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Black, Mulatto and Light Skin: Reinterpreting Race, Ethnicity and Class in Caribbean Diasporic Communities

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STATE OF THE RACE

CREATING OUR 21ST CENTURY
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

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BLACK, MULATTO AND LIGHT SKIN: REINTERPRETING RACE, ETHNICITY AND CLASS IN CARIBBEAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES

Marc Prou

White supremacy is the unnamed political system
that has made the world what it is today.

Charles V. Mills

in recent years, Caribbeanists of different academic specialization and intellectual orientation have demonstrated a renewed interest in the unholy trinity of race, class and ethnicity matters. The renewed interest has reflected a continued, but rather unsystematic attempt to account for the social characteristics of race, ethnicity and class among Caribbean people, both at home and abroad. In fact, that renewed interest represents a compelling reason for the search for a new analytical approach to reinterpret these socio-historical characteristics, which began in 1492, and took shape during the plantocracy era. There is no general agreement as to the fundamental dynamics of these various characteristics among Caribbean Diasporic communities. Indeed, several directly contradictory views have emerged from research in this field.¹ In this essay, I will address a topic that is at present left aside: Caribbean "racenicity"²—the issue of race, ethnicity and class as Pepi Leistyna cogently advances.³ I will argue how the socio-political paradigm that attempts to evaluate the relationship that exists between black/brown, light skinned/mulatto, and class orientation in Caribbean Diasporic communities needs to be reinterpreted. I will attempt to do so only after race and ethnicity have been defined according to their class correlates and their relative political position and orientation subsequently addressed.

This essay is at the same time very ambitious and very limited. It is ambitious because it attempts to reinterpret the impact of social class on race and ethnicity among Afro-Caribbean peoples at home and abroad in comparison with African-Americans and Cuban-Americans. I will in fact look at whether such relationship explains the persistent stratification and the present context in which Afro-Caribbean immigrants find themselves in their experience with race, ethnicity and class. Inevitably the attempt to talk about race, ethnicity, and class in the Caribbean or among Caribbean individuals living abroad raises a problem of operational definition and the familiar difficulties of establishing adequate boundaries. The common sense view would obviously focus upon that motley collection of stratifications to which reference is made when people speak of Caribbean transnational communities. It is limited because it purposely selects to analyze the socio-cultural history of the peoples in that region called the Caribbean, not focusing on the particularities of any specific groups or specific islands or mainland with its multiple subtleties, richness and variations. While it is not my intent to analyze every island or mainland Caribbean issue in the unholy trinity, rather I shall describe a few major tendencies.

CARIBBEAN RACENICITY AT HOME

The current ethnic power relationships manifested by the unequal distribution of wealth in Caribbean Diasporic communities is the direct result of colonialist influence on race and culture through exploitative practices of the plantocracy and selective immigration to create a Caribbean middle-class. Regional cultural domination from the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries was primarily Eurocentric, with Europeans having a more long-term impact on the post-emancipation period. Slavery and plantocracy played a pivotal role in the region insofar as establishing the manner of communicating with each other [slaves vs. *colored* vs. *whites*].³ The distinction among the slaves [slaves] was based on race and skin color. The Eurocentric activity in the Caribbean resulted in a class system that perpetuated white

supremacy and African subjugation. European plantation owners would take slaves for concubines, who then gave birth to children referred to as *mulattos*. These *mulattos* were referred to as *colored*. These *coloreds* were more likely to engage in relations with the plantation owners and gave birth to more children who would be referred to as *quadroons*, because they had one black grandparent.

This mating practice laid the foundation for providing non-threatening familial support (it obviates the need to have another family member travel to the region to help with the plantation activities), particularly during the later days of slavery. It was also a way for the slave to assure that the next generation would not have as stressful a life, in that miscegenation plays rather an important role as a transfer marker in social status.

The origin of the *colored* class also marks the beginning of the middle-class in the Caribbean. The upper class has always been the domain of the wealthy plantation owners or merchants who were white, while the lower class consisted of slaves.⁴ When white men and slaves (African or Indian) mated either to consummate a non-legal Creole marriage or because a white man made his female slave available to address his personal needs, their offspring were considered *colored*. The Europeans referred to these *colored* offspring as either *mulatto* (one African parent), *quadroon* (one African grandparent) or *mestizo* (Indian mother); all important distinctions, since the variable proportion of African and white blood inherited determined class designation.

