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American Dreams and Immigrant Realities: Transnational Migration and Notions of 'Better' for Caribbean Immigrants in Brooklyn, NY

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ABSTRACT

Caribbean people have been migrating to New York City since the turn of the twentieth century in search of a “better” life. What has resulted due to large concentration of Caribbean immigrants is a hub of Caribbean culture that impacts everyday life and has helped to create a narrative that goes beyond previous understandings of what it means to be Caribbean in America. This project explores Caribbean immigrant experiences in the United States labor market with the immigrants’ voices and experiences as the driving force in presenting the information, with specific reference to Brooklyn, New York (NY).

This project utilizes a political economy framework of historical materialism and Black feminist theories to examine society through a gendered lens of intersectionality that sees gender, race and class as equally important in understanding Caribbean immigrant women’s experiences in New York City. In order to underscore the experiences of Caribbean immigrants, data from interviews with Caribbean immigrants living and working in New York City are used to present a cohesive narrative of what life is like post migration.

AMERICAN DREAMS AND IMMIGRANT REALITIES:

Transnational Migration and Notions of “better” for Caribbean Immigrants in

Brooklyn, NY

By

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B.A. Hobart and William Smith Colleges, 2011

THESIS

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of Master of Arts in Pan African Studies in the Graduate School of Syracuse
University

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First and foremost I thank God, through whom all things are possible, for continued strength and faith.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Immigration has been an integral part of human history, especially in the United States, and has been essential in shaping politics, economics, and social interaction. Caribbean people have been migrating to New York City since the turn of the twentieth century. Whether they come on their own or with their families, they have left their mark and made their presence known. We know that some renowned figures in US history were of Caribbean parentage. These include Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and in 1972 the first African American to make a bid for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party. Similarly, Colin Powell, the first African American Secretary of State, as well as the first African American Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff; actor Sydney Poitier; Harry Belafonte; and the revolutionary Malcolm X were all of Caribbean parentage. Most of their parents had made the trek from the Caribbean to the US, and to New York City in particular where their children were born. However, their stories of success and excellence do not represent the experiences of the masses of Caribbean immigrants who move to the United States every year.

Caribbean immigrants are migrating to the United States in search of a “better life”, which they have been told, and believe is available through work. In doing so, they leave behind stagnant economies that are unable to support them. These are dependent economies that are unable to provide employment for all their residents, with governments who have not shown any particular interest in the

mass migration of citizens who view emigration as their means to survival.

Therefore, emigration to the United States in particular, where most emigrants move to because of family connections, is a means through which they combat the reality of their inability to sustain themselves in the Caribbean.

The dialogue about immigration and immigrants usually stems from discourse surrounding the labor market and immigrants' participation or lack thereof. Generally, what is missing in this dialogue is an analysis of the Caribbean immigrant experience within the context of social class and the implication of living in a society built on social stratification. In regards to Caribbean immigrants, their location in the labor market does not account for their class location prior to and post migration to the United States. The reality of life in the United States is that all Black immigrants, even those of middle class status prior to migration, experience immediate downward social mobility with migration. When portrayed in a positive light, Caribbean immigrants are a testament to the ever-changing labor landscape. However, although this is meant to be a positive representation, racism, discrimination and the occasional violation of human rights exist.

Personal Background to the Problem

On June 23, 2001, I became a Caribbean immigrant in the United States, and although it has been more than thirteen years, I still clearly remember the day I moved with my family. I remember wearing a new outfit my grandmother had sent from America that my mother ironed with care the night before. I remember rushing to the airport and saying goodbye to the friends who had gathered to see us off,

reminding us not to forget them now that we were moving. More specifically, I remember the apprehension and the excitement surrounding the move because it was a signifier of something good to come.

Months before we left, we travelled as a family to the United States embassy in Barbados, where it would be determined whether or not we would be allowed entry into the United States. We went through physical examinations, fingerprinting, and an extensive interview process, all after years of waiting for our 'papers' from my grandmother who had been living in the United States for over fifteen years. Once we had been approved in Barbados, the move to the United States happened quickly. In less than a month, our flights were booked and we were preparing to leave everything that was familiar behind. When we arrived in the United States on a sunny evening, we were shuttled to an immigration room at John F. Kennedy airport. After hours of waiting in a long room with no windows, we went through a process that involved more fingerprinting and more questions. At the age of eleven, I remember wondering: *I have to do all of this just for a better life?*

My story is not an anomaly. Like so many before had done, my mother, the principal of a small Anglican school in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, packed up my sister and I, and we left the only place we had known as home. When I asked her why we were leaving when everything at home was good, she responded that things in America would be better. At that age I could not understand what she wanted to be better. We had a nice home, with fresh fruits and vegetables growing in our backyard, neighbors who were always available to help when needed, and as far as I could tell we were happy. What more could you want? She promised that my sister

and I would have more options; options that I did not know we needed or were otherwise unavailable. She did not give an explicit example of what ‘more’ would look like but held fast to the idea that better was available. In retrospect, I realize that even if pressured to tell me what ‘more’ was my mother would be unable to do so. Like so many people living in the Caribbean, who aspire to migrate in search of a better life, she had based the idea of “better” in America on the promises that accompany the migration narrative, even though she had no concrete examples of how any of these promises materialize.

By the time we were finished with the new immigrant process at the airport, it was almost midnight and I remember thinking that this is not what America is supposed to look like. We moved into an apartment just off of Flatbush Ave in Brooklyn, New York. All of the buildings looked alike. Even at night, the neighborhood was loud as people roamed the street. At the time, I did not realize that I had moved into a predominantly Caribbean immigrant¹ neighborhood. It was only after travelling and beginning to understand the dynamics of other neighborhoods that I realized the significance of the community we moved into and what Brooklyn meant for Caribbean immigrants. Even though we were in the United

¹ Throughout this work I use the term Caribbean immigrant to describe participants. However, it is important to note that the Caribbean is a multi-ethnic region with people of African, East Asian, Caucasian, and South Asian (known in the region as Indo-Caribbean) ancestry. This project focuses on the experiences of Caribbean immigrants of African descent who identify as Black. In conducting this research, I actively sought out and limited participants to this criteria and it is important to make that distinction for this work because a different argument can be made for other Caribbean ethnic groups because these groups, perhaps with the exception of those of South Asian ancestry, have enjoyed a status above Blacks because of how class and color works in the Caribbean.

