Invisible Men: Negotiating Parisian Colorblindness & Identity Amongst African Immigrant Youth Males

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INVISIBLE MEN:
NEGOTIATING PARISIAN COLORBLINDNESS
& IDENTITY AMONGST
AFRICAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH MALES

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Humanities
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Abstract

This research explores the process by which African immigrant youth males are accultaruing into Parsian society. The goal of this study is to provide a small window into the lives of several of these males in order to add to current research examining Parsian immigrant experiences. Current research literature primarily focuses on district factors influencing African immigrant experiences. My research compiles the narratives of three participants to show how these factors are impact ing Parsian African immigrant youth males.

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Chapter One

Introduction

My research explores the influence of African immigrant youth culture on notion of “colorblindness” and the interconnectivity of the Parisian pop culture and traditional African culture. Francophile African migration to Paris was sparked by postwar economic growth in France and the need for cheap labor during its Glorious Thirty Years from 1945 to 1975, better known as *Les Trente Glorieuses* (Stovall, 2012). This movement led to an influx of African migrants living on the outskirts of Paris called the *banlieues*, or outer suburbs, in order to separate these migrant workers from the general Parisian population. Most *banlieues* are the equivalent of public housing developments located within the confines of most U.S. central cities where residents live socially isolated and economically stagnate lives, whereas the city of Paris is the equivalent of the U.S. suburbs as reflecting an influx of expendable income, comfortable living, and access to cultural attractions.

The focal point of my study is the examination of the process of negotiation by the children of these African migrant workers between assimilating to French culture and maintaining African tradition and culture. This study also explores the desire of French-born African children to connect with the mainstream French society that fails to include their presence. (Cannon 1997).
This study will do this by examining the ways in which French-born African children deal with *de facto* (or customary) systems of racial oppression that include: residential segregation, police brutality, educational and economic inequalities within the *banlieues* and in Paris. Many first generation born children must sacrifice their overt African identity in order to progress within the French social system (Auslander and Holt, 2003). In the process of negotiating their space, African youth have created unconventional means of bridging the gap between their opposing French and African identities (McIlvaine, 2007). This ongoing struggle of identity and external oppression has recently led to several urban uprisings within the *banlieues*. The oppression of African peoples in Paris severely contradicts the French policy of “colorblindness.” Colorblindness is defined as the legal and policy-making process of France established by the Hate Speech laws of 1972. These laws established the inexistence of race and ethnicity in an embrace of a singular French national identity. Contradicting this practice are the inequities centered on housing discrimination, occupational marginalization, and a rigid social hierarchy (Gafaiti, 2003). My research explores the African immigrant male youth response to these constraints by bridging the gap between their African culture and identity and the acculturation process within Parisian society through examining pop culture, education, and employment. These factors reveal how and why they have the jobs in Paris that they do now, which is gradually changing how Parisians view African immigrants.
**Rationale for Study**

During the months of June and July 2011, I conducted a pilot study for an independent project through the Syracuse University Study Abroad Program entitled Paris Noir. My study abroad program culminated in a research paper entitled “The Image of the Black Woman in French Television.” My project’s initial findings introduced two key claims: a lack of black female representations in French television; and black females felt that black males had an easier time climbing the social ladder.1 These two claims led me to this proposal to expand upon the findings of my pilot study as a way to validate, disprove or complicate the assumptions of the women’s conclusions about the social mobility of African men. I decided to select a very specific population for this follow-up study. The black female population I interviewed in Paris included both African immigrant and African American immigrant women. Another initial conclusion from my interviews was that African American women participants had a different and dissonant acculturation process than my African women participants. In addition, my younger participants had varied experiences that led them to their occupations, social circles and use of their education within Paris. Thus, I synthesized my diverse desires into a way to learn more about a younger demographic and immigrant experiences to ask the question: do African immigrant youth males have an easier time climbing the social ladder within Paris? Moreover, how are African immigrant youth males negotiating their definitions of self-identification in Paris?

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1 Black- defined as a person of African descent (Konare, 2002)
Based upon the initial information gathered during my pilot study, one can infer that the over-simplification of the cultural and social negotiation process of African-Parisian youths undermines the rich fusions, binaries, and nouveau cultural explosions occurring in Paris today. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the information gathered and the generalization that there is a singular African-Parisian youth immigrant and immigrant-citizen experience suggests that this scholarship is important and perhaps groundbreaking, because it will explore and interrogate—and thereby—challenge the politicization of the African-Parisian youth caricature, so prevalent in French culture (Auslander and Holt, 2003).

**Review of Research Literature**

After examining previous research literature concerning first-and second-generation African immigrant males, Auslander and Holt (2003) concluded that young African immigrant males have layered identities that include: national, ethnic and cultural identifiers. Moreover, contemporary scholarship establishes the impact of the “black youth effect” in French culture (Thomas, 2007). Synthesizing multiple texts from research literature, several factors were identified that influence African immigrant youth males’ experience in Paris, France. These factors include: the political, social and legal implications of French “colorblindness” (Stovall, 2012); the effects of xenophobia in regard to immigration of North Africans to Paris, and the repercussions of their Muslim religious/cultural practices (Gafaiti, 2003); the institutional practice of undermining a dominant African and cultural identity through assimilation.
education (Filostrat, 2008); the role of Hip Hop within African youth culture, mainstream popular culture, and its use as a subjective voice within the banlieue (Cannon, 1997); the banlieue as a location where marginalized African populations have lived since its creation during the Trente Glorieues to separate the workforce from the privileged population (Clapson and Hutchinson, 2010); the African intellectual community as a source of knowledge; the demonstration of the transitive property of culture, in reference to the scholars within the community that are considered a form of the traditional griot (Gueye, 2001).²

Research literature affirms that different waves of African immigrants moved to Paris for a myriad of reasons (Thomas 2007) and that different time periods in Parisian history catalyzed the movement of African populations to Paris, France (Conklin, 1998; Fourastie, 1979; Allen, 2011).

Gaps within the research literature reveal a unilateral focus on the factors that influence African immigrant experiences and the differences between noir culture and mainstream Parisian culture (Konare, 2002). However, many African immigrants sense a tension between the disparity of a “color-less” policy and a legal system that allows for the manipulation of this system to engender racist experiences for its immigrant population, particularly within Paris (Kaim, 2008). Thus, there needs to be a focus on collecting the narrative stories of youth immigrant males who experience this tension between the superficial “color-less” policy-making and the reality of the racist experiences facilitated by the French legal system. As a result of examining relevant literature, my research will

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²Griot is being defined as a storytelling and chronicler of history within the African tradition (Gueye, 2001).
attempt to highlight the factors that influence how young African immigrant men 
self-identify and the experiences that mold their aspirations within the 
“colorblind” legal, political and social system of Paris, France.

Methodology

Statement of Purpose

The goal of my research is to add to the scholarship on immigrant and 
immigrant-citizen communities in Paris and the banlieue, by chronicling, 
amassing and analyzing data focusing on artistic expressions and life experiences 
of youth. Beginning with an exploration of the history of what I am calling 
“immigrant and immigrant-citizen space,” my work explores the various topics 
and ideas listed above as links made to demonstrate how the various topics 
cohere. Close study of select examples from the arts, including literature – 
imaginary, scholarly and journalistic—as well, as youth involvement in Hip Hop 
culture and other forms of political movements will be explored. Furthermore, an 
inextricable component of the research is qualitative based on interviews. The 
conclusive goal of my research project is to provide a more precise picture and 
understanding of the diversity of experience in African-Parisian youth culture in 
Paris, France. Using a qualitative constructivist/interpretivist format of narrative 
research methodology, my work addresses the following questions:

- How are African immigrant youth males negotiating colorblindness in Paris?
- How are African immigrant youth males self-identifying?
• Is colorblindness affecting the career choices of African immigrant youth males?

Theoretical Framework

The point of view that guides the focus of my research is “Parisian Immersion” (Thomas 2007). This frame of reference allows the study to pinpoint as interviewees different members of the African immigrant population who currently live in Paris, France. The rationale behind this “in-the-moment” interviewing process is to record a unique narrative that captures the African-Parisian youth population that I believe has not been adequately represented in the present scholarship and research. My approach encourages and allows for interviewees to tell their own stories alongside and in contention with the existing social, political, and economic climates. This perspective sheds light upon the “unspoken” colorblind mantra that exists in legal documents and everyday life in Paris and the effect it has had, and continues to have on the youth. Therefore, the goal of these interviews is to give voice to the silenced youth often torn between two worlds. In effect, the interviews and the analysis of political, cultural, and social spaces will engender a multi-layered narrative that examines the outward persona, the exploration of the inner-workings of a mental and physiological negotiation of the disparity between the two presentations; and based on this past and the present state of affairs, implications for the future will be illuminated. My methods of investigation are heavily based upon a series of three interviews that
will provide me, the researcher, with a lens through which to view their daily lives unhampered by external surveillance.