Culturally this new middle-class group made it easier for the Africans and Europeans to influence each other culturally. This new sociocultural mixture would be referred to as the Creole society, which was based on integrating all races around the developing local culture and values, with the effect of altering the racist rationale for exploiting the slaves, by assigning value to their culture and beliefs.⁵ Traditionally, this was a very difficult challenge since many plantation owners refused to recognize black laborers as human beings, but the developing *colored* class made this effort possible. It is the emergence of this new class of

slaves in the power relation system of the plantocracy which transformed the socio-racial stratification of the Caribbean, and had a tremendous impact on existing beliefs about racial differences.⁶

In the Caribbean, socio-racial stratification proceeded from the cultural premises with the ultimate source of difference being appearance. Traditionally, as mentioned earlier in this essay, racial differences stemmed from functional role requirements. While roles for whites included plantation owners, managers, overseers, bookkeepers, lawyers, doctors, clergy, merchants and army personnel (at the core of their roles is a sense of individual expression and independence), the roles for the African and Indian slaves included field work, housework, and other labor intensive duties (the core of these roles is the subordination of individual expression and dependence). Interestingly, even a poor white man was afforded the social courtesy of respect for his race, merely because of the complexion of his skin. In fact, the complexion of a man's skin during the pre-emancipation period distinguished freedom from slavery.

Colored slaves were less likely to be considered for field labor, partly because most plantation owners believed that being of partly white descent made them unsuitable for various field labors. Instead, they were determined to be more appropriate for various skilled and semi-skilled duties because their proportion of white blood and lighter skin complexion predisposed them to higher aptitudes.

This deliberate designation of occupations based on skin complexion and race provides the basis of the tripartite class system of racial segregation observed in the Caribbean today: white Upper class, colored Middle-class, and black Lower class. The colored Middle class was educated in secondary schools afforded by their free status as the offspring of white men. Upon return to the community, they quickly enrolled in "white-collar" occupations in government and business. They were clearly different as a result of their educational exposure in that they were literate in European languages—usually English and they were considered cultured [Creole elite]. They were able to act responsibly in

roles never considered by free blacks, and certainly not their slave counterparts, in their Creole society, solely because of their European-based cultural refinement. Although the *colored* initially replaced whites as carpenters, masons, and coppersmiths, and in various other skilled capacities, as a result of progress made in education, the blacks soon took over these positions, leaving the colored to occupy white-collar positions. There was a trade-off however, while the *colored* Middle-class elite saw themselves in all respects as cultured, and equally as educated as the Europeans, they traded away any status in the Creole society or identification with either African or East Indian culture to secure a place among the upper class *white* group.

Politically, the middle-class group was instrumental in forming alliances throughout the Caribbean with the Upper-class merchants and ruling elite to articulate the interests of the masses, particularly in the area of trade, ensuring that products of small farmers entered the export markets. *Colored* involvement in the trade industry was helped along by strong alliances developed with newly immigrating entrepreneurial ethnic minorities, which included Jews, Syrians, Palestinians, Portuguese, and Chinese.⁷ Many of these immigrants were imported as indentured workers with the intent of providing a cheap, disciplined labor force.

The immigrants were integrated into the workforce, replenishing the rank of the lower class.⁸ However, because these immigrants were of light-skin complexion, it was much easier to assimilate into local commerce in the Caribbean, where many became itinerant peddlers (traveling from door to door), shop owners, small landowners, and tenant farmers. The immigrants rose rapidly in the areas of commerce, in part because they came from societies with traditions of literacy, trade, and accounting; and their eagerness to succeed in their new environment allowed them to take advantage of opportunities that the subjugated locals were either denied, or prevented from recognizing because of their limited station.⁹ From peddlers they subsequently would open small retail stores and develop import-export and manufacturing businesses which became quite prosperous. The immigrants' success was linked directly to their ability to exploit Caribbean resources, and to effectively utilize the *colored* elite

as intermediaries; again, the *colored* had linkages to both the black laboring masses, and to the ruling elite.

The alliance benefited two out of three groups by providing opportunities and financial support for the developing *colored* elite; thus forming an economically privileged class, while reinforcing the presence of immigrants as a powerful force in the region.

Today, the Caribbean is ethnically diverse, being composed mainly of Africans, East Indians, and mixed populations.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the distribution of wealth and political strength rests decidedly among the European and (mixed) colored elite ethnic minority. In fact, the persistently uneven distribution of wealth and power with its impact on cultural capitals is a direct result of "racenicity" construction, following mating between the plantation owners and their African/Indian slaves, which created a free *colored* middle class, and the subsequent exploitation of this class by immigrant entrepreneurs. Thus the emergence of a Caribbean *middle class*, whether as a default of exploitative efforts or deliberate action, assured that the majority African labor force maintained a voice in the economic, political, and cultural future of the Caribbean.