States, we were still eating the same foods we did before we moved. There were people around us with similar accents and inflections in their words, which did not seem as important until the first time I was surrounded by a group of people with American accents.

For me, Caribbean people in Brooklyn were the standard and thus the default measure of experience. They were everywhere; yet, it seemed that the only time I saw them was on the weekend. Caribbean immigrants are always engaged in some form of work, which often demands that they work long hours. My mother would leave early in the morning and return late at night. She would talk about how stressful and fast-paced Brooklyn was and how hard it was to adjust to the setting. After a particularly cold winter, I began to question why anyone would want to move to the United States. As far as I could tell, my life here was not much better than the one I had left behind and I knew that I was not the only one who felt this way. I had overheard my aunts crying about having left their jobs in the Caribbean and moving to the United States only to be unemployed for extended periods of time, or worse for them, having to take work for which they were overqualified. Despite all of this, they did not see moving back as an option. They were working hard but never seemed to be happy in this space that was supposed to be better.

Throughout the years, I have heard my aunts' experiences echoed by different Caribbean people and there has been very little change to the narrative. After examining my own experience, as well as the experiences of those around me, I began to question why Caribbean immigrants were continuously moving to the United States when it was evident that their expectations were not their lived

reality. For the vast majority of Caribbean immigrants, what was promised to them with migration was not what they were experiencing. Yet, they continue to perpetrate the myth of success through migration and move to the United States in droves. The dynamics of this kind of migration cannot be simply understood by asking why Caribbean immigrants were moving to the United States. There are other factors contributing to this disconnect that Caribbean immigrants are experiencing and it goes beyond simply asking “why are you here?”.

Through my graduate coursework, I developed a more nuanced exposition of how social factors work to affect people. It became apparent how pervasive societal structures such as capitalism and prejudice are in affecting Caribbean people, both in their home countries as well as in the United States. Therefore, any attempt to understanding Caribbean immigrants who seek work as a means of making a better life should be assessed with these structures and their implications on experience at the forefront of their analysis. I want to understand the Caribbean immigrant experience through a lens that allows me to explore the totality of what this experience looks like. This necessitates that Caribbean immigrants provide the narrative as to why they chose to move and remain in a space that has proven to hinder more than aid their attempts at “better”. They effect and are affected by the world in which they live. They do not experience life in a vacuum and this project is developed to reflect living in that social reality.

At the core, I want to understand why the people I saw every day while living in Brooklyn, who are a reflection of myself, have a difficult time achieving the goals they have set despite how hard they work. To understand this, I went to the source

and sought out Caribbean immigrants living and working in New York City, specifically Brooklyn, NY. Initially, I wanted to include men and women in this study. However, the participants who were willing to be interviewed were mostly women. The primacy of women in the study is not a limitation but rather a welcomed comparative avenue through which we can locate and understand the narratives of the men who were interviewed. Furthermore, it is a testament to the reality of migration among Caribbean immigrants. There are disproportionately higher rates of Caribbean women migrating to the United States. This can be attributed to who has the “opportunity” to migrate, or the manufactured opportunity within the unending void that the US labor market has created—a constant need for Black women to work as discussed later. Although the narratives included come primarily from women, the supplemental male narratives support the general experience of Caribbean immigrant women, with some exceptions where maleness garners privileges in a patriarchal space. Therefore, the analysis is applicable to understanding the broader Caribbean immigrant experience in the United States, I want to understand the factors that contribute to Caribbean immigrant experience. In order to do so, it is important to understand the factors in the Caribbean that contribute to migration.

Justification

I understand and highlight the varied factors that influence Caribbean immigrant experiences and recognizes that although Caribbean immigrants share a similar history, the people themselves are diverse individuals that are shaped by

their locations and experiences. There is extensive scholarship on immigrants and immigration but it often highlights the effects that immigrants have on the receiving country, while qualitatively ignoring immigrant experience. In these cases, the immigrant is lost in the analysis. There is a need for scholarships that explores Caribbean immigrant experience within the context of social class that examines what this means for a group of people living in a society built on social stratification. This study fills that gap. It adds to the current literature that seems to quantify immigrant experience while failing to understand and explore the nuances to Caribbean immigrant life.

This work is a current analysis of Caribbean immigrant experiences that accounts for how individual differences shape experience, while locating that experience in the context of the larger social world. It provides a space for a group of people in the US labor market who are often overlooked. Because this work utilizes an intersectional approach which looks at what happens to Caribbean immigrant women at the intersections of race, class, and gender given that they embody these features of social relations simultaneously, it provides a cohesive exploration of Caribbean immigrant experience in the United States that is needed in the current discussion about Caribbean immigrants.

Research Questions

This project seeks to understand the following questions regarding Caribbean immigrants residing in the United States.

1. Why are Caribbean women migrating to New York City?

2. How do Caribbean immigrant women's experiences differ from their expectations in the United States labor market?

In order to answer the above questions, this thesis is organized to trace the trajectory from home to "foreign". The first chapter is the foundation of this thesis as it includes the theoretical framework for analysis and the literature review. The literature review of current work about Caribbean immigrants, as well as relevant texts to this study such as work on intellectual hegemony and neoliberalism, provide the basis for moving forward and situating this work. Contained within, there is a brief history that describes the formation and growth of Caribbean economies and the role of women in those economies. This chapter examines how Caribbean economies came to be, what they look like, and the geopolitical relations between Caribbean countries and the United States that have created dependent Caribbean economies and produced inhospitable environments for Caribbean immigrants. Most importantly, this chapter provides the basis for understanding the space that Caribbean immigrants are leaving and the space that they are moving into.

The second chapter brings the participants' voices to the forefront of the work. In this chapter, I examine how the history and current atmosphere as understood and expressed in the first chapter influence how Caribbean countries, and the United States have influenced migration. It begins by exploring the expectations that Caribbean immigrants have prior to moving, while comparing these expectations to their lived experiences since their arrival. This chapter

explores why participants migrate and what they hope to achieve. Additionally, I explore the factors that contribute to participants' experiences in Brooklyn, NY by exploring the use of 'community networks', and how Caribbean immigrants navigate and adapt to migration and the effects thereof. Finally, this chapter examines one of the harsh realities that many Caribbean immigrants experience post migration when I examine how Caribbean immigrants are valued in the labor market.