A limitation within my project is the small sample size of participants. Thus, it is impossible that their individual narratives can represent the collective African-Parisian community. Therefore, this pool of three participants can function only as a small window into a relatively large world or sub-culture that exists within Paris. Despite, the restrictive nature of this small interview group, I use a vigorous bibliography to provide historical and social contexts to augment their narratives. This effort will point out the need for and encourage future work that will hopefully suggest what I already believe necessary; a re-vamping of the educational, political, and societal infrastructures of Paris. The three narratives suggest that current legal policy and social structure within Paris have negatively impacted African immigrant males in regard to xenophobia and political censorship. Furthermore, that the prolonged practice of such behaviors has led to unrest and uprisings within the African-Parisian population and youth-led retaliations against gross infractions and contradictions of the national French motto, “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” meaning “Liberty, equality, fraternity,” (or brotherhood). Although, the French maintain this motto in form (legally), the function (practice) of this motto is subdivided by race, gender, geographic placement and socio-economic status. Thus, the negotiation process of African immigrant males is in correspondence with societal acceptance and personal identification.
Participants

Narrative research relies heavily upon the element of interviews. The participants for this project are individuals who have been selected as the primary preliminary interviewees for the exploration of Parisian colorblindness and its effects on identity upon African immigrant youth males. The criteria for participant involvement were based upon the following guidelines:

- African descent
- Age Range: 18-28 years of age
- Males
  Rationale: in contrast to my pilot study that included only females to examine if there are gender differences for social mobility.
- The French equivalent of a high school diploma
  Rationale: examine the effects of assimilation education on the lives of the participants.
- Participant(s) pursuing higher education
  Rationale: examine the effects of the removal of assimilation education from the curriculum.
- Participant(s) who immigrated to Paris from Africa
  Rationale: understand the differences in situational experience between Paris and Africa.
• Participant(s) who were born in Paris
   Rationale: understand the experiences of second-generation African immigrants.

• Participant(s) who were born in the banlieues
   Rationale: understand the experiences of youth males who live in the suburbs and how they may differ from experiences had within the city of Paris.

• Participant(s) who live within the city of Paris
   Rationale: understand the experiences of youth males who live within the city of Paris and how they may differ from experiences had in the suburbs.

• Participants(s) who have clear career goals
   Rationale: examine how identity and colorblindness may have affected the career choices of participants.

• Participant(s) who have a basic proficiency in English (both written and oral)
   Rationale: ensure that participants understand the questions being asked in order to protect the validity of the questions asked and answered.

Based on the above criteria, three participants were selected for data collection: Rene, Keita, and DJ Durty Mike. During my pilot study in Paris, France; I met these participants, and kept in contact via email, Facebook, Skype and Twitter. Rene is French-born. He is 20 years old and is of Angolan and Lebanese descent. He resides within the city of Paris, and is currently enrolled in business school. He works for Orange, which is the French national telephone company. Keita is a
student who emigrated from Mali to Paris to pursue higher education. He is 23 years old and resides within the city of Paris. DJ Durty Mike is a popular DJ in the noir clubs of Paris. He is 26 years old and is of Congolese and French descent and resides within the banlieue. In a prior conversation, DJ Durty Mike M shared, “they love Americans but they hate blacks. [When] you are American you can be French whenever you want…[when] it’s for Africans it’s difficult,” in reference to his understanding of the differences between African immigrants and Americans. More specifically, his comment speaks to the difference between his role as the interviewee and my role as an interviewer and our very different experiences within the same spaces. He perceives that Americans are more welcomed by the French to enter into spaces that he as a French citizen is not privileged to enter nor welcomed to enter into.

Data Collection and Analysis

The structure of the interview is based on compiling a narrative by following a two-step process that included both an email interview and a Skype interview. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured procedure, with three basic guiding questions that participants answered and further directed where the interview led. By following this two-step procedure I wanted to examine the differences between the two forms of written and oral interviews. The first to occur was an email interview with a series of questions. I selected this to occur first for the reason that it allowed participants to answer the questions at their leisure without the pressure of a time constraint. Also, it eased the initial
pressure of translating French to English, although I located a translator to assist in the transcription process. The written interview was more stringent in its form due to the time lapse of the back and forth interactions. Whereas, the second series of interviews conducted by Skype were conversational in manner allowing interviewees to branch off to areas that accentuated participant contribution interests/experiences.

Narrative research is best completed when following a multi-layered approach over an extended period of time. My approach included a series of both oral and written interviews, which provided my participants the opportunity to re-tell experiences and occurrences throughout their lives. By allowing participants to chronicle their narratives both written and verbal, I then examined what similarities presented themselves in these two formats. Also, I was able to see how over time their narratives expanded or changed. While compiling the narratives I analyzed them for themes that answered my research question.

**Research Implications**

The findings from this study will contribute to the continued scholastic conversations about the effects of the African diaspora, immigrant experiences, youth movements, social mobility and the ramifications of a “colorblind” society. It is my sincere hope that compiling the narratives of Rene, Keita, and DJ Durty Mike will help form a more complete picture of the current diversity of experiences for African immigrant populations within Paris. Moreover, that by giving voice to their stories these young men will find the strength to continue to
challenge a French legal system that refuses to acknowledge the totality of their identity.
Chapter Two

A Dream Deferred

The *Trente Glorieuses* (1945-75) was the largest movement of Africans to Paris. This thirty year period signaled a time in French history when immigration was welcomed and a foreign labor force was essential to the structural growth of Paris. This labor force for the most part lived outside the city of Paris and commuted to the city. As previously mentioned, the creation of the *banlieues* is a phenomenon of the twentieth century. The *Trente Glorieuses* was the French reconstruction period marked by structural development and growth; this period of time sparked an economic boom and opportunity for Paris to move into the modern era. In order to re-build Paris after World War II, an enormous workforce was needed to construct these edifices. Capitalism formed the basis of the new French economy that encouraged exponential growth of industry and consumption. The workforce that France recruited was its former colony citizens. Moving from francophone countries in Africa (i.e. Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria) these African immigrants moved to Paris not only to build modern day Paris but also to provide greater opportunities for their children. The thirty year period marked the suburbanization of Paris. The suburbs called *les banlieues* are mainly composed of the working class, immigrants and city-dwellers who relocated to the suburbs for a quieter life. An example of one of the oldest suburbs in Paris is Saint-Denis, a formerly
booming suburb that housed companies and athletic stadium with a small area designated for housing quarters.³

During this period of time within the banlieue, the birthrate skyrocketed, thus producing the first-generation of French-born African children conceived during the second half of the thirty year period – from 1960-1975. An important distinction in the living conditions of African immigrants is the difference between the banlieues and les foyers. The banlieues are the suburbs that surround the city of Paris; whereas, les foyers are housing conditions within the suburbs that were created to house male immigrants workers. Currently there are 700 foyers in France, 250 of which are located in the banlieues of Paris.⁴ The assumption of the French government was that immigrant workers had relocated to Paris to “cash in” on the booming industry and upon completion would return to their home country. Thus, citizenship for these workers never reached the forefront of French government policy. As the thirty year boom in French economic and social growth came to a close, it became more apparent that the African immigrant population had moved to Paris for good. The closing of the borders in Paris began around 1974 and a downturn in the French economy signaled that the glorious years were over, a situation directly impacted by the 1973 oil crisis which led to worldwide recession. A sharp turn occurred from open


borders and immigrants welcomed as an intricate accomplice to Parisian growth to a skepticism and sense of xenophobia by French citizens.\(^5\)

The economic depression in France ended the thirty glorious years of growth, and as a result French policy regarding citizenship and national identity came to the forefront. The Hate Speech Laws of 1972 addressed the growing hostility towards members of various ethnic groups and the need to regulate the defamatory press. Moreover, The Hate Speech Laws of 1972 were not created to directly address xenophobia and members of the African diaspora. Rather, these press laws were formed out of the shadows of World War II and the realization that the reality of the Holocaust could not be denied from existence.\(^6\) The rationale behind addressing race inevitably extended to the inclusion of the African immigrants, although it was not originally created to do so. The decision to embrace a singular French national identity and forgo singling out ethnic groups and race led to a subversive racism that is not realized at first glance. Even though race by law does not exist, the existence of xenophobia and the cultural practices of immigrants inextricably connected to race are prevalent.

The Hate Speech Laws of 1972 marked an important turning point in the legal reasoning of France.\(^7\) Discrimination was declared illegal; in addition, any and all racist press would be adjudicated. Race was removed as the basis for

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distinction amongst French citizens. As well as the concept of affirmative action based upon race. This French legal nomenclature introduced the concept of a “racially colorblind society.” It is important to note that the dismissal or rejection of race as a basis of formal discrimination does not mean it did not take place at a socioeconomic level. This reality contradicts the legal jargon that declares it a violation of French law, thus affirming the dissonance between French legislative form and function. Succeeding laws such as the Gayssot Act (1990) prohibit discrimination based upon ethnicity.