CARIBBEAN RACENICITY ABROAD

How the Caribbean *middle class* redefines itself in the United States has become a controversial issue. Caribbean individuals have long received attention for proving themselves to be the most successful black immigrant group. The disparities between the success rates of immigrant Blacks and native Blacks have called into question the historical specificity of racism and discrimination in the United States.

The first wave of immigration from the Caribbean region occurred between 1911 and 1920, most settling in New York City. In the 1920s, during the Harlem Renaissance, twenty-five percent of the population of Harlem constituted of the foreign-born blacks, mainly from the

Caribbean. In the 1930s, the arrival of Caribbean immigrants coincided with the arrival of southern African-Americans migrating North, which caused job competition and corresponding resentment and hostility. Immigration numbers increased in the late 1960s because of the 1965 amendments to the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, which had placed ethnic quotas on immigration, and also because of a ban on English-speaking Caribbean immigration imposed by Great Britain at that same time. As a result, between 1961 and 1970, 134,000 immigrants had arrived in the U.S. from the Caribbean, but between 1971 and late 1980, that number more than doubled with the arrival of the Haitian and Cuban boat people. In the 1990s, approximately five-percent of the African-American population, or 1.6 million people, were foreign-born blacks who arrived after 1970. The 1990 U.S. census reported that 1.1 million black Americans were of Caribbean ancestry. About sixty percent of them live in New York and Florida.

Afro-Caribbean immigrants hold a disproportionate share of black American success stories. Their average family income is now 40% higher than that of all blacks in the U.S. Nine percent are professionals, which is equal to that of native-born blacks. In the New York area, Caribbean blacks parallel the Chinese and Koreans in success. Their families seem stronger, and they live in better neighborhoods.

It is not often taken into account that the larger number of workers per family among Caribbean Americans could partly account for their higher median family incomes as compared to other black families. Another explanation is the larger proportion of skilled and educated workers among Caribbean black immigrants. Also, immigrants are willing to take the lower wage jobs when starting out that native-born Americans might refuse. One third of the recent arrivals hold service sector jobs and only thirteen percent hold professional jobs. It is the immigrants who have been in the U.S. a while and the second generation who hold a larger portion of the white-collar jobs. There is a myth that Caribbean Americans are doing better than African-Americans economically. This myth needs to be debunked since their situation is worse than that of

African-Americans and other immigrant groups whom they fall far below in both jobs and education.

Commonly, the greater progress made by white immigrants in contrast to American blacks has been attributed to economic deprivation and racism. The fact that black immigrants appear to be doing better yet they share the same legacy of slavery and have the same physical characteristics as American blacks calls into question the correlation between racism and economic mobility. Usually areas more dense in black population evoke a higher degree of white racism due to the greater perceived threat. However, despite the swell of new black immigrants converging in urban areas like New York and Boston, Caribbean immigrants were able to flourish. Some suggest that the success of Caribbean immigrants implies that white racism and discrimination actually lie within the black culture, a result of the influence of white supremacy influence. This view supports the argument of conservatives that the poor need to take responsibility for themselves and the answer is not reliance on collective action.

Economist Thomas Sowell devoted intellectual argumentation to the notion of Afro-Caribbean superiority. He credited their achievements to historical and cultural advantages. Sowell traced differences in present day accomplishments back to differences in slavery. Furthermore, Sowell said that the greater presence of commingling between white overseers and black slave women in the Caribbean fostered a class of *coloreds* that performed skilled tasks. The American south, however, had enough whites to perform the skilled tasks and therefore American blacks were (and are still) denied the opportunity to develop skills based on initiative and education.

It is misleading to think that African-Americans simply need to adopt the confidence and drive displayed by the Caribbean immigrants and that discrimination plays only an illusionary role in economic mobility. Sociologist Phillip Kasinitz and Professor Jan Rosenberg researched hiring practices in 1994 and discovered a pattern of positive discrimination.¹² Asa Hilliard, an educational psychologist at Georgia

State University, bluntly claims that the cohesive cultural identity endows them with "an imbued orientation for success."¹³ For instance, even the first wave of Caribbean immigrants from Jamaica were called *Jamaicans* or black Caribbean Jews, referring to their emphasis on hard work and education.

Kasinitz and Rosenberg's research as well as a study conducted by Catherine Newman revealed that employers were favoring applicants who live farther away from the job site, which would be primarily the immigrants. The employers preferred the unfamiliar to the familiar.¹⁴ The studies concluded that individual attitudes were not the key determinant in acquiring jobs but rather personal prejudices and racism. Employers feel more comfortable with condemning American blacks as a whole when they can point to Caribbean immigrants as a cultural ideal. The relative success of Caribbean immigrants does not prove discrimination against American blacks does not occur, but actually encourages a false sense of justification in discriminating against American blacks. Ethnic groups are being played off against one another.

