess and understand this group. Future studies could include a larger sample of Caribbean immigrants and examine multiple topics not yet addressed in the discipline of Sociology. A study could examine language (i.e. patois) retention among first, second, and third generation Caribbean immigrants. Further studies could interview Caribbean immigrant parents, examine how parents view their lives abroad, and understand what strengths exist in the family as well as understand what difficulties they may encounter abroad. Studies could also learn about family dynamics in Caribbean households from the parental perspective. Finally, studies could examine similarities as well as differences among different Caribbean island ethnics.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your Caribbean ethnicity? What islands are you from?
3. What is your grade point average?
4. What is your school classification?
5. What is your School Major?
6. What is your School Minor?
7. What is it about your major that you like?
8. How do you feel about your college/academic program? (For example: Is it a good academic program? Is it student-friendly? Do you enjoy it? Is there anything that you do not like about it?).
9. Why did you come to the United States?
10. If your parents also came to the United States, why did they come?
11. What did your parents tell you college was like in America? Why did they think this?
12. How did you think college would be before you went? Why did you think this?
13. Did your school meet your expectations? If no, why? If yes, how?
14. Why do or did you want to become a college graduate? Why is this important to you?
15. Who do you consider your mentors?
16. Who has been most supportive of you in achieving your academic goals?
17. What types/kind of support did your family provide for you while in college? Why? Please describe and explain.

18. Has anyone discouraged you from achieving your academic goals? Why do you think this happened? (Please explain this experience.)
19. What would you like to do with your degree?
20. Do you feel that obtaining a college degree will give you more opportunities in the future?
21. What kind of opportunities do you think you will have?
22. Where do you see yourself five years from now? With your career, life, etc?
23. What do you like MOST about your school?
24. What do you like LEAST about your school?
25. Why do you think that you are a successful student at school?
26. Are you a part of any organizations?
27. Do you feel your school is helping you achieve your goals? If yes, how? If no, why?
28. How do you pay for school?
29. Is there any special scholarships/program that you received financial support from? Are any of them Caribbean scholarships?
30. If you had to work to pay for school? How did this affect your life/school?
31. Have you ever had any difficulties in school?
32. Have you ever experienced racism or discrimination by students? Faculty? Others on campus? Tell me about this experience.
33. How do you identify your ethnicity with others? For example: Do you say Black, Caribbean? Or does it depend on whom you are speaking to? Why do you think this is?
34. Do you identify or have ancestry with an Amerindian/indigenous Caribbean Population? (Ciboney, Arawak, Carib, Taino, etc...) Please list and why.
35. Is being Caribbean, an important part of your life? Family? Why?
36. What are some Caribbean values that your family thinks are important?

37. Is education an important value in your family? Explain.
38. Do you feel having Caribbean values has helped you through college? Please explain.
39. What islands are your parents from?
40. How long has your family lived in the US?
41. Did your parents go to college? If no, why? (Did your parents come from an area where you had to pay for high school education?) If yes, where? What is there degree in?
42. Do your parents want you to graduate? If so... why is this important?
43. If you could give advice to a new Caribbean student about being successful in college, what would you tell them?
44. If you could change or improve anything about your college experience what would it be?

APPENDIX B

RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Academic Classification	Caribbean Born	Caribbean Parents Born	Immigration
Nina	Bachelor's Degree Doctoral Student	Y	Y	Solo
Myla	Undergraduate Junior	Y	Y	Family
Mary	Undergraduate Junior	Y	Y	Solo
Elizabeth	Undergraduate Junior	N Caribbean- American	Y	Family
Natalie	Undergraduate Sophomore	N Caribbean- American	Y	Family
Anne	Bachelor's Degree	Y	Y	Family
Ashley	Undergraduate Senior	Y	Y	Family
Ciara	Undergraduate Senior	Y	Y	Solo
Jessica	Undergraduate Junior	Y	Y	Family
Edward	Bachelor's Degree	Y	Y	Family
Sara	Undergraduate Junior	Y	Y	Solo
Angela	Bachelor's Degree Master's Student	Y	Y	Family
Lauren	Undergraduate Senior	Y	Y	Solo
Kimberly	Bachelor's Degree	Y	Y	Family
Marie	Bachelor's Degree Doctoral Student	N Caribbean- Foreign (Abroad)	Y	Family

APPENDIX C

SUBREGIONS OF THE CARIBBEAN



Subregions of the Caribbean,
Thomas Boswell, 2009;
Understanding the
Contemporary Caribbean,
2009; p. 20

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