The third chapter tackles the notion of "better" and how Caribbean immigrants perceive this concept. Most of the expectations expressed in chapter two are steeped in the idea of "better" available with migration. The notion of "better" is at the forefront of this discussion and is one of the most enticing features of migration. Chapter three examines how participants see "better" and questions whether what has manifested is a true representation of "better". It also explores how participants reformulate notions of "better" post migration and how this affects how participants see themselves and their experiences in the United States.

Finally, I examine what these experiences in the United States mean for Caribbean immigrants. The conclusion recaps the totality of the Caribbean immigrant experience as presented by participants. I explore the notion of nostalgia and returning home. Some participants have noted the urge to return home and I examine, based on their experiences and social locations in the United States, whether the notion of returning home is possible or even viable for Caribbean immigrants.

In all of these chapters, the impact of race, class, and gender on Caribbean immigrant experience is present in the analysis to inform a cohesive understanding.

I underscore the importance of keeping the analysis rooted in an intersectional understanding of race, class, and gender because, at times, it allowed me to examine and explain the at times contradictory narratives as presented by participants. Additionally, by examining these narratives at the aforementioned intersections, I was able to locate Caribbean immigrants and their experiences in a space that transcends their static location in Brooklyn, NY and situate their experiences in a context of globalization as shaped by neoliberalism and its impact on peoples of the South.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This project utilizes a political economy framework of historical materialism and Black feminist theories to examine society through a gendered lens of intersectionality that sees gender, race and class as equally important in understanding Black women's lives.

Caribbean people have been migrating to New York City since the turn of the twentieth century with mass migration starting in the 1960s. This work focuses on that period from the 1960s until the present. Although due to institutional racism Caribbean immigrants remain marginalized as part of a larger group of Black immigrants in the United States, they are a vital part of the labor market and contribute greatly to everyday life. In Brooklyn, NY, Caribbean immigrants continue to leave their mark on the spaces they occupy and continue to shape and reshape the economic, political, and cultural landscape of their new country.

The United States' current phase of capitalism that has manifested through neoliberalism, continues to divide and stratify individuals based on perceived differences in social identities such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as immigration status via markers such as documented and undocumented, and has been instrumental in shaping immigrant experiences while dictating the available opportunities. Racist, classist, and sexist notions have historically been engrained in every facet of American society. Therefore, when Caribbean immigrants move into and locate themselves within that sphere, they are immediately subjected to the

same racist, classist, and sexist restrictive markers, with the additional marker of 'immigrant'.

While the majority of my participants are women, their experiences are not determined by this singular salient identity. Post migration, these women are moving into a stratified space, where their worth and capabilities are eclipsed by predetermined ideas steeped in hegemonic philosophies. Therefore, to truly understand their experiences, it is imperative that I adopt an intersectional approach that encompasses race, class, gender, and in the case of these women, one's status as immigrant. Originally explored by Kimberlé Crenshaw and later reintroduced by Patricia Hill Collins, an intersectional approach to understanding experience becomes even more important when examining Black women. I use a Black feminist theory lens throughout my analysis as explored by scholars Barbara Smith (*All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies.*; 1982), bell hooks (*Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*; 1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; 2000), as well as Kimberlé Crenshaw ("Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color";1991). Because I want the narrative of my participants to be at the forefront of the discussion, and it seems organic that one of the frameworks of analysis be one that encourages the multiplicities of identity that go into one's overall experience.

Black feminist theory is a response to initial waves of feminism. It seeks to challenge the pre-existing notions of what it means to be a woman in a complexly woven, institutionally unequal environment, by urging that analysis of these

experiences also include a critical understanding of race, class, and sexuality in addition to gender. For Black women, their lives are structured at the intersections of these markers. In other words, they are Black, female, working class etc., simultaneously. So, they experience multiple levels of oppression in the same body, not as discreet pieces of the self. In this case, it then becomes imperative that I use the additional marker of immigrant in order to understand the total Caribbean immigrant experience. Challenging patriarchy and the ideas of power and domination associated within that framework is necessary when exploring the experiences of my participants because the construction of systemic institutional male superiority and dominance continues to permeate and influence women's experience in both the private and public sphere. This is the same dominance that Black feminist theory seeks to challenge. Black feminist theory is not only important on its own, but in conjunction with other theories- particularly historical materialism as explained later. Together, they help to explain the totality of the Caribbean immigrant experience pre and post migration.

In *Small Garden, Bitter Weed: Struggle and Change in Jamaica*, authors George Beckford and Michael Witter provide a foundation for understanding the economy in Jamaica by exploring how colonialism and capitalism have shaped a political economy that has underdeveloped Jamaica. Understanding this connection is essential in order to explicate the conditions that are causing Caribbean people to migrate. Although the authors' focus is on Jamaica, their analysis can be transferred to the other Caribbean countries that share a similar history of exploitation and domination. The authors situate their work within the historical materialist

framework in an effort to understand Jamaican economy by exploring the present conditions in terms of the development of Jamaica's history. Additionally, historical materialism explains the underlying social phenomenon occurring within the economy as it relates to materiality. Using historical materialism as their foundation enables the authors to explore how material conditions are the primary influences in how society and the economy are organized and therefore understood. Like Beckford and Witter, in order to unpack and explore the lived experiences of Caribbean immigrants pre and post migration, I would also have to utilize historical materialism in my analytical trajectory in order to situate my work within the broader discussion of understanding "opportunities" in the United States. Historical materialism is a theory used to understand any social formation by examining the material conditions that govern social relations. In other words, it is a fundamental understanding of how the class relations in a society give rise to and sustain social inequality, the core feature of capitalism.

With historical materialism as the foundation to understanding Caribbean economies, it is easy to comprehend that the events occurring in the Jamaican economy as explained by Beckford and Witter- and by extension other Caribbean countries- is not simply the result of poor planning or lack of ability as some would suggest plagues 'developing nations'. Instead, as Beckford and Witter point out, the economy that is present is simply a ramification of that past and the effects that have been compounded due in part to years of exploitation by dominant Western nations that make up the global North. In the Caribbean, it began with colonization and the plunder and looting of resources on the islands that destroyed the

indigenous societies. Similar to other Caribbean countries, in Jamaica, English settlers moved in and settled on small family farms, with the intention of providing for themselves through farming. However, when sugarcane was introduced as a profitable avenue, settlers shifted to larger scale sugarcane production and thus a need for cheap labor was born. This need then pointed to the exploitation of Africans that resulted in their enslavement. Understanding and charting the course of work, beginning with plantation labor, provides insight to understanding how work has manifested over time. Furthermore, this also speaks to the social, political and economic conditions that have manifested with this history and continue to affect Caribbean countries.