In American society, immigrants usually profited from assimilating into the mainstream. However, this is not true for all Caribbean immigrants. People from the Caribbean face a unique dilemma because their advantage is actually dependent upon their ability to explode the myths. Assimilation is disfavorable to Caribbean blacks because they would be grouped with the American blacks they resemble, and subjected to the same negative stereotypes. Whereas, if they maintain their distinctness, they benefit from the "good" stereotypes. Therefore, immigrants have more incentive to speak with a detectable foreign accent and to assert their separate ethnic identity. Distancing themselves may serve as a form of protection against cultural devaluation. Caribbean immigrants exhibit a high level of resistance to moving into African-American groups, as Caribbean immigrants may share the white stereotypes of native-born African-Americans, seeing them as lazy, disorganized, obsessed with racial issues, and unstructured in family life and child raising. American blacks in turn stereotype the Caribbean immigrants as arrogant, selfish,

submissive to exploitation in the workplace, oblivious to racial tension, and unfriendly toward black Americans.

The choice of Caribbean immigrants to distance their identity from that of native-born African-Americans stunts racial solidarity and enhances friction. Some immigrants from English-speaking Caribbean islands identify themselves with England rather than Africa, celebrating British holidays and events, playing cricket, and valuing British culture and customs. Other Caribbean immigrants identify strongly with their Caribbean heritage, which leads to a tightly knit community closed off from African-Americans. These Caribbean immigrants talk nostalgically of the islands, and may join one of the many nationalistic Caribbean benevolent societies and community-based organizations.

There have also been many Caribbean immigrants who adopted African-American culture uniting in common cause with African-Americans in the fight against racism and for equality. Brooklyn, which has the largest concentration of Caribbean people, has been hosting the Caribbean-American Day Parade on Labor Day for over thirty years. This carnival is a celebration of Caribbean Diasporic communities and African-American music, dance, and food. Marcus Garvey, a political organizer born in Jamaica, founded the United Negro Improvement Association in New York City, which attracted both Caribbean immigrants and then African-Americans to unite in a mass movement of black solidarity. Other African-Americans of Caribbean descent who have helped develop and diversify African-American culture have been poet and novelist Claude McKay and John Brown Russworm, actor Sidney Poitier, and more recently literary writers like Edwidge Danticat, Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid and Patricia Powells among many others.

Many Caribbean immigrants may initially think that African-Americans in general exaggerate racial discrimination in the United States. This is a reaction to the fact that many come primarily from countries where black people are the majority and have significant roles in white-collar jobs. They cannot understand what it is that weighs black Americans down because most have not grown up under domination, but rather, encounter

racism in America after having developed in a country in which they were the majority. African-Americans who have grown up in the United States are constantly dealing with white supremacy and reminded of the social significance of being black. Afro-Caribbean immigrants have not been reminded of the social significance of being black. In other words, they have not been routinely reminded of their racial identity. Having this diversity in racial consciousness allows individuals to focus on goal achievement rather than racial discrimination.

After spending some time in the United States, though, they begin to change their view as they themselves experience racial discrimination. Although they may expect their distinct culture and identity to be acknowledged, they have no choice in how they are viewed, as black Americans, by the dominant white group. When whites do acknowledge differences, they still may see them as just another African-American group to be targeted with racist stereotypes. For example, Haitians are associated with voodoo religion, "boat people," poverty, and AIDS.

The more recent a group's entry in the society, the more resistance there is to its assimilation. More of the second-generation populace of Caribbean immigrants has been identifying with African-American culture. The youth who do choose to identify with African-Americans are more aware of both the limited opportunities for blacks and racial discrimination. Those who identify as ethnic Caribbean perceive more opportunities and the value of individual effort. Mary Waters contends that the interaction of race and class influences how the children of Caribbean immigrant background will identify themselves ethnically. Upwardly mobile second-generation youth tend to maintain ethnic ties to the Caribbean while poor inner-city youth assimilate more readily to the black American culture surrounding them.¹⁶

First-generation Caribbean immigrants tended to distance themselves from African-Americans, stressing their national origins and ethnic boundaries. They have faced pressure though to be identified as black. In fact, instead of being compared with other immigrants, like the Chinese, in terms of their adjustment and success, they are compared instead to

black Americans. Second-generation Caribbean immigrant descendants can be more ethnically invisible because they lack their parents' distinctive accents. They must actively assert their ethnic identities, otherwise they will be seen as African-Americans. There may be negative consequences toward adopting an African-American minority attitude toward school and work opportunities with diminished aspirations and, worse, diminished socioeconomic outcomes.