Despite urban myths, France indeed has a census. However, France’s census it is not the equivalent of the United States’ census. Race is not a question asked. Instead the French census is a headcount of population from each of the different cities and banlieues. The important distinction is that citizenship is equated with being a native born French citizen, while naturalized citizens are identified based upon the final question of the census “What is the country of origin?” Thus, France makes a meager attempt to keep track of the various countries represented within its cities and provinces. However, the race of these citizens is not emphasized. The census is divided between personal questions

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and habitation questions—those relating to the conditions under which citizens live.  

Questions of origin and country of birth date back to France’s imperialistic past. France maintained a direct rule approach to governing its colonies under the guise of integration. In the examples of Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and Benin in West Africa, these Francophone colonies were governed by the legal restrictions of France; however, aspects of the country of origin were maintained in order for colonies to feel that they were still allowed to keep part of their identity. Embodied in the work of Camara Laye’s *L’Enfant Noir* (1953), France allowed for certain cultural qualities to be retained. Yet, as these individuals grew up and embraced education, there was a stark shift in the movement from traditional-based African customs to forgoing these customs in order to embrace the French language, and a disengagement from what the French perceived as “primitive culture.” As waves of African immigrants relocated to France, and more specifically to Paris, a very conscious effort was made to avoid using race as a distinguishing or divisive characteristic. The caveat to this objective exclusion of race from governmental information gathering is the fact that racial differences are concrete and real. Although discriminatory language and policymaking is illegal, confrontation with race is unavoidable. Distinguishable by the origin of last name, education levels, and in-person meetings, race is the final piece of the puzzle that is examined by employers, educators and government. The phrase


“colorblind” can be thought of as a form of legalistic functioning; whereas, the practice of being physically blind to the existence of color has proven to be impossible. Moreover, an important distinction to make is the difference between American and French conceptions of race.

The present-day descendants of the first generation of African immigrants are now faced with a sense of “dialogical self” that may pose an affront to the concept of the singular French national identity. This internal evaluation consolidates the varied and complex experiences of a person, in order for to embrace a unified self-perception by the process of psychological synthesis. Creator of the “dialogical self” concept, Hubert Hermans, summarizes the definition:

A far-reaching decentralization of both the concept of self and the concept of culture. At the intersection between the psychology of the self in the tradition of William James [(DuBois's mentor at Harvard)] and the dialogical school in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin, the proposed view challenges both the idea of a core, essential self and the idea of a core, essential culture. In apparent contradiction with such a view, the present viewpoint proposes to conceive self and culture as a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can be established. Particular attention is paid to collective voices, domination and asymmetry of social relations, and embodied forms of dialogue. Cultures and selves are seen as moving and mixing and as increasingly sensitive to travel and translocality. Three perspectives for future research of self and culture are briefly discussed: the shifting attention from core to contact zones; increasing complexity; and the experience of uncertainty.

This definition can be made applicable to African males in France who are attempting to negotiate layered identities comprised of: being male, African ethnic origin, Parisian-French socialization, and a suburb geographic location.
Filtered through the lens of French government, the education system that instructs these young men stresses not only the importance of understanding academic subjects such as math and science, but also French language, national history, and culture. In primary school, there is not much discussion or inclusion of the role of Africa or African culture in formal education. Reminiscent of colonial education France superimposes the importance of identifying culturally with a national agenda.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, exploration of culture is an experience convened outside of the classroom. This policing of education directly correlates to the policing of the communities these students return to after a day at school. Established in 1999, the police de proximite is an extension of the police force stationed in the suburbs. Originally established as a community presence to curtail violence and as a form of pleasant surveillance, the police de proximite are currently viewed as an oppression force.

To add to the multi-dimensional picture of the Parisian immigrant landscape, the police de proximite have the power by law to ask for identification cards at any moment. These random checks for cartes d’identite underwrite a deeper concern, which is the desire to verify citizenship.\textsuperscript{15} The reality of the present conditions of the banlieues is that a mass population of undocumented African immigrants resides in Paris. Moreover, the role of undocumented

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[15] Selon, Caroline Ober. « La diminution à brève échéance des comportements délits du n’est pas l’objectif immédiat de la police de proximité. Son but est de renforcer le sentiment de sécurité des habitants », in La police de proximite. Une institution renouée en attente de résultats probants, Mémoire de DEA Droit et Justice (dir. Lorgnier), Université Lille II (2001-2002).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Africans is especially important in terms of tourism and the vending of tourist trinkets. For example, the majority of young African males that sell Eiffel Tower keychains are undocumented. This fact may seem insignificant, but considering the millions of people who travel to visit the Eiffel Tower and places like Notre Dame and L’Louvre and purchase souvenirs to take back home, the economic vitality of undocumented workers is undeniable. Although, citizenship and undocumented workers are currently contentious subjects in France, there is both a tolerance and intolerance toward this group of people. Thousands of Africans are deported each year as the French government cracks down on undocumented immigrants. However, the presence of undocumented immigrants in Paris will continue. The game of “cat and mouse” is played daily between “illegal immigrants” and the police in front of landmarks. The selling of their wares by undocumented immigrants will be in full swing and the moment the police are seen making their rounds, the sellers will abruptly pack up their items and run. This common sight is not a result of illegal practices in terms of selling items; instead it is because these men are undocumented and fear being singled out by the police and deported. Interestingly, after the police have completed their tour of the area, the vendors return from hiding and proceed with their sales. This back and forth of running from police and returning occur almost bi-hourly and every day. It is a vivid example of the passive/aggressive position of the French

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government in its treatment toward undocumented immigrants. Occurring within the city of Paris, this example marks the difference between life in the city of Paris and the suburbs.

The fact that many African immigrants live in the suburbs does not mean that an African presence cannot be found within the confines of the city of Paris. Located within Paris’s eighteenth arrondissement, Goutte d’Or\(^\text{18}\) or “Little Africa,” is a flourishing community with a large population of people of African origin. In recent years “Little Africa” has become a hub for undocumented immigrants living and working within Paris. It’s a community reminiscent of their native home. Lining the streets are shops that sell spices, clothing and food from various countries in Africa and the Caribbean islands. Restaurants vend dishes from Africa and hair shops cater to the large population of Africans within the neighborhood. Senegalese music can be heard coming from a barbershop that is converted into a club at night. Women are seen entering and exiting African hair braiding salons and seamstresses are seen diligently working on handmade dresses within fabric shops. Predominantly comprised of immigrants, this community is home to one of the largest open-air markets in Paris.\(^\text{19}\) This location is key in terms of identifying a vibrant and flourishing community of Africans

\(^\text{18}\) English Translation: Nugget of Gold

within the city, in sharp contrast with the suburbs that receive a lot of bad press about the economic, social and cultural lack of fortitude of Africans in Paris.20 “Little Africa,” can be thought of an epicenter of discussion and community gathering for Africans.

Central to this socioeconomic divide is the Parisian metro system, which is comprised of sixteen lines that traverse the country’s capital. These sixteen lines are distinct from the commuter lines that travel beyond the city’s limits into its suburbs. The official name of the Parisian metro system is *le Métropolitain* or simply *le Metro*, whereas, the commuter lines beyond the city limits to the suburbs are called the RER or *Réseau Express Régional*, meaning the Regional Express Network.21 The RER functions in conjunction with the metro system within the city limits. However, after leaving the city of Paris, the RER serves the suburbs. The RER is comprised of five lines (A, B, C, D, and E). Construction on the RER began in the 1960s to extend the Parisian metro system outside of the city limits. A local business tax (*versement transport*) was imposed to collect funds to continue the construction and completion of the RER. This tax continues to the present day, and has allowed for the expansion of the RER from one line to five lines. The final line of the E, is still being constructed and is set to be completed by 2050.22

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The Paris Metro

Source: RAPT (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens, or Autonomous Operator of Parisian Transports)
The Regional Express Network (or RER)

Source: RAPT

Although the Parisian metro system of *le Metro* and the RER run simultaneously, they do not run according to the same schedule. The Parisian metro opens at approximately 5:30am. The last train running is at 1:15am. On the other hand, the first RER train leaves at approximately 4:30am and the last trains run at 9:00pm. Moreover, ticketing fees associated with the two train systems are different. The metro system prices are typically higher and change at the end of every month, affecting the quantity added to one’s metro card. The RER
system is a little bit cheaper and prices for metro passes are also printed every month allowing for a more affordable option than the metro.  