For Beckford and Witter, society begins when people enter into relationships among themselves in order to carry out social production of their means of survival. By this estimation, Caribbean societies began with slave plantations and the production of sugar cane. Today, we can examine the role that Caribbean countries play in the larger global context by examining their location within the larger structure of production and their interaction with the larger global market and capitalism. As explained by Beckford and Witter, these relations can be understood in terms of technical relations, based on the division of labor where there is a relationship between workers in the same realm because their tasks and functions rely on each other for success, and property relations, which are based on individual ownership of things. The means of production are guided by social relations, which then affect the distribution of power and wealth.

As Beckford and Witter continue, for the people living in these Caribbean countries, their social locations are not only determined by their location within their individual countries, but also in relation to their country's location in the global context. These social relations are important to recognize insofar as they are used to understand social class experiences, in addition to understanding the location of Caribbean immigrants pre-migration. During the interviews conducted, many participants cited a need for a better life as a reason for migration. In many cases, this is represented in some form of upward social mobility. In the same manner that a stratified class system is represented in every capitalist society, in the Caribbean, one's class is determined by one's proximity to the means of production. Due to years of exploitation, the majority of people who live in the Caribbean countries from which participants are migrating do not own the means of production and thus, are relegated to supplying the labor necessary to produce.

In coming to understand the lives of my participants before they left the Caribbean, I appreciate Beckford and Witter's analysis that points out that the resulting economies in Caribbean countries are remnants of the plantation-based economies prevalent during colonization where the enslaved population provided the labor with no claim to the products of their labor. Similar to the United States, even with emancipation, very little changed in terms of social status and access to the means of production. There was very little chance for advancement for the newly freed population due in part to vagrancy laws, restriction of sale of land to Caribbean Blacks and other measures that were used in order to ensure that the newly freed population in the post slavery era had few options for survival and

would feel the need to return to the plantation. These efforts were further solidified with the rise in investment and expansion in Caribbean countries. Although these investments were offering new avenues to stimulating the economy, there was very little benefit to workers as they were not owners. Instead, an export-oriented economy developed where those who were benefiting from these investments were not the citizens of the country, but instead, the external investors.

Although with emancipation the colonial powers that once occupied Caribbean nations moved on, the structures they put in place remained. The social dynamic of class relations transferred with emancipation and functioned in the same manner it did on the plantation. Power was still concentrated among the people who controlled the means of production, and as explained above, this was not the newly freed population that once worked on the plantations. As these economies have evolved, the one constant that has remained are the markers of a capitalist social class system that govern how Caribbean economies and people function and exist within a larger global structure that supports those who own the means of production. Beckford and Witters' analysis provides an important historical analysis that informs how I locate Caribbean economies. It is the basis for understanding why Caribbean immigrants are leaving and how they come to live in the United States. In others words, it is a necessary examination of the prelude to migration.

Caribbean economies today are a representation of a fractured past trying to compete in a global market designed for their failure. In "Neoliberal Economics and Caribbean Economies" (2010) Winston Griffith argues that "the historical

experience of Caricom countries does not support the assertions of the proponents of neoliberal economics and the new global market in which these countries must now operate complicates matters” (506). He points to a history of laissez-faire approach in dealing with the economy and agricultural production that has resulted in a singular economy. This is a central problem in Caribbean economic development, or lack thereof that has in turn deprived these economies of a central component of development, economic surplus. Economic surplus allows countries to thrive and compete on a global scale.

Griffith’s scholarship adds to Beckford and Witter’s analysis by showing the contemporary ramifications from a history of underdevelopment and this is instrumental for my analysis. The dependent capitalist economy that is the specter of Caribbean countries is a result of globalization and functions only as an attachment to the larger capitalist economy. Many of these economies are export-based where citizens do not and cannot afford to consume the items they produce, and are not producing the items they consume. Others are tourism based where large conglomerates have descended on the islands to erect luxury vacation locations where native islanders cannot afford to stay but are encouraged to work. In these instances, citizens are sources of cheap labor. While it may seem in both instances that income is generated within the space of the Caribbean countries, the problem lies with where the money is spent. Because the economy is based on exports, this also means that these countries must import many of the items consumed in their borders. This interdependent mode of survival in which Caribbean countries have to export to earn a living and import the basic necessities

for survival has contributed to their precarious position within the larger capitalist structure where the money made in their home country is spent elsewhere. Instead, the large capitalist nations who have had a foothold in these economies through exploitation and manipulation and remnants of colonial rule, continue to benefit the most from the labor in these economies.

The effects of colonialism's presence are still apparent today as we explore the unequal distribution of wealth not only within a nation but also among nations on the global scale. Caribbean economies and others like them that were sources of labor and production have helped to build and solidify the nations recognized as the global North today. Through a series of carefully crafted measures executed through colonialism, and today carried out through organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, Caribbean economies are failing because the nation states of the region have been unable to detach their economies from the global North in order to reap the benefits of their labor. They have been stuck in a cycle where their economies are failing but the only measures that are taken to revive them leave them more vulnerable to failure. Still labeled as 'developing nations', globalization- with its stark measures of structured unequal trade relations and, in the case of the Caribbean, oppressive geopolitical relations with the global North, specifically the US, helps to systematically exclude Caribbean countries from reaping the benefits of their land, and forcing citizens to move elsewhere in order to survive. The economy is disconnected from the needs of the people and is instead shaped to benefit external investors and producers.

In *Globalization and Its Discontents*, which explores the effects of globalization on 'developing nations', Joseph Stiglitz examines the deficiencies of global economic policies by exploring how organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies have contributed to 'developing nations' inability to compete in the global economic market. Although Stiglitz cautions that we should not be quick to vilify globalization, he argues that with globalization, western countries have forced poor countries to eliminate trade barriers but keep their own barriers, thus preventing smaller nations from exporting their agricultural products and stifling their export income. In the case of nations similar to Caribbean countries that rely heavily on export as a means for building their economy, globalization is the avenue through which these nations continue to be dominated with the help of organizations that are supposed to provide aid.