American identified, second-generation Caribbean teenagers assimilate to the American black *subculture* in the neighborhood with ease. They speak Ebonics with their peers, listen to rap music, dress in baggy clothes, and accept the peer culture of their black American friends. They adopt the oppositional poses that American black teenagers show toward academic achievement. They reject the immigrant dream of their parents about individual social mobility, and regard, as do their American peers, the United States as a place where blacks face blocked social mobility.

In the 1950s, Paule Marshall, a second-generation Barbadian-American herself, wrote a novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which chronicled the development of a young girl born in Brooklyn, New York who struggled to establish an identity for herself. Her parents were immigrants from Barbados who handled their adjustment to America differently. Selina's mother, Silla, adopted the materialistic values of the dominant society while her father refused to compromise his own dream for the American dream, and longed to return to Barbados. At first Selina resented that her mother and the Barbadian community seemed to be imitating the white oppressors. Her mother had even voted down an idea that black Americans be allowed into the Barbadian Association. However, Selina experienced an encounter with a white lady who focused on her blackness after she had performed brilliantly at a dance recital. Selina then reassesses the intentions of her community as survival driven and she realigns with her community. At the end of the novel, she sets out for Barbados to reconnect with her roots and rediscover the culture that the Barbadian community had lost. Once enriched by her cultural heritage she returns and tries to work out an acculturation of the best of the two cultures.

Besides time of entrance, another factor affecting assimilation for minority ethnic groups is demographic factors. Geographic concentration retards assimilation. The first wave of Caribbean immigrants found themselves living with American blacks in racially segregated neighborhoods, but by the 1980s, New York had distinctly Caribbean neighborhoods. The post-1965 immigrants outnumbered previous waves and settled in Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Flatbush sections of Brooklyn. The mother in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* described the Caribbean-American effort to leave crowded Bedford-Stuyvesant for the more stately streets of Crown Heights: "Every West Indian out here is taking a lesson from the Jew landlord and converting these old houses into rooming houses...and now the place is overrun with roomers the Bajans getting out. Every jackman buying a swell house in dicky Crown Heights."¹⁷

The Caribbean immigrants retained a strong sense of identity. They differed from African-Americans, especially in religion. Caribbean immigrants were largely Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Voodoo practitioners, while African-Americans were mostly Baptists and Methodists. Caribbean immigrants introduced into the food culture of the black community plantain, guava, yams, cassava, and curry. They have specific folk tales, songs, and superstitions. Caribbean immigrants to a great degree have not experienced biological or primary structural assimilation. Marriage to African-Americans is uncommon, especially among the well educated. When intermarriage does occur it is usually Caribbean males and African-American females.

The most critical factor in determining the degree of assimilation is visibility. For racial ethnic groups, separation remains more persistent than for groups who are only culturally distinct. It is the beliefs connected with physical distinctness that deter assimilation. While they may culturally have some commonalities with African-Americans, Caribbean immigrants still evince some ethnic similarities. The American Black population is evolving into a more diverse multi-cultural

ethnic category so that one can no longer make assumptions about cultural commonalities simply on the basis of racial designation.

The experience of Caribbean immigrants in the United States is a significant journey yet to be documented. Initial observation revealed a clear case of matters being more complex than they might at first appear. They are unique as black immigrants entering a country where assimilation for them would mean cultural devaluation and low social status. They have an extra incentive to retain their cultural identities.

RACENICITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

The United States has always been a destination for people trying to find a new beginning, to start anew. Nevertheless good intentions do not equal prosperity. It is a highly competitive global market economy, where your best asset is what you can offer. Depending on what you know as well as "being at the right time and the right place," may be the key to your survival.

African-Americans generally have had an extremely difficult time trying to advance and to reach a level of survival in neo-liberal capitalism. They have usually found employment in the lowest economic sector: the service industry. One saying that stands true for working-class African-Americans is "last hired, first fired." When Caribbean immigrants enter this country their expectations tend to be lower while their need for employment greater. For these two reasons, Caribbean immigrants will work for a much lower wage than African-Americans. Undocumented immigrants will work for even less, feeling that they are in a powerless situation totally dependent on their employer. The wages that these two groups work for are low in comparison to other Americans but much greater when compared to what they were making back home (if they even had a job). The results can range from accusations of job snatching, to strike breaking, or unemployment that leads to crime for survival.