Paris is recognized throughout the world for its clean, quick and user-friendly accessibility. However, one does not often explore the ramifications and the speculations for why the two trains run on separate schedules. One of the prevalent speculations for why the RER begins sooner is that many of the domestic public workers who clean the streets and work within the Parisian transportation system live in the suburbs and must commute to the city to work. Another speculation for why the RER schedule ends earlier than the metro is to keep out the suburban citizens. By cutting off the transportation system schedule, commuters must either leave the city of Paris sooner to catch the final train. Or they must stay within the city for the night until the trains begin running again at 4:30am. It is important to realize that if commuters stay within the confines of the city for the evening, it is quite costly, which suggests a class divide between the upper, middle and lower class French citizens. Although, it is commonplace in America for societal divisions to occur along the lines of racial and economic distinctions, the French socioeconomic division is based upon geographic location in relation to one’s proximity to the city of Paris. Further analysis suggests that race is an underlying factor to this division. France’s underlying and understated


25 "DJ M." Web interview. 5 April. 2013
racial divide is augmented within the African cultural community by music. Music reveals nuances to the written and auditory codification of Parisian socio-economic divisiveness.

Hip Hop culture and rap music have provided an important outlet for African American males. In the documentary, *African Underground: Democracy in Paris* (2007), men from various suburbs use rap as a vehicle of expression within these interviews. Excluded from mainstream discourse due to language and citizenship contingencies, rap is the form of artistic and political revolution used to combat the silence. To contextualize this documentary, it was filmed during the 2007 French presidential election. The producers explore the themes of citizenship, democracy and the use of Hip Hop culture and rap music as the politicization of speech. Contributors to the documentary discuss the realities of living in the suburbs and issues of immigration.

In order to understand the role of Hip Hop culture and rap music in Paris, an important concept to define is hybridity. Hip Hop culture is the cultural cross-section between African American origins, Caribbean and African colloquialisms, the Latin-based French language and religious references to Islam and Christianity.

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DJ’ing, break dancing and graffiti writing.\textsuperscript{29} France is the second largest market in the world for Hip Hop. Furthermore, Hip Hop was used within the documentary and conversation to express frustration against xenophobia, housing discrimination, and affronts to societal imbalances.\textsuperscript{30} Hip Hop is also used within \textit{African Underground} to address the urban uprisings of 2005 that occurred in the \textit{banlieues} of Clichy-sous-Bois, Montfermeil, Seine-Saint-Denis, Dijon, Seine-et-Marne, among others. At the root of these violent and on-going rebellions are crises against police brutality, poor housing conditions and racial intolerance. Considered by the French government to be agitators and inciters to riot, French rappers such as Booba, Rohff and La Fouine use their voices to speak out against the notion of colorblindness, or the lack thereof.

Despite expressing disapproval of Hip Hop within the \textit{banlieues}, French governmental leaders reappropriated the concept of rap in the presidential election. Current president Nicolas Sarkozy overtly expressed his disdain with suburbs such as Clichy-sous-Bois when in a visit to the suburbs he said he was “going to hose down the rabble of the suburbs.”\textsuperscript{31} This sparked a public outcry from the African community.\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, during the 2012 presidential


election, French nominee Francois Hollande used Hip Hop to reach an audience of voters in an unforgettable way. Using Jay-Z and Kanye West’s theme track to their joint album *Watch the Throne* (2011), Hollande places the song “Niggaz in Paris” along with a montage of images of his visits to different suburbs and images of youth and people of African descent together in a viral campaign video to entice a younger audience to vote for him. Interestingly, “Niggaz in Paris” is a song bragging about the lavish and excessive lifestyles of Jay-Z and Kayne West. The gross materialism and bravado of the song was used to attract the audience and engender a sense of pride in identifying with being a “nigga” in Paris.\(^{33}\)

Moreover, the fact that Hollande acknowledges this identity and makes it acceptable was crucial to his political success and is a far cry from Sarkozy who demonizes the suburbs and the people who inhabit them.

The sociological implications of using Hip Hop music to convey political messages do not stray from their American roots. In the years 2012-2013, the social ramifications of addressing social injustice and stratification between the *banlieues* and Paris were considered by French rappers. The physical and geographic boundaries between Paris and the *banlieues* that divide the people living within both neighborhoods are also addressed by rappers such as Cleo Le-

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Tan and Ahb Al Malik, who seeks to “call France out” about being racist”.\textsuperscript{34} Despite these physical boundaries, the national government legally recognizes one national identity. The American perception of “Niggaz in Paris” provides an image in stark contrast to the reality of the \textit{banlieues}. Furthermore, Hip Hop provides an important binary narrative between popular culture that is connected to the placement of American Hip Hop in Paris and the “underground” or sub-culture of African peoples in Paris, which uses hip hop culture and rap music as critiques of political and societal limitations.

\textsuperscript{34} Bourderionnet, Oliver. "A 'Picture Perfect' Banlieue Artist: Abd Al Malik or the Perils of a Conciliatory Rap Discourse in France." French Cultural Studies 22.2 (May 2011): 151-161.
Chapter Two

A Dream Re-visualized

The deferred dreams of the first wave of African immigrants during the Trente Glorieues are re-visualized in the lives of descendants. Second and third generation off-spring born and raised within Paris have different relationships with Africa than their parents. These youth view Paris as their home and Africa as their place of origin. The following narratives explore how youth are navigating their Parisian socialization in juxtaposition to their overt African identification. Going beyond the literature, the personal stories of Rene, DJ Durty Mike and Keita offer a peek into the effects of Parisian acculturation upon their lives.

Rene M. Ngadi

In the quiet neighborhood of Saint-Cloud, Paris, lives Rene M. Ngadi. Twenty one years ago his life narrative began with a love story. His parents met each other in the “City of Love,” better known as Paris. Rene’s mother was born in Guinea. She moved to Paris at the age of nineteen to continue her studies. His father, an Angolan immigrant, worked in a grocery store and spotted his future wife one day as she was shopping. After numerous dates, this father and mother were married and five years later
Rene was born. However, Rene did not come into this world alone; moments after he took his first breath, his twin brother Zoher Ngadi was born.  

The story of Rene’s birth is crucial to understanding the how his life would unfold after birth. During her pregnancy, Rene’s mother experienced medical complications that threatened the termination of the pregnancy. When prayer and bed rest seemed to not to be enough to save her child, she made a promise. She promised her doctor that if her children were born healthy, she would name her first son after him. Thus, Rene was named after the doctor that

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saved his life. This name of French origin would later serve a greater purpose than a reminder of the doctor who facilitated his birth.\textsuperscript{36}

One of Rene’s earliest childhood memories is growing up in Northern France. He remembers his mother left the door open and being a curious child he waddled out of the door. Alone in the corridor, his neighbor approached him. As he walked closer to the stairs, his neighbor pushed him. He recalls tumbling from the third to the first floor. If you look closely you can see a scar below his right eyebrow from this childhood incident. When asked why he thinks this happened: he rationalizes the occurrence was the result of racism. The Ngadi family were the only black people living in the building. At that time in the early 1990’s there was not a high concentration of Africans living within the north of France. Rene perceived that the presence of a black family was unsettling to their neighbors because there were so few black people living nearby. His mother is of Lebanese decent and appears to be white. However, the stigmatism of being married to a black man and having black children deepened neighborhood apprehension and familial isolation. Although, his mother appears to be white, she clarifies that she is African, born in Guinea but of Lebanese descent. Mrs. Ngadi is affected by the racism that her husband and children experience because she is considered being disloyal to the purity of the race by marrying a black man.\textsuperscript{37}

Despite the challenges of growing up in a neighborhood that opposed his parents’ marriage and the sometimes negative perceptions of a bi-racial household, Rene describes his life as an upwardly mobile journey. Beginning with

\textsuperscript{36} “Rene Ngadi,” interview by the author.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
his parents’ decision to move from Northern France to Paris, he trances an upward movement in the family’s trajectory to their present day comfortable life. He stated “My parents want the best for us (the Ngadi children), so they do everything to give us better conditions. Before living in Saint Cloud, where we were living in the 93 [suburb], it wasn’t a good neighborhood, and after living in the 93 [suburb], we moved to Saint Cloud to give us better opportunities.” This conscious effort of Mr. and Mrs. Ngadi to give their children everything they possibly could coincides with a hard work ethic and a reappropriation of the “immigrant dream” ethos. In effect, this ethos suggests that each generation must better itself and build upon the legacy of the previous generation. His father works as an engineer. His mother works in a handicapped center. His parents’ occupations have enabled them to move up the corporate ladder and increase their pay. The Ngadi’s career paths demonstrate an unspoken lesson to their children that with education and hard work, one can achieve employment upward mobility. This mobility has allowed the family to continue to improve their living conditions and embrace the Parisian ideal of living a “comfortable life.”