There are three main institutions that govern globalization: the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (Stiglitz, 2003). In my work, Stiglitz's analysis fuels how I understand the continued suppression of Caribbean economies through measures that are supposed to aid but end up doing more harm than good. Although the aforementioned organizations are supposed to be impartial entities, they often end up fueling the agenda of dominant western nations. All of these organizations have competing agendas and this, in turn, affects how they deal with globalization and the 'developing world'. The problem arises when these organizations are driven by a capitalist agenda of dominant western nations and use 'developing nations' like Caribbean countries as the means through which to further these agendas. In *Globalisation: A Calculus on Inequality*, Brian

Gosovic's 'Intellectual Hegemony in the Context of Globalisation' examines how intellectual hegemony, as narrated by the global North, is one of the major factors that have pigeonholed Caribbean development. Understanding intellectual hegemony in the context of Caribbean nations and the entities that control the dissemination of information is key to understanding how Caribbean countries are failing to advance within the global market. It speaks to another facet through which dominance of the global North stymies Caribbean development. It is not simply about changing how the global North views Caribbean islands. Instead, it is about changing how these economies interact and how resources are distributed.

While globalization does have its benefits to Caribbean countries, the benefits are overshadowed by the evident little change that has occurred in many cases. Essentially, many of these Caribbean countries have become a semblance of their past as they are now simply plantation economies operating without the plantations and the organizations, acting as the mediators of globalization take on the role of colonial advisor. Again, most of the problems in Caribbean countries stem from the fact that they do not own their means of production. This is amplified by the fact that they do not use the resources that they have available, like land, as a means of production that will enable them to become politically autonomous from the global North. Efforts at transformation often end up reflecting proven failed efforts such as selling off lands to international forces for development in the form of hotels. In many cases, they are working within a larger framework that is governed by external force, primarily the United States, or forces with distinct US interests. The sordid history and the present that has fostered very little change for

many in terms of advancement has created an environment that has forced people out of their homelands in search of a 'better life' and more "opportunities". For many, this often means migration to the United States or the United Kingdom.

Racist, classist, and sexist notions of white supremacy have historically been engrained in every facet of American life. Because the US is a dominant force in the world, some of these sentiments have been infused into the policies and practices deployed by the United States in its relations with Caribbean countries and by extension are practiced on Caribbean immigrants when they arrive in the United States. While the migration that is occurring from these former British colonies to the United States where participants are coming in search of opportunities may be reflective of a current need, it is much more than that. This migration is a form of resistance to the social conditions plaguing the island economies and is rooted in history of resistance to economic hardships. Whether their migration is a form of conscious resistance to the ongoing unstable economic climate in their homeland or not, these Caribbean immigrants are products of this resistance and their actions are a representation of these struggles and their attempts to alleviate the economic hardships of their homeland.

The resistance started as labor uprisings that occurred between 1934-1939. Although there are many factors that contributed to the uprisings, at the core, they were driven by economic instability. Similar to the economic conditions today that can be viewed as one of the issues stalling Caribbean economies, prior to the labor uprisings, economies were largely dependent on a narrow range of export. At this time, the success of these countries was determined by the demand for goods in

Britain and Europe. The sugar industry, one of the main sources of export, was in fluctuation having showed some increase during World War I, but drastically dropping postwar when the supply outweighed the demand. No country could escape the repercussions of the war and there were widespread revolts. The consequence of the unstable market affected the working classes the most. Unemployment and underemployment increased as wages decreased and social conditions deteriorated drastically.

In *The Poor and Powerless Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean*, Clive Y. Thomas cites two features that led to the underdevelopment of the region's economies: the perpetuation of distorted economies and economic structures, and a rhythm of economic expansion of capital in the center. Thomas argues that a lack of industrial development and limited agricultural differentiation, the secondary role of the markets and how resources are used, and the absence of autonomous, internally regulated source of capital accumulation ensured that the development in the region would be nonexistent. In other words, an economy that was doomed to fail would inevitably breed social conditions that would leave members of society with very little choice and room for advancement.

Similar to George Beckford and Michael Witter and their work *Small Garden, Bitter Weed* mentioned earlier, Thomas also explores how the conditions post slavery impacted the growth, or lack thereof of Caribbean economies. He cites the transition from colonial slave economy to 'centre periphery relations' as the stem to understanding how the economies came to be and the resulting social conditions that arose. Thomas argues that capitalism presents a space for crisis and expansion

and with these crises there is always a period of recession. Post slavery, some of the major events happening in Caribbean economies is reflective of these products of capitalism as explained by Clive Thomas. The rise of the peasantry, the emergence of wage labor, the transformation of the planters class, and a qualitative shift in the role of the colonial state provided the environment that would spark the labor uprisings that would shift social relations on the islands.

Although many of the changes are reflective of the general needs of the working class, the most pertinent to this discussion is the shift in the role of women. As mentioned before, the majority of participants are women who have migrated alone or with family in search of better economic opportunities. Therefore, it is important to note that women have always been at the forefront of resistance work, even though their status was often one of second-class citizen. In "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalism in the UNIA in Jamaica", Honor Ford-Smith explores the shift in women's roles in organizations like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Women's roles in organizations like the UNIA helped to fuel initial seeds of revolutionary resistance and shifting ideas about work. Ford-Smith argues that this was particularly important because of the male-dominated organization of the UNIA and the women's ability to work within that space and find women empowerment. Women were inspired to fight for their own political rights, access to once restricted positions, and for representation in government. It is important to note here that while there were some changes being made for the advancement of women, women found that the fight was an uphill battle. There were strides being made, but these

efforts were not representative of the needs of the masses, working class women. Initially, those benefiting from the changes in government and access to jobs were middle class women, whose actions were often representative of the larger patriarchal structure that aimed to restrict working class women and their fight for equality.

As a result of the uprisings on the islands, the British Government created the Royal (Moyne) Commission of Inquiry. Tasked with investigating the social conditions on the islands that led to the uprisings, Lord Moyne, pinpointed areas in housing, agriculture, hospitals, schools, factories, etc. as possible sites through which Caribbean islands can improve their economic status. While the report offered many solutions to the problems on the islands, independence from Britain's domination, a core demand from workers, was not one of the suggestions. The solutions to many of the problems centered on restructuring the familial unit to men working outside of the home and women working in the home and being dependent on men. For Moyne, the Caribbean economies could only stabilize if the familial unit was intact and the only way to do that was to revert women to traditional patriarchal roles of servitude within the home.