The following excerpts highlight vividly the many trials and tribulations of African-Americans and Haitian immigrants as they face the Cuban-American power structure in Miami:

During the 1980s, the community resolved to improve its lot, while at the same time extending its new double-subordination discourse to Haitians. Yet racial solidarity alternated with class and ethnic factionalism as well as with economic competition. During the decade Black Americans became increasingly divided by class, as did Haitians; and both immigrant and native Blacks became increasingly ambivalent toward each other. These contradictory tendencies weakened their common voice, making it easier for all these groups to be lost in the fray.¹⁸

Portes further declares that, in 1980, Dade County did not award a single construction program or purchase order to a black firm; after establishing a new set-aside program, however, county projects gave work to 158 Black contractors between 1982 and 1990. Black participation peaked in 1985-86 when \$12.7 million worth of contracts, or 6.6% of the county total, was awarded to these firms.¹⁹

By 1990, the participation of Black contractors had shrunk so much that the numbers were closer to 1980 than where they should have been. Both native Blacks and newly immigrated Blacks from Haiti felt the reason had to do with the strong presence of Cubans. As Portes cogently puts it, "Whatever advances Black entrepreneurs and professional made occurred in the context of a rapid Cuban economic and political advances that threatened to confine Black successes to a mostly symbolic status. In 1987, still less than 2% of Dade County's Black population owned business, as compared to over 10% for the Cubans. Latin firms were much bigger in terms of both sales and employment."²⁰

Fueled by the clout of their enterprises and by their sheer numbers, Cuban-Americans moved into local politics and government. Whether or

not by intention, these advances were often accomplished by elbowing Blacks aside from positions of real power. For example, the black Miami city manager, Howard Gary, was fired in 1984 and replaced by Cuban-American César Odio, black mayoral candidates were repeatedly defeated, first by Puerto-Rican born Maurice Ferre and then by Cuban-American Xazier Suarez. In 1990, a Cuban-American, Osvaldo Visiedo, again bested a Black American, T.S. Greer for the position of Superintendent of Dade County schools. Greer had been with the system for thirty years, and served as the interim superintendent during the selection process. Many considered him the natural choice for the position. In reaction to his defeat Black leaders called for a one-day boycott of public schools. Over two thousand people attended a rally in front of the systems headquarters to protest the decision, 70% of school bus drivers observed a one-day walk out, and students' attendance dropped to as low as 20% in the same urban schools.²¹

Cuban-American leaders tried to stem racial divide by appointing Blacks as Miami's police chief three terms in a row. Black leaders questioned whether Cubans have always been as racist as white America or if it came with their climb to social prominence. A Liberty City activist stated:

Cubans are afraid of Blacks. Their experience in the United States had made them more racist than they were, and this got translated into fear... As they go up the totem pole trying to become successful, many Cubans find out that these white Anglos don't like colored folks, so if I am going to progress, I must take on some of the same behaviors of the Anglos. You don't discriminate, but as a way of doing business you begin to laugh at racist jokes, you talk about those niggers over there in Overtown... because you're surrounded by racist people and because it is more important in this moment of your life to pursue your own agenda.²²

While Black Americans were attempting to reassert themselves within the political community, Haitians were attempting to get their foot in the door. The Haitian economy grew from a negligible amount of firms in 1970 to 120 in 1985 to nearly 300 in 1990. Portes says, "They saw little Haiti as becoming a cultural and tourist attraction based on their drive and on Haiti's unique cultural attributes—world renowned painting, woodcrafts, French-Caribbean inspired cuisine, and numerous skilled trades."²³

When Cuban refugee groups entered the United States on inner tubes or rafts, they were rescued in the Florida straits and could count on U.S. sympathy or financial support. Haitians on the other hand, have had more claims for asylum denied than any other refugee group. When Haitians were rescued in the Florida straits they were returned to Haiti. The Immigration and Naturalization Service harassed those who made it ashore. "Public health officials repeatedly identified the new refugees as a health threat; in the late 1970's, tuberculosis were declared endemic among Haitians; and in the early 80's, the Center for Disease Control identified them as primary group at risk for AIDS."²⁴

Haitians once optimistic about life in the United States slowly realized the reality of race relations in America. They soon began to ally themselves with Black Americans, both groups coming together to fight racism and in doing so trying to benefit financially. Cultural differences soon began to drive a wedge between this newly formed solidarity.