To use the colloquialism, “the apple does not fall far from the tree,” Rene cites his early desire to decide on a career as inspired by his parent’s dedication to their jobs. As a young boy he dreamed of becoming a successful businessman. This dream is rooted in the internalization of Parisian capitalism and the rationale that wealth equates to a better life. Further analysis can suggest that his dream of being a “successful businessman” demonstrates his parents’ successful

acculturation into proper society and the embrace of Eurocentric ideals of
patriarchy, benefits of capitalism and wealth as symbolic of a good life. Rene’s
ultimate dream is to facilitate business transactions for telecommunications
development in Africa. His desire to become both a successful businessman and
return to Africa is a *mélange* (mix) of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric ideals.
Within the Afrocentric paradigm, a sign of progress and success is to return to the
former community, to one’s original home and help build it up. However, it can
be conceived as a Eurocentric ideal to cash in on the treasures of the motherland
seen clearly in the diamond and oil industries. Rene realizes realization that
Africa remains a continent full of resources that need to be developed not only in
order to compete but to become self-reliant and detach itself from the neo-
colonialism forces of China, Europe and the United States. He believes that Africa
is what the world needs. Telecommunications is the link that can connect Africa
to international commerce and global conversations despite distance. This
understanding of economics, history and technology is very much rooted in his
education.\(^{39}\)

Like it did with his parents, education plays a clear role in Rene’s life. He
affirms that familial African-based education has served a greater purpose then
his school-based education. He can remember traveling to Africa at age of 6 or 7.
It was at this age that he realized that France was not as open-minded as its
constructed self-image liked to project. The very nationalist basis of bias of is
propagated in proclaiming its education as the apex of knowledge. He learned that

\(^{39}\) "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 19 Nov. 2012.
France was inherently invested in focusing its entire educational curriculum on national agendas. Thus, his experiences in Africa had a greater impact than his French education for the reason that what he learned about Africa in Africa was a sharp contrast to what he was taught in school. Overall, he believes that France does not have a good perception of Africa. Popular misconceptions about Africa include: that the continent is poor, there are little to no resources, the population is predominately uneducated and that people are uncultured. In Rene’s words, “in France you just learn bad things about Africa.”

The success of his acculturation into Parisian society can be measured by his level of comfort and ability to engage in relation to Parisians. He believes that his personal sets of friends are colorblind. He has a large social network that includes French, African, and international friends from various countries throughout the world. His perception of his friends being colorblind is complicated by daily “real world” experiences that pose an affront to this progressive image of Paris, France.

Recently, Rene boarded the bus and there were two seats open. As he proceeded to sit down next to a stranger, a white man told him he could not next sit down next to him. When Rene questioned him as to the reason, the man replied because he was black. The man declared that all black people are bad, they have no education and are the ones perpetrating all the mauvais choses qui passé en Paris—or, all criminal activity happening in Paris. Rene proceeded to explain himself to the man and plead his case against the stranger’s ignorance. He spent

40 "Rene Ngadi." Email interview. 19 Nov. 2012.
much of the bus ride, introducing himself, speaking about his accomplishments, and trying to present himself as an example of a good African living in Paris. Rene pleaded with the man to change his mind about the bad conceptions of African people. Rene attests, “I try to live my life to show that I have a good education, I work hard and I am an example of the good that black people contribute to France.” However, the stubborn white stranger was neither moved nor changed by Rene’s assertions. The stranger refused to reconsider his prejudice that all black people are delinquents.⁴¹

Awakened by his recounting of the racist experience on the bus, Rene continued with a second story. He preceded this second story with this phrase, “you know in France, the police have a lot of stereotypes of black people?”⁴² As an employee of Orange Company, a national and worldwide telecommunications company that accrues over 46 billion euros a year, Rene is privy to the best technology the phone industry creates⁴³. He carries two phones at all times, a Blackberry for work and an iPhone for his personal use. One particular day he was stopped by the police for a random controle d’identité (identity check). During their search, the police accused him of being a drug dealer because he had two phones. After showing the police a second form of identification that verified his role as an Orange Company employee, the police’s treatment toward him greatly changed. They were incredulous. They did not want to believe that a

⁴² "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 16 Feb. 2013
young black man could work for such a prestigious company. In their eyes it was “almost impossible for a black man to have such a good situation.”

A *controle d’identite* occurs at random and is protected under French law. The police can stop anyone and ask for their identification in order to prove their citizenship. According to Rene, these identity checks usually occur in metro stations. The police look for people to stop for these checks. In his observations, the police usually stop Black and Arab people. In particular, the Chatlet metro stop where the police apprehended him is a location where a disproportionate number of identity checks occur. In recent years these identification checks have become the source of fear within the African community. As a result of the influx of *sans-papiers* or undocumented immigrants, a random stop by police officers can result in an arrest and later deportation. Thus, when police arrive many Africans that are *sans-papiers* disperse in order to avoid these sometimes race-based and often times violent, interrogative and abusive identity checks.

One’s identification card in Paris represents much more than appears to the eye. When someone is applying for a job, not only do employers check the applicant’s resume and name. Job applications do not have a space for applicants

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44 "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 16 Feb. 2013.
to fill out their ethnicity, instead race is assumed by the origin of the family’s name. Thus, if an applicant has an Arabic or African last name it becomes much more difficult for one to get a job.\footnote{Rene Ngadi.} Not only does the origin of name matter, but also, where you live. If an employer sees that you live in a perceived bad neighborhood, there are negative connotations that accompany this address.

Therefore, two things matters in Paris: the origin of your name and where you live. Rene has learned from observations that, “if you are African, and live in a ‘bad’ neighborhood it’s over for you.” This realization is a bit of a contrast from his personal story. His blend of an African last name and a French first name has put employers at ease. Moreover, his home address of Saint-Cloud, middle to upper class neighborhood, suggests four things to potential employers: he is multiracial, he is educated, affluent, and most importantly not a threat to the system because he “is one of them.”\footnote{Rene Ngadi.}

These uncomfortable realities are a driving force behind his immersion into corporate France and among wealthier clientele. Rene has dedicated himself to moving up the corporate ladder within the Orange Company. At the age of 21, he has already risen to the rank of a business developer. He contextualizes his personal work ethic by stating:

I work hard. Because I want to prove that despite all the stereotypes, you can work hard, I don’t want to be a model. I just want to show that being black isn’t a handicap like they used to say. You can be successful.\footnote{Rene Ngadi.}
Rene’s career experiences differ from his twin brother’s within the workplace. Rene’s French first name has allowed him greater opportunities to overcome social barriers. His twin brother’s name is Zoher. The name Zoher Ngadi is a combination of an Arabic name and African name—a double strike against his job applications. Furthermore, Zoher has a darker skin complexion than his fair-skinned brother Rene. Regardless of these two challenges, Zoher’s employment as a sales assistant at BMW was facilitated by his geographically acceptable home address and enrollment in a university.\(^{51}\)

Moreover, Rene’s ability to acculturate into Parisian society is augmented by his communication skills. Besides his fluency in his mother tongue of French, in school he learned Italian, English and Dutch. His newest venture is learning Swedish. The ability to communicate in several languages has allowed him to advance in his career at an unusual pace for both his age and race. Thus, it is no surprise that he is confident he will become a force to be reckoned with in the telecommunications field.

Although he speaks several languages and has traveled throughout the world, he firmly believes in maintaining an integrated identity.\(^{52}\) He self-identifies as mixed, “I am from Lebanon and Angola. I’m proud to be mixed.” This identity extends beyond just a racial characterization; it includes his assessment of personality.

I think I have one identity. But my identity evolved with time. When I’m traveling, it’s a way to learn about myself and affects

\(^{51}\) "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 08 March. 2013.

\(^{52}\) "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 08 March. 2013.
the evolution of my identity at the same time. I’m open-minded, I’m generous, I’m ambitious, for me my goal in life is not to be rich, it’s to be happy. I think that life is beautiful. I like to be generous and kind to people, that’s why I’m a referee for blind people. I like to meet new people and to travel. It’s very important for me to open-minded. I think one of the best ways to learn about yourself is to move to other countries and learn how you can adapt.  

Rene’s varied and layered life experiences have allowed him to question Paris as a colorblind place. Instead, he views Paris as a melting pot comprised of populations of people from every corner of the world. Moreover, Rene rationalizes that these immigrant populations have made Paris their own. He attests that within the city of Paris, you can find Chinese, Latino and African neighborhoods. Contradicting his romantic portrayal of immigrant populations living in the “city of love” is his opinion Paris is not open-minded. He concludes that the value of having a diverse population of people in a concentrated area is thwarted by the stereotypes and social glass ceilings of Parisian society.  