Women's fight for advancement and change in representation did not stop after the labor uprisings in the 1930s. In "Women's Organizations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean: The response to Global Economic Crisis in the 1980s", Rhoda Reddock explores how large-scale mobilization and organization of women continued within the labor movement and political organizations, most often manifesting through religious organizations. Organization through religious

bodies enabled women to participate freely outside of the home while helping to foster community. Reddock utilizes the uprisings of the 1930s as a blueprint to understanding how organization practices, particularly through trade unions changed and how 'responsible' trade union practices only included 'real workers' that divided along industry lines, leaving many women excluded from wage labor (58). The surge in international women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s helped to usher in a new wave of Caribbean women's resistance. Reddock argues that unlike the earlier movement, the new movement was broader and touched more aspects of personal and political life. There was a new consciousness among the women that helped to remind them of the marginal position they still held, despite some progress.

While the organizations and members may change, the spirit and seeds of resistance still remain. Like the political parties born out of the labor uprisings of the 1930s that developed as a need for control and representation that still remain, women find avenues through which they can exert their independence to fight back against the social conditions that relegate them to second class citizens in their home countries. Whether their actions are a conscious extension of a history of labor unrest, or whether they are simply viewing migration as an avenue of opportunity, women are leaving their home country in search of "better".

There is significant research surrounding migration that focuses on how immigrants impact the economy, as well as the political landscape of the United States. Current scholarship explores the impact of immigrants on the workforce, both in the informal, as well as the formal labor market, while others examine the

political implications of immigration reform. In “Caribbean Immigrants’ Discourses: Cultural, Moral, and Personal Stories About Workplace Communication in the United States”, Melissa Bridgewater and Patrice Buzzanell explore how cultural identity is manifested in the workplace and used as a form of asserting agency (Bridgewater and Buzzanell, 2010). The authors explore the workplace as a means for asserting agency but fail to examine the structure that necessitates the needed agency. Works outside of these realms tend to focus on educational aspects of immigration. Mary Alfred’s “Sociocultural Contexts and Learning: Anglophone Caribbean Immigrant Women in U.S. Postsecondary Education” explores the learning experiences of Caribbean immigrant women while arguing that the country of origin influences learning experiences in the host country. However, participants faced challenges that centered on negotiating language and identity, and reorienting to a new meaning of teaching and learning (Alfred, 2003). There is importance placed on the connection to the home experience in shaping the host country experience and this is essential to understating Caribbean immigrant experience in this realm.

Other scholarship provided a social-psychological exploration of how Caribbean immigrants adapt to their new surroundings. In *The West Indian Diaspora: Experiences in the United States and Canada*, Alwyn Gilkes examined acculturation as a process of cultural and psychological change and explores whether integration or relative cultural autonomy is most effective for adjustment. This study explores the external stressors and its effects on immigrants post migration and what this means for quality of life. However, there remains a need for more work surrounding the cultural experiences of immigrants in an economic

sphere. More importantly, there remains a need for more current research surrounding the social experience of migration for Caribbean immigrants and their quest for social upward mobility.

Mary Waters is one of the preeminent scholars on Caribbean immigrant experiences in New York City. In *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*, Mary Waters examines the identities and culture of Caribbean immigrants in New York City before and after migration. She argues that national identities are not predominant in Caribbean immigrants before migration. Furthermore, she explores how self-definitions of blackness differ from that of Americans and how this changes when Caribbean immigrants move into American communities. More importantly, she explores how the culture and identity of Caribbean immigrants interact with American society by examining the success of West Indians in the American economy while viewing race and discrimination in the United States as a prominent factor in determining what happens to the children of immigrants, as well as the neighborhoods and schools that working-class immigrants deal with. Waters' work provides the backdrop for analyzing and understanding Caribbean immigrants experience in New York City, and by extension in the United States. As one of the most extensive analyses on Caribbean immigrant experience, *Black Identities* is instrumental in depicting and understanding any changes in Caribbean experience particularly within the labor market. However, it does not account for the nuanced differences in factors and experiences that influence Caribbean immigrant experience. The study seems to quantify experience in an effort to provide data, albeit helpful, that is easily understood. However, what

has resulted from this is a superficial account of Caribbean immigrant life in the United States that informs generally but tells only a little of Caribbean immigrant experience.

Like Mary Waters, Nancy Foner has conducted extensive research about Caribbean immigrants in the United States. In “Benefits and Burdens: Immigrant women and work in New York City” (1998), Foner explores how migration changes women’s status in the workforce. She argues that regular access to higher wages improves women’s position in the household while enhancing their sense of independence. Similarly, Foner argues that women often work in dead-end positions, and often have to juggle the ‘double burden’ of working and household labor.

Foner’s exploration of the contradictory and complex ways in which immigration changes women’s status is especially helpful because it resonates with the data I gathered from my participants. Participants cited that they believed they were better off post migration and believed that there were countless opportunities available to them. However, many were unhappy with their current employment and doing little to change their situation. Foner’s work provides the basis to understanding the contradictory experiences post migration as explained by participants that is so prevalent in immigrant experience. Additionally, Foner’s work shows the importance in adapting multiple lenses in order to understand the totality of experiences.

In looking at work and Caribbean immigrants, Susan Model’s *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?*, the author explores the implications of

Caribbean immigrants as Black success stories. She explores the trajectory of work for Caribbean immigrants and explores how this is compared to Black American experience with work. Model argues that black immigrant success is used to discount racism in the work environment and discount the need for affirmative action programs that combat years of historical prejudice. She advocated for the comparative study of black Americans and Caribbean immigrants because they are both working to fight against systemic oppression while at the same time competing against each other for jobs.

Model employs a theory of cultural differences, selectivity and favoritism in explaining the difference in success rates. She argues that those who migrate are more motivated than those who remain in the home country. Based on this, immigrants in the United States are held at a higher standard in the workplace in comparison to African Americans. While Model's analysis is logical in explaining some immigrant experiences, it is simplistic in analysis because it does not take into account access to resources to move, immigration laws and restrictions, or other support networks that facilitate migration that may be missing for immigrants. Additionally, she fails to recognize the multiple identities at work in understanding immigrant experience. She does not point to immigrant status as being a factor in job opportunities and immigrant history of occupying menial jobs and exploitation are not at the forefront of the discussion.