Black Americans did not generally appreciate Haitians' business successes or other manifestations of the immigrant drive to get ahead at any cost. For their part, Haitians accepted Black American support in their struggles against racism, but they did not wish to be identified with what they saw as the poorest and most downtrodden group in the society. Each group feared and resisted the prospect of triple subordination: the double hegemony of Anglos and Latinos plus the ascent of another black-skinned group. Black Americans are

profoundly ambivalent about Haitians in Miami, who though "brother" in color, are regarded as a competitive threat in the labor market and the business world. Haitians, by the same token, resist being pulled down to the economic level of native blacks and of having their distinct immigrant identity submerged into that of the urban underclass.²⁵

Today in Miami race relations have not improved a whole lot. The situation has not gotten any better. Cubans point to the fact that their banks have given more loans to African-Americans, meanwhile they don't buy the arguments that the Cubans are exploiting them by not forming a partnership. Based on our analysis it is still a story of the "haves" and the "have-nots" in all three ethnic populations. Divisions continue to create more tension and a large underclass. There seem to be many questions and few answers but changes are possible. People must be made to understand that positive growth and financial gain can be accomplished by all, not just a lucky few. The only problem is that my last statement runs counter to (U.S.) capitalist ideology. Capitalism is where the problem lies, not with certain population groups.

For most Caribbeans in the Diasporic communities there are difficulties which they encounter such as: their ethnicity, race, language, class, color, culture or way of life that the media is quick to misrepresent these ethnic groups by stereotyping and blaming them for the rise of violence, rise in unemployment is also blamed on immigrants from the Caribbean that often fall in the most undesirable jobs in factories, restaurants, cleaning jobs and other menial jobs usually not sought by the Americans. Most Caribbeans in the Diaspora, being Haitian, Jamaican, Dominican or Puerto-Rican, encounter resentment and misunderstanding from the mainstream culture (i.e. US); if foreign then regardless of the prior condition of not being regarded as American citizens, this status does not exclude them from being as ill-treated as the native-born groups when it comes to stereotyping.

but the dynamic of racism and segregation is nothing new to Afro-Caribbeans since in the Caribbean color and class play an intricate part in society and most likely a poor black is from lower class while a poor white belongs to a higher status of society mostly by means of his color. The discrimination started with Columbus as part of the efforts imposed by European colonials to establish the Negro inferiority as a justification for their political and economic goals of exploitation. The institutional racism in the U.S distorts the multicultural and multilingual values that these ethnic groups bring to the mainstream with misconceptions and stereotypes.

As observed, the division among the people always has its roots in socio-economic realm. It's known that when Caribbean people migrated to the United States they arrived with certain skills. These skills were something they had learned in their homeland. The Caribbean immigrants were for the most part educated and carried skills and trades that were an advantage. In the African-American community often times if one were "light skinned", it was considered a plus. However, it was the *middle class* community who was educated professional, and attained the stature. Because of the African-American stigma and its history, it seemed that they lacked the opportunity the immigrants attained. The aggressiveness to achieve excellence caused them to try harder to climb that socio-economic ladder. They were often taunted by the African-Americans for their accents and some business ventures. As Kasnitz once observed, "if you West Indians don't like how we do things in this country, you should go back where you came from."²⁶

The above quote exemplifies the level of intolerance and animosity that characterize the ambivalence and mistrust between the African-American and Caribbean immigrant communities. There is always going to be that social boundary within the black community. Both African-American and Caribbean immigrant communities share a similar history of slavery with many of the same societal issues. Ethnicity played a major role in their lives. Their ethnic identity was a way of tracing back to their roots. For the Caribbeans in particular, one way of identifying their roots was by celebrating carnival. Carnival became very popular in the U.S. and

Canada, as well as in the islands. There is a popular myth that African-Americans were "stripped" of their identities. This myth is very pervasive among European social historians who often negate the fact that many Afro-Americans, beginning in colonial times, referred to their African ancestry through their religions and their culture. Although African-Americans were forced to adapt to the western world through the institution of slavery, they have resisted to a degree. However "many immigrants were able to sustain aspects of their Caribbean identities through links with home while they also contributed to the complexity of expanded African-Americans community"²⁷ Society creates the condition to perpetuate the triple stigma of race, ethnicity and class among all minorities as a divisive means. George Hermon illustrates this view when he states, "...racial groups are both status groups and interest groups whose concerns are real since race is a real phenomenon in American society."²⁸ Racial boundaries continue to be an impediment in society. There is a pervasive view that politically and economically blacks have advanced and racial disparity has gone down. "The Black middle class is on the rise" seems to be the trend in ethnic studies literature. But according to the *Encyclopedia Encarta 2000*, the conditions of African-Americans reflect this gloomy picture:

- Only 43% of African-Americans are homeowners
- One third of African-Americans now live in poverty, which is a rate greater than that of whites
- Employed blacks earn 77% of white wages
- Blacks have shorter life expectancies than the national average
- More than one million of black men are currently in prison.