There is no denying the sheer numbers of Africans who live in Paris. According to Rene’s observations, the majority of African immigrants living within the city of Paris, live within the eighteenth arrondissement. This neighborhood is shrouded by negativity by those who live outside of the quartier or neighborhood. His personal critique is that many of the immigrants living within the arrondissement continue to live as though they are in Africa and refuse to assimilate to Parisian society. Rene uses the pronoun “they” as a general term to encompass the African population living within the quartier. In his opinion, a

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53 "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 08 March. 2013.
54 "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 08 March. 2013.
lot of French people judge the community in the eighteenth arrondissement, because these African immigrants do not try to integrate into French society and culture. This creation of a community within a larger community has allowed immigrants to create a sense of home far from the Africa complete with a plein air (open air) market selling produce and products imported straight from Africa. The presence of Africa is felt strongly in the eighteenth arrondissement Africa from the scents in the air to the black faces walking along the streets.

In Rene’s opinion there is a difference between “real” French people and the immigrants who move to France. “Real” French people are defined as citizens who have had generations of descendants living in Paris. Immigrants who moved to Paris for various reasons are not defined as authentic. He defines authenticity as being fully acculturated and unconsciously receptive to French ideals. Rene believes that the citizens born and educated in Paris are the population of people who hold strong to the negative stereotypes that cannot possibly define all immigrants within Paris. Immigrant families whose education did not occur in Paris and social behaviors were cultivated in France do not typically ascribe to these stereotypes. Growing up in Paris, Rene believes that French education teaches stereotypes because it neglects to educate students on areas outside of France. The curriculum stresses through its lesson selections that France is the

55 "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 23 March. 2013.
57 "Rene Ngadi." Skype interview. 23 March. 2013
best, therefore it is unnecessary to learn about other cultures.\textsuperscript{58} Rene Ngadi’s life represents a complete acculturation to France and Parisian society.

In terms of explaining the world beyond Paris, Rene’s tone became apprehensive. He divides the Parisian suburbs into two parts. There is a “bad” part of the suburbs that houses the immigrants and \textit{delinquance}, or delinquent youth population. The other independent part of the suburbs is the middle class hub. Considered to be the “good” part, the middle class lives within the business district of the suburbs to avoid the high tax bracket that accompanies the Parisian area code. This middle class population lives along the immediate fringes of Paris; whereas the majority of African immigrants live in suburbs on the outer fringe of the city.

The suburbs outside of Paris are rarely referred to by their neighborhood name. Instead the citizens refer to their various suburbs as: “91, 92, 93, 94, 95, and 77.”\textsuperscript{59} These listed suburbs are located in the second ring of the Parisian metro map or along the outer fringe of Paris. The most notorious neighborhoods of the outside suburbs are located within “93.” For example, Saint-Denis is known for its dangerous \textit{quartiers}, but also equally well-known as an important business district outside the center of Paris.\textsuperscript{60} Rene works within the business district of Saint-Denis, independent of the residential neighborhood.

\textsuperscript{58} “Rene Ngadi.” Skype interview. 23 March. 2013


Meeting DJ Durty Mike was an unforgettable experience. In a sweaty and dark basement lit by only flashing lights and fog refracted laser beams, Mike was in control of this Dionysian center of debauchery called Le Prince Nightclub, his head bowed and his fingers navigating two turntables. His only acknowledgement of a successful set was a head nod thanking the drunken young women for their thunderous screams of applause and lust. His presence was distantly magnetic. Lifted above the dance floor, he did not look out over his kingdom. Instead his eyes were riveted on two things: his turntables and laptop. Bartenders brought him a complimentary bottle of Grey Goose that he sipped in between songs.

After his set, I approached him asking if he’d be willing to participate in my research project. Our conversation was a musical test. He wanted to know my
favorite rappers and musical groups. The most important question he posed was “what do you think is swag?” I said, “I don’t believe in swag, I much prefer class.” In response to that statement, he pointed out a man that he knew from his neighborhood and analyzed him. He calculated the price of “swag,” this young man sported $160 Jordans, $300 True Religion jeans and a $250 Hugo Boss button-down. But something was out of place; the young man sported knock-off Ray Bans sunglasses and cubic zirconia earrings. Mike proceeded with his didactic lesson in swag; not only was the young man unemployed, but aspired to replicate the song lyrics that he heard reverberating through the speaker system. It was economically unfeasible to support the club lifestyle that the young man projected as suggested by the song lyrics. Although he did not admit it, Mike played a role in disseminating these images to clubgoers. His journey to becoming one of the most famous DJ’s in Paris begins far earlier than his current meticulously-constructed image as one half of the DJ Duo Les Clones.61

At a loss for words when asked why he wanted to become a DJ, he replied, “I can’t answer you. It's the logic for me. It was my destiny; I didn't [start] out for this. I stole turntables and mixers and then I began to mix. I already understood the mixing technique.”62 His musical training began as a young boy listening to a variety of genres of music and French DJ mixtapes. He learned how to scratch at the age of 16 and by the age of 17 he was already getting jobs in various clubs. During Mike’s childhood, French DJ’s were among some of the

62 “DJ M.” Web interview. 25 March. 2013
best of the world. DJ Cut Killer taught Mike about East Coast rap and crowd communication, DJ Cream and DJ James taught him about West Coast rap and how to make smooth transitions between different genres of music. He met his DJ partner during one of his travels to New York City at the age of 20. After a brief conversation several onlookers mistook them for brothers, or more specifically twins. This formed the basis of their gimmick; they advertised themselves as twins, brothers in music under the tag name “Les Clones” beginning in 2006. It was during this period of time that they took Paris by storm, performing at some of the most popular Hip Hop and underground clubs in the country. DJ Stan, his partner, or “twin,” was more classically trained in the art of mixing to complement Mike’s ear for selecting an ingenious mix of both the old and the new school genres of Hip Hop. Their stint as pseudo-twins and a DJ duo was short-lived. Fame, international travel, and all that comes along with stardom came too quickly, and their bond was not strong enough to handle the tension. DJ Stan was offered a job as a producer and left the group.  

Music is an outlet for Mike. Amidst all the changes that have occurred in his life, music has remained constant. Tattooed on his right lower arm is the phrase “C’est du son qui coule dans mes veines en BPM,” which means “music runs through my veins.” Along with his binate interest in both French and international music, Mike is a mélange or mix of French and Congolese ancestry. His father was born and raised in Brazzaville, Congo, to a well-to-do family. At the age of 20, his father decided to move to Paris, France, for a change in scenery.

63 "DJ M." Web interview. 25 March. 2013
Described by his son Mike as a “hustler,” he had his hand in many activities none of which were exactly legal. He gained much respect in the African Parisian community, because he was born to a well-respected family in the Congo, but also because of his own hustle. Mike’s father differed from many other Congolese men in the hustling game, for the reason that his business ventures went beyond the African community to the inclusion of the white community. His neighbor at the time was a beautiful French woman, who at the age of the 21 fell in love with a Congolese hustler.  

After the two became a couple, Mike’s parents left the city of Paris and moved to the South of France where Mike’s father got a job working at the lowest level for French company. However, over the years tension mounted: three children were not easily supported on such a poor income, and after paying the bills there was no money left. Mike’s father missed the surplus of money. He missed the lavish lifestyle of the Congo and the quick money associated with hustling. He wanted his expensive clothes, cars, and vacations back. When his father returned to hustling and quit his day-job, Mike’s mother filed for divorce and the three children were divided between the two parents.

At the age of 15, Mike moved with his father to district 95 of the outer suburbs. This suburb is predominantly an African neighborhood considered by Parisians to be banlieue défavorisée or a bad neighborhood. It was here that Mike learned the importance of making money. In this southern suburb, survival was

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64 "DJ M." Web interview. 31 March. 2013
65 "DJ M." Web interview. 31 March. 2013
the motive for making money. Everyone within the neighborhood had a hustle that financed their livelihood. DJ’ing was Mike’s first hustle. Mike describes his hustle as the safest thing to do because he was “softer” than his father. He did not feel that he could join his father in the family hustle that included illegal and dangerous activities.66

The ninety-fifth district, where Mike and his father lived was socially divided between the predominantly African population and the growing population of Arabs, who were seen as a threat. This conflict between African and Arab inhabitants reached its peak at school. It was at school where Mike “lost his innocence”.67 He described school as a tough place where he had to learn to defend himself. Looking back at this period in his life, he said students fought each other for no reason. The best teachers were not sent to the ninety-fifth district of the suburbs where Mike was a student. Instead, the suburb schools were manned by teachers left over after the Parisian city schools selected teachers. By the age of 16, Mike had become disinterested in school. He believed that higher education was not “made for him.”68 Instead, he concluded that life was the best teacher. As a result of his mother’s persistent prodding, he completed his baccalauréat, (the equivalent to a high school diploma). It took him five years to complete but after finishing his exams, he turned his full attention to DJ’ing.69

66 "DJ M." Web interview. 31 March. 2013
67 "DJ M." Web interview. 5 April. 2013
68 "DJ M." Email interview. 14 December. 2011
69 "DJ M." Web interview. 5 April. 2013
With the influx of many high profile artists such as T.I. and Swizz Beatz that were either mixed or apparently light-skinned, Mike found a growing audience that welcomed him into their clubs based upon his appearance. Many club promoters likened him to teenage star Chris Brown. Bearing light-skin was fashionable because it was deemed more American. The American Hip Hop scene is considered paramount to other locations in the world; Parisian clubs used American constructs as the golden standard. This positive attention bolstered Mike’s stagnant self-esteem. Growing up, not many people gave him a second look. His fair skin was a reminder that he was of mixed ancestry. His image was Americanized and he primped for photo shoots, exclusive club openings and celebrity meet and greets. Being a DJ opened up a new world far from the “jungle” of the schools grounds and the conflicts of the suburbs. Although, he was fair-skinned and a DJ, he could not play in every club in Paris, his career was confined to playing in Hip Hop or black clubs. Mike believes his restriction to Hip Hop clubs such as Gibus or Prince and rejection from mainstream techno-pop clubs like Le Queen was due to his race. In his words, “every black person here in France knows he's African... and has a particular link with the country of his ancestors...but we feel like [we] havin’ our ass between 2 chairs. We are considered African by [the] French but we are considered as French by Africans.