In "Double Jeopardy? Female African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States", (2009) Mamadi Corra and Sitawa Kimuna explore the earnings attainment for Black immigrant women, and African American women. In their

study, Corra and Kimuna separate the immigrant women into groups of English, French, and Spanish speaking Caribbean women in an effort to further understand what contributes to the earning differences among black women. Kimuna and Corra acknowledge the significance of race and gender in understanding the socioeconomic attainment in the United States, and posits that a woman's race, immigration status, gender, and nation of origin determines where women are placed on a socioeconomic stratified ladder. In explaining why Caribbean immigrant women seem to earn more than other Black immigrant women, the authors rely on the selectivity argument theory. This theory suggests that immigrants who choose to migrate to the United States already have a likelihood of success within the labor market because "economic immigrants are likely to be persons who already have positive attributes such as qualifications, skills, and motivation needed to succeed" (1017).

Additionally, using cultural arguments as a basis, they credit the success of Caribbean immigrants to socialization in a favorable cultural environment, where Caribbean immigrants make up the racial majority in their home countries. In theory, according to the authors this should facilitate a psyche that produces people with strong work ethics. Again, the authors place the emphasis on individual experience as playing a large role in the likelihood of success an immigrant will have after moving to the United States. This is important because while speaking to some of the participants in my study, a discourse is present suggesting that success in the United States is possible as long as an individual works hard. While the authors' analysis account for all of the variables that may influence the success of the

individual, the actual trajectory of success remains very individualistic. The factors examined depend extensively on the individuals' ability to produce, often based on their past experiences and the skills they bring with them. There is very little examination of the receiving conditions that await immigrants in the United States labor market. This factor is very important to understanding the location of these immigrants in the labor market because these factors are beyond their control and thus affects experience. Therefore, Kimma and Corra's study is of limited use.

Another factor that is heavily referenced is the fact that Caribbean immigrant women are coming into the United States with more degrees than other Black immigrant women as a possibility for understanding immigrant success rate. However, what is not examined are the fields that these women go into for employment. . The authors spend time discussing educational upward mobility but fail to examine what that really represents within the scope of where immigrants came from in comparison to their position within the United States. The authors' use of migration selectivity and cultural theories as a framework for locating their analysis hinders their ability to look beyond the individual to examine the external factors that contribute to immigrant economic experiences.

In "Perceived Congruence Between Expectations and Outcomes: Implications for Mental Health Among Caribbean Immigrants" (2006), Eleanor Murphy examines how pre-migratory expectations and post-migratory outcomes affect mental health among Caribbean immigrants. She argues that like other immigrants, Caribbean immigrants migrate to improve social, economic, and educational opportunities for themselves and their families, which can be hindered when the expected outcomes

fall short of the actual opportunities in the new country. Murphy explores in detail the factors that contribute to the skewed expectations and what this would mean for immigrants moving in, hoping to take advantage of opportunities. She cites factors on the personal level, ranging from familial connections and support, as well as the structural factors such as job availability and how these may work in conjunction with each other to produce harmful experiences for Caribbean immigrants.

While Murphy's work does not delve drastically into the structural mechanisms that affect and impede Caribbean immigrant experience causing the results she listed, her work examines experiences that are certainly present among my participants. Her work on the effects of pre-migratory expectations and post-migratory outcomes is particularly helpful because it provides some insight to answering why some Caribbean immigrants choose to remain in the United States, while simultaneously encouraging others to migrate. While my research includes an attempt to better understand how these structural factors play into the Caribbean immigrant experience, it was not an important part of Murphy's study.

Sherri Grasmuck's and Ramon Grosfoguel's work in *Geopolitics, Economic Niches, and Gendered Social Capital among Recent Caribbean Immigrants in New York City* (1997) highlights the importance of acknowledging all of the identities that influence and shape how participants understand and locate themselves. The authors argument is particularly important when examining immigration because initially, traditional work on immigration and immigration theory, was based on white European ethnic history and experiences which were not easy transferrable when trying to understand other ethnic groups moving into the United States. They

provide the context through which I am able to understand immigration as it relates to Caribbean immigrants. They argue that there remains a need for analysis of structural and contextual factors that affect types of assimilation and to some extent success or failure within the workplace.

Thus far, the literature presented has explored the Caribbean economy that is pushing Caribbean people to migrate to the United States, as well as some of the literature that explores life post migration. The following literature explores the economic climate present in the United States labor market. To understand how Caribbean immigrants participate in the labor market, it is imperative to understand how the labor market they are entering in the United States is organized to receive them upon arrival. Both Pierre Jalée's *How Capitalism Works* (1977) and David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) combined provide the necessary context to understand the United States labor market through which we can locate Caribbean immigrants and their work. It is important to understand and use both of these works simultaneously because collectively, these works help to examine and explain the trajectory of migration for "opportunities". When participants cite "opportunities" as a primary reason for migration, most often, that is reflected through education advancement and upward class mobility via work opportunities. Therefore, it begs the question of what within the home countries' labor fields makes migration the most appealing avenue for success and advancement. Examining the factors at home that lead to migration provides a baseline for measuring what participants described as 'a better life' post migration.

In *How Capitalism Works*, Pierre Jalée examines capitalism and the notion of free markets and how these combined ideas work together as exploitive forces against less dominant nations, such as the Caribbean islands from which many immigrants in Brooklyn are migrating. Additionally, he also describes the interconnectivity of the state and the market as a system of rules and regulations that ultimately formed a set of divisive markers through which capitalism can thrive. These mechanisms sought to maintain social antagonisms such as race, class and gender, and also nation of origin when examining the experiences of Caribbean immigrants. Because capitalism is entrenched in the American experience and how people interact within the labor market, locating the Caribbean immigrant's role within this structure is imperative to understanding their experience post migration. David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* is the companion piece to understanding the labor market structure in the United States as it speaks to the current phase of capitalism in the United States. Harvey spends time discussing how neoliberalism has developed in capitalism and uses this to analyze and explore the problematic outcomes of this current phase of capitalism and how this may affect the labor market.

This approach to understanding the Caribbean immigrant experience is significant because their experience pre-migration is not monolithic and should not be treated as such when trying to understand their experiences post-migration. The above combination of explored literature provides the foundation from which I will examine and understand the narratives of my participants. Using my understanding of the trajectory of work, the history of social class and color formation in the

Caribbean and how this affects access to employment and the availability of work, and knowledge of Caribbean economies and how it works locally as well as within the larger global structure, I am able to situate life for the Caribbean immigrants moving into Brooklyn, NY pre-migration. I am better able to identify the factors pushing them out of their home countries, and into a significantly larger global world, that still leaves the questions of availability of a 'better life' unanswered. Locating the United States as the recipient for Caribbean immigrants, in relation to capitalism provides an understanding of why Caribbean immigrants continue to see the United States as a solution to their problems instead of the creator. Additionally, locating and examining their experiences post migration through a lens where race, class, and gender intersect, I am able to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced representation of what Caribbean experience in the United States looks like and what this represents.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

In order to gain new insights on Caribbean immigrants' experiences living and working in the United States, a qualitative research study was designed to collect and analyze personal narratives from Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn, NY. The ethnographic data that has been collected is examined through a Black feminist lens while locating the data in the political economy framework that structures the reality of a capitalist US labor market, in an effort to point to the multiple factors that affect Caribbean immigrant experience.