These startling statistics were gathered a few years ago, however, they provide information that raises a critical question in our minds: "What would the future hold for both the African-Americans and those of Caribbean descent?" I may not have the answer but hopefully as a "race" we can come together to celebrate diversity and unite as one to overcome this stigma that has plagued our society. Amongst the black community, our ethnicity is evident. Today during the celebration of this carnival of diversity, all groups should come together to enjoy the event by

educating about its history and its ancestry. Hopefully, in the years to come this stigma will be erased and the global community will come together to erase this triple stigma of race, ethnicity, and class.

END NOTES

1. For a thorough overview of the issues on race, ethnicity and class in the Caribbean's social history, see e.g. William Green (1996), p.35; also Franklin Knight, (1998), and Joe & Clairice Feagin, (1996).
2. The term *racenativity* was coined by Pepi Leistyna in his essay *Presence of Mind*. He beautifully argues how the racist hierarchy has resulted in three general patterns of ethnic and racial behavior: "First, Most whites....Second, Groups that are racially subordinated, such as blacks....Thirdly, some members of racially subordinated populations come to believe in their imposed inferior status and consequently buy into the dominant paradigm by attempting to change their ethnic and physical beings in order to fit in. Racenicity is the result of the antagonistic social relations caused by the unequal distribution of power throughout society along racial lines. It is the product and driving force of an ideology in which whiteness has been a socio-politically and institutionally sanctioned marker of status" (p.65).
3. For a detailed account of such a relationship, see Raymond Smith, *The Marrijoal Family: Power, Pluralism and Politics*, NY: Routledge, 1996, pp.143-162.
4. Smith, Raymond, *ibid.* pp 148-155.
5. Abrahams, Roger D. *The man of words in the West Indies: Performance and the Emergence of Creole Culture*, 1998, pp. 15-17.
6. Smith, Raymond, *op cit.* pp. 145-152.
7. See David Nicholls' essay on the "Lebanese of the Antilles: Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Trinidad" (1992), for an in-depth comprehensive historical analysis of the impact of this new migration in the Caribbean region. In A. Hourani and N. Slechahi *Lebanese in the World* Lash Touris 1992, pp.341-360.
8. Look Lai, Walton. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918*, Baltimore, 1993, pp. 33-46, 75-86.
9. Johnson, Howard. *After the Crossing: Immigrants and Minorities in Caribbean Creole Society*, London F.Cass 1988, pp. 18-57.
10. Those of Africans origin constitute 80% of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, 93% of Jamaica, 95% of Haiti, and 11% of the Dominican Republic; the mixed [*Coloreds*] comprise 18.5%, 7.3%, <5%, and 73% respectively. See statistical breakdown of available background information from the U.S. Department of State: "Background Notes: Jamaica," "Background Notes: Haiti," "Background Notes: Trinidad and Tobago," "Background Notes: Dominican Republic," all published in March 1998.
11. Slaves in the Caribbean unlike slaves in America were given individual plots of land for personal crops, which provided them with early business experience not accorded to American blacks.
12. Employers were distinguishing between blacks they stereotyped as "good" and the ones they prejudged to be "bad". Employers deemed immigrants to be "good", "loyal", and willing to work hard. Thus they would more likely hire Caribbean individuals based on these preconceived images. The stereotypes prevailed throughout society.
13. Hillard, Asa, pp.
14. Employers were distinguishing between blacks they stereotyped as "good" and the ones they prejudged to be "bad". Employers deemed immigrants to be "good", "loyal", and willing to work hard. Thus they would more likely hire Caribbean individuals based on these preconceived images. The stereotypes prevailed throughout society.
15. For a more comprehensive analysis of the racial dynamics and ethnic relations see Feagin and Feagin (1996), p. 279. As Feagin (1996), cogently stated: "They want to be black; they are proud of being black; they just don't want to be black in the United States." They realize that blackness does not signify the strength it does in the Caribbean. Assimilating would mean giving up a positive image.
16. The matter attracts comments and analysis from various perspectives. These perspectives have considered the unholy trinity of race, ethnicity, class and gender deserves particular attention in diasporic discourse.
17. Marshall, Paule. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 1981, p. 312.
18. Portes (1993) *City on the Edge: Transformation of Miami*, p. 178.
19. *Ibid.*, p.179.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
21. *Ibid.*, p.183.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
26. See Kasnitz, *Caribbean New York*, pp. 46.
27. For more elaboration on issues of identity maintenance among Caribbean, see Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, p.167.
28. See George Hermon, Jr. *American Race Relations Theory*, (1984) p.117, Maryland University Press of America.