Even guys like me who are mixed half Congo, half French.” Torn between two worlds, Mike found solace and acceptance in his music—that was colorblind.\textsuperscript{71}

Unfortunately for Mike, the club scene where he could find solace and acceptance was not found in mainstream society. The police were not blinded by his fame nor were they blind to the color of Mike’s skin no matter how light. His earliest experience with the police occurred at the age of 12. While leaving the schools grounds, he was stopped at the front entrance for a \textit{controle d'identite}. These random checks by the police have continued throughout his life. For example, during the month of January 2103, he was stopped 7 times. His last run-in with the police happened last month, while he was walking home from a late night DJ gig. These police stops occur both on foot and when he is driving.\textsuperscript{72}

His most poignant interaction with the police occurred when he was 16 years old. During that summer, six of his friends were hanging out in the city of Paris. They were playing a game of passing around a burning paper the last person to hold the paper was deemed the winner. In the middle of the game, he recalls three police cars pulling up to them. One police officer said “Don’t move! You know we can shoot you easily. So don’t move. You don’t like us so we don’t like you!” Mike responded to their retort with the phrase, “Yeah we don’t like you and what?”\textsuperscript{73} He was held in the holding cell for a day and a half, and then

\textsuperscript{71} “DJ M.” Web interview. 5 April. 2013  
\textsuperscript{72} “DJ M.” Web interview. 6 April. 2013  
\textsuperscript{73} “DJ M.” Web interview. 6 April. 2013
released to his mother, who was told that he was arrested for burning cars. Burning cars is a phenomenon of the suburbs that reached its peak during the riots of 2005.

Jaded by his experiences in Paris, Mike now uses DJ’ing as an opportunity to leave Paris. Performing in the United Kingdom and Ireland has given Mike the opportunity to explore the world and escape Paris. Disappointed with Parisian clubs, he finds comfort in immersing himself in the music. Recently, he has been working on compiling tribute mixtapes of his favorite artists. Within Mike wages a war between the necessity of making money and doing what he loves. His statements are conflicting and confusing, but reveal a deeper level of clarity or an awareness of the forces conspiring against his exit from the suburbs. Mike came to the understanding that money is the root of all evil and believes it’s better to do what you love. However, he realizes that in the world he lives in working for free is not an option and money is necessary to his survival. In reference to a popular rap song, he says nothing is better than “doing what you love well to make money at the ‘sammeeee damnnnn timmeeeее.’”

Jaded by his rise to fame at such a young age, Mike is increasingly frustrated by Parisian clubgoers resistance to his musical maturation. International

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74 "DJ M." Web interview. 6 April. 2013


travel means the opportunity to play the music he desires. In contrast to this freedom outside of Paris, within Paris he feels obligated to play music that appeases clubgoers still stuck in the past. Despite his disdain for playing in Parisian clubs, he must in order to pay the bills. At the age of 26, Mike is still living with his mother in an apartment outside of Paris. Unable to sustain a stable income, he cannot afford to live by himself and provide for himself based up the money he makes DJ’ing. Mike’s “studio” is en plein air, or outside on his mother’s balcony. Elevated on a table, his turntables, laptop, and records surround him as he works mixing into the early hours of the morning. When money is especially scarce, Mike picks up DJ’ing jobs in local clubs that remember him from his younger years. Moments when he feels especially discouraged by the lackluster reception of clubs that used to clamor for his mixes, Mike remembers what the most important vocational lesson his father taught him. “Everyone has to have a hustle,” DJ’ing just happens to be his. For Mike there is no life outside of music. Music is the beginning, and the end. Moreover, the fact that he only possesses the equivalent of a high school diploma severely limits his career options. On the other hand, Mike is not searching for a career outside of music. He is not drawn to the corporate world of suits of ties; nor is he desirous of engaging in the academic world of cloaks and degrees. For Mike, DJ’ing is a hustle but also music is the medicine that soothes many of the scars left from his struggles to acculturate into Parisian society.78

77 "DJ M." Web interview. 31 March. 2013
78 "DJ M." Web interview. 11 April. 2013
Speaking frankly, Mike admits that his relationship with his siblings was deeply impacted by his parents’ split. He candidly admits that he speaks with me more than his siblings. Scattered throughout Paris, Mike communicates with his siblings mostly through Facebook. On holidays they reunite; but for the most part they conduct their lives separately. Reflecting on the early years of his parents split, he believes that the back and forth movement between his father and mother’s home added to the splinter in familial relationships. Some years, he lived with mother. Other years, he lived with his father. This back and forth movement applied to his siblings as well. In their teenage years, home life was not stable and this has resulted in a dysfunctional parent-child relationship. Self-described as a “padawan” or “jungle boy,” Mike believes that the music and club business made him grow up. As he nears the age of twenty-six Mike seeks to only please himself. The only way he seems to be able to do that is through music, which Mike relies on to convey his sentiments.79

Keita

Keita guides a group of eager Paris Noir students through the streets of the eighteenth arrondissement. With ease and sincerity, he greets both vendors and strangers with a quiet smile. During a lunch conversation, Keita tackles a broad array of topics with the study abroad students. The conversation ranges from the importance of Camara Laye’s work in addressing the effects of France’s colonization of education and the French rationale behind separating African

79 "DJ M." Web interview. 11 April. 2013
identity and French assimilation to Abraham Lincoln’s election speeches. His breadth of knowledge is uncanny; therefore it is no surprise when he announces he would like to become a professor after completing his studies in Paris. His journey to the city of lights was not a direct route from his home country of Mali. Instead, he made two stops before arriving in Paris. Studying in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for a year was his first stop after leaving Mali. After his year in
Ethiopia, he lived in Italy; from Italy, Keita moved to Paris to pursue further studies in 2006.  

His developmental years were very much affected by his family life in Mali. Keita was birthed and raised in a West African polygamous family. Raised along with many half-brothers, his immediate family includes a mother who gave birth to seven boys and one girl. Growing up was a binary experience that included a happy childhood in his mother’s home and bullying from his half-brothers outside of her immediate protection. In his opinion, one of the consequences of being raised in a polygamous family is jealousy, rivalry amongst siblings. In order to combat the physical abuse of his older half-brothers, he learned the art of Taekwondo to defend himself. After 11 years of training, he acquired a black belt and grew to be 6’7” in height.  

During his time of study in Paris, Keita’s positive experiences have led him to believe that Paris is indeed colorblind. Although, he is not ignorant of the fact that many other people would disagree with his point of view; for him Paris, France has provided him with a life and a greater sense of personal value and education. It is the place that has given him “everything” i.e. an education, job, etc. As he continues to go through the acculturation process, Keita prefers spending time with his French friends than with his countrymen who are living in Paris. He says, “I have nothing but respect to my French friends. They like me

81 “Keita” Email interview. 24 Jan. 2013
82 “Keita” Email interview. 2 Feb. 2013
83 “Keita” Email interview. 13 April. 2013
and I like them, and they feel for me. They have helped me look for jobs and invited me to their houses. So for me, France is color-blind."

Although Keita believes he is successfully acculturating into Parisian society, he made it a point to mention that he has not forgotten his African identity during this process. He considers his integration into Parisian academia and society a balancing act. When it is necessary to adapt French behaviors he does, and when he feels it is socially acceptable to return to his African mannerism, he does.

Wherever I can be, I will remain African, the man who was born in Africa and grew up there. In [any] normal situation, I try to be like any Frenchmen, I get dressed like them, speak their language, go to the theater, cinema and museum; I eat with fork and spoon, etc. But at home I often use my hands to eat, speak my native language with my sister except her children who speak only French; and if I have to go to an African feasts [like naming ceremony], I get dressed like an African.

Beyond learning to conduct himself like a Frenchman, the country’s educational system has “tremendously influenced the way [he] process [es] information.” Keita’s entire motivation for moving to France was to gain the type of education that Mali could not offer. He has currently completed defending his Masters and is pursuit of a doctoral degree in either History and Civilizations of the Anglophone world or Education Sciences. By continuing his education in France, Keita has strengthened his grasp of research methodology but also possesses a “critical mind.” Upon completing his education in France, he plans to

84 "Keita” Email interview. 14 April. 2013
85 “Keita” Email interview. 13 April. 2013
return to Africa as teacher. Using the knowledge he gained in France, he would like to share his specialization in history with students who will not have the opportunity to leave Africa. Although Paris is currently his home, Keita asserts “my place is in Africa among my countrymen.”

86 "Keita" Email interview. 27 April. 2013
**Conclusion**

This study is the beginning of a larger project exploring African immigrant acculturation processes. My pilot study unearthed how African immigrant and African American women’s self-esteem were affected by a lack of representation in mainstream media. This study explored the claim of my pilot focus group’s claim that African men have an easier time acculturating into Parisian society. Though this subjective statement cannot be quantified by a singular positive or negative answer, my study extracted that there are multiple challenges facing African immigrant youth males.

The first finding is that French assimilation education and society affected the participant’s self-worth assessment. The seconding finding is that participants confront the requirement to choose or synthesize their African and or French identities. None of the participants felt they were able to choose a singular identity overall. The third finding is that factors such as education, familial relationships and the geographic proximity to the city of Paris affected participant career choice. Each of the young men was impacted by: their parents’ job choice, positive or negative educational experiences, and whether they lived in the city of Paris or in the banlieue. My fourth finding is that participants believed that Paris is not colorblind based upon their social groups (i.e. family or friends). Participant affirmation of Parisian colorblindness was contradicted by accounts of negative interactions with police that they believed were based upon race. The final finding is that participant education and grasp of the English language affected how they
interviewed with me. Rene was my most thorough interview. His English fluency 
and graduate education facilitated a comprehensive narrative. DJ M’s interview 
contained many details and personal anecdotes. He is not fluent in English; rap 
music taught Mike the majority of the English he understands. Keita’s interview 
is a work in progress. Keita is not fluent in French and is currently enrolled in 
English-speaking classes. Also, as a doctoral student Keita had very little time to 
interview. Overall, email and web interviews were more successful for my 
participants who were not fluent in English. The time delay in email and web 
interviews allowed for the participants to take their time and formulate cohesive 
and comprehensive narratives without the pressure of an immediate response. The 
Skype interviews proved to be successful in gaining valuable additional 
information from participants who were more fluent in English. The 
conversational style of the Skype interviews enabled participants to share stories 
not considered in the email interviews. The back-and-forth style of the 
conversation allowed for participants to gain confidence in their English-speaking 
skills and lowered their apprehension of sharing more intimate or personal stories.

There were several limitations to this study. Time constraints proved to be 
a persistent obstacle. The six hour time difference affected how often and for how 
long I could communicate with participants. Participant English comprehension 
affected the breadth and depth of the interview. Although I reassured participants 
they could feel free to communicate in French due to my own French abilities and 
my acquisition of a translator, none of my participants desired to conduct any of 
the interviews in French. My small participant pool caused me to focus on
personal narratives instead attempting to make generalizations about the entire African immigrant male youth population.

In future research I would like to continue my current study with a larger participant pool to offer additional personal narratives. Furthermore, I would like to do field research in Paris by accompanying participants during their everyday activities. If possible, I desire to conduct interviews with immediate family members to contest or converge with participant insights. Instead of singling out individual factors affecting African immigrant youth acculturation processes, it is my future goal to provide a more inclusive picture of how immigrant youth identity is configured, negotiated and challenged.
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Appendix: Where Are They Now? (6 May 2013)

Rene Ngadi
Currently, Rene is completing his second year of graduate school. After completing this year, he is preparing to study at the University of Chicago through a university student exchange program for the Spring 2014 semester. He is pursuing a Master’s in Business Engineering and still works for Orange Company. As a business developer he was promoted to a position in management and manages accounts in Paris, Sweden and Spain.

DJ Durty Mike.
Currently, DJ M is making mixtapes in homage to his favorite artists. He recently opened for Mary J Blige. Mike has returned to performing in Parisian clubs with plans to perform in Ireland this summer. He is searching for DJ opportunities in New York, Miami and Atlanta for a change in scenery.

Keita S. Ibrahima
Currently, Keita is pursuing a doctoral degree in History and Civilization. He successfully completed his Master’s program in December 2012. His current research examines the image of Africans in the eighteenth century.
Summary of Capstone Project

My Capstone Project explores the influence of African immigrant youth culture on notion of “colorblindness” and the interconnectivity of the Parisian pop culture and traditional African culture. Francophile African migration to Paris was sparked by postwar economic growth in France and the need for cheap labor during its Glorious Thirty Years from 1945 to 1975, better known as Les Trente Glorieuses (Stovall, 2012). This movement led to an influx of African migrants living on the outskirts of Paris called the banlieues, or outer suburbs, in order to separate these migrant workers from the general Parisian population.

My study is the examination of the process of negotiation by the children of these African migrant workers between assimilating to French culture and maintaining African tradition and culture. This study also explores the desire of French-born African children to connect with the mainstream French society that fails to include their presence. (Cannon 1997). This study will do this by examining the ways in which French-born African children deal with de facto (or customary) systems of racial oppression that include: residential segregation, police brutality, educational and economic inequalities within the banlieues and in Paris. Many first generation born children must sacrifice their overt African identity in order to progress within the French social system (Auslander and Holt, 2003). In the process of negotiating their space, African youth have created unconventional means of bridging the gap between their opposing French and African identities (McIlvaine, 2007). The oppression of African peoples in Paris
severely contradicts the French policy of “colorblindness.” Colorblindness is defined as the legal and policy-making process of France established by the Hate Speech laws of 1972. These laws established the inexistence of race and ethnicity in an embrace of a singular French national identity. Contradicting this practice are the inequities centered on housing discrimination, occupational marginalization, and a rigid social hierarchy (Gafaiti, 2003). My research explores the African immigrant male youth response to these constraints by bridging the gap between their African culture and identity and the acculturation process within Parisian society through examining pop culture, education, and employment. These factors reveal how and why they have the jobs in Paris that they do now, which is gradually changing how Parisians view African immigrants.

During the months of June and July 2011, I conducted a pilot study for an independent project through the Syracuse University Study Abroad Program entitled Paris Noir. My study abroad program culminated in a research paper entitled “The Image of the Black Woman in French Television.” My project’s initial findings introduced two key claims: a lack of black female representations in French television; and black females felt that black males had an easier time climbing the social ladder. These two claims led me to this proposal to expand upon the findings of my pilot study as a way to validate, disprove or complicate the assumptions of the women’s conclusions about the social mobility of African men. I decided to select a very specific population for this follow-up study. Thus,

87 Black defined in this study as a person of African descent (Konare, 2002)
I synthesized my diverse desires into a way to learn more about a younger demographic and immigrant experiences to ask the question: do African immigrant youth males have an easier time climbing the social ladder within Paris? Moreover, how are African immigrant youth males negotiating their definitions of self-identification in Paris?

Narrative research relies heavily upon the element of interviews. The participants for this project are individuals who have been selected as the primary preliminary interviewees for the exploration of Parisian colorblindness and its effects on identity upon African immigrant youth males. Three participants were selected for data collection: Rene, Keita, and DJ Durty Mike. During my pilot study in Paris, France; I met these participants, and kept in contact via email, Facebook, Skype and Twitter. Rene is French-born. He is 20 years old and is of Angolan and Lebanese descent. He resides within the city of Paris, and is currently enrolled in business school. He works for Orange, which is the French national telephone company. Keita is a student who emigrated from Mali to Paris to pursue higher education. He is 23 years old and resides within the city of Paris. DJ Durty Mike is a popular DJ in the noir clubs of Paris. He is 26 years old and is of Congolese and French descent and resides within the banlieue. The structure of the interview is based on compiling a narrative by following a two-step process that included both an email interview and a Skype interview.

The findings from this study will contribute to the continued scholastic conversations about the effects of the African diaspora, immigrant experiences, youth movements, social mobility and the ramifications of a “colorblind” society.
It is my sincere hope that compiling the narratives of Rene, Keita, and DJ Durty Mike will help form a more complete picture of the current diversity of experiences for African immigrant populations within Paris.

This study is the beginning of a larger project exploring African immigrant acculturation processes. My pilot study unearthed how African immigrant and African American women’s self-esteem were affected by a lack of representation in mainstream media. This study explored the claim of my pilot focus group’s claim that African men have an easier time acculturating into Parisian society. Though this subjective statement cannot be quantified by a singular positive or negative answer, my study extracted that there are multiple challenges facing African immigrant youth males.

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