During the summer of 2014 I went to Brooklyn in search of Caribbean immigrants. More specifically, I went in search of Caribbean immigrants' stories. The stories that were born out of a journey to a new space, and learning to navigate and understand one's self within a complex social structure. These were the people I saw every day while living in Brooklyn. They live in predominantly Caribbean neighborhoods that were transformed and now resemble a mixture of the former African American Brooklyn neighborhoods and the countries they have left behind. In a city like Brooklyn, NY where it seems as though Caribbean immigrants are constantly moving into the space but rarely ever moving out, I wanted to understand why, given the current economic climate in the United States that is not particularly welcoming to Black immigrants, do Caribbean immigrants continue to move to the United States.

As I listened to the stories of Afro Caribbean immigrants, I realized that it was important that my research reflect the stories of my participants. It was

important that their voice be at the forefront of this narrative. Too often, research that focuses on the experiences of Caribbean immigrants quantifies their experiences instead of allowing the voice of the participants to lead the narrative. In this case, the study is about the experiences of Caribbean immigrants and the researcher serves as interlocutor. During my conversations with my participants, their narratives revealed a common thread among the immigrants leaving their home for the United States. They were seeking the “opportunities” promised in the United States- opportunities that were available through work and would provide avenues for upward social mobility and a “better” life. The question of what is considered “better” is at the forefront of understanding the mass migrations from Caribbean countries to the United States in search of jobs. Therefore, this project is an exploration of the socioeconomic landscape present in the United States and the global North in general, and is led by the narrative of my participants. Their experiences will inform the social and economic conditions in Caribbean countries that are forcing residents seeking a “better” life outside their home countries. At the core, this project is about charting the trajectory from home to “foreign” while locating their experiences by underscoring the intersections of the realities of race, class, and gender present in the larger economic structure that promises the “opportunities” that Caribbean immigrants seek.

Ethnographic interviews have been the main source of gathering the data used in this thesis. The interviews are instrumental in driving this thesis because the participants’ narratives are at the forefront. Through the interviews, I began to more clearly understand the questions that needed to be asked before I am able to

truly understand participants' experiences. More importantly, I was able to locate participant stories in the labor market by examining the Caribbean's economic history with the United States and the capitalist world economy.

Site of Research:

This research took place in Brooklyn, NY in the summer of 2014. Brooklyn is the most populous of New York City's five boroughs, with almost double the size of Manhattan's population. According to the United States Government Census Bureau 2010 Census data, the population in Brooklyn is estimated to be 2,504,700. Within this population, 42.8% identify as White, 34.3% identify as Black or African-American, and 10.5% identify as Asian. An estimated 9% (266,666) identify as 'West Indian' non-Hispanic. The 9% of the population who identify as 'West Indian' are natives of, or have ties to Caribbean islands with African ancestry. Ideally, a representative sample would encompass multiple participants from these countries.

Because this study is focused on understanding the experiences of Black Caribbean immigrants living and working in Brooklyn, I was aware that there might be some apprehension from potential participants due to immigration status. Although, immigration status of the participants was not an integral part of the narrative during research, it is still a part of immigrant life and shaping why potential participants may or may not partake in the study. Documentation status has real implications for potential participants and I was cognizant of protecting my participants.

The focus on immigrant experience influenced the targeted sample size. With the short timeframe in mind, and the rich data necessary to get to the core of what I was looking for, I aimed to interview thirty Caribbean immigrants living and/or working in New York City.

Participants:

In order to participate in this study, the participant would have to be an adult who identifies as a Black Caribbean immigrant. Potential participants would have migrated to the United States after 1960 from a Caribbean island, and live and/or work in Brooklyn. It is important to note that although this work focuses on the period after 1960, the experiences shared by participants reflect their most recent experiences in the US labor market. I point to this because it has significant implications for framing the context through which to understand the experiences as discussed by participants. There are some questions about participants' first experiences with work, but this is used as a means to understand how participants first find work, and provide a context for where they started in the US labor market to their positions at the time the interviews were conducted. The experiences expressed within are based on how participants navigate the US labor market, and should be understood in context of the economic downturn in recent US history that has affected the availability of work. The experiences with work in recent years as described by participants is a significantly difference experience than what would

have occurred in 1970-1990s in a thriving economic market. Therefore it is important to note this distinction.

With the above criteria, I interviewed twenty-five participants about their experiences in the United States. I wanted to have both men and women participating in this study but the majority of people who participated were women and thus the data reflects the experiences of mostly women. This is not to suggest that I purposely removed the narratives of men. Of the twenty-five participants, three were men. Their relatively privileged experiences such as their manner of migration, ease at which they found work, and other amenities afforded to them through being male in a patriarchal society, points to the importance of addressing race, class, and gender when examining experience. Female participants carry similar markers as the male participants but remain extremely marginalized.

The women included in this study form a diverse group of Black Caribbean immigrants. They range in age from 18-74 and the amount of time they have been living in the United States. They vary in relation to country of origin, their educational backgrounds, social class status in their home country prior to migration, and manner of migration². Most importantly, all of these participants identify as Black or Afro-Caribbean immigrants. They live and work in predominantly Caribbean neighborhoods in Brooklyn, NY that are comprised of

² Manner of migration refers to the circumstances through which Caribbean immigrants entered the United States. It can refer to participants who entered as permanent residents and have documentation, those who visited the United States on a visa and remained in the country when their visa expired, as well as those who entered through other channels and remained in the United States.

working-class people. These participants moved into Brooklyn and have been consciously and unconsciously shaping the space to accommodate their needs.

Initially, I partnered with a community organization in Brooklyn that provided a multitude of services to the community. While the organization does not work exclusively with Caribbean immigrants, the center is located in a neighborhood where the majority of residents are Caribbean immigrants. Flyers announcing the study were distributed to multiple sites associated with the center, as well as through their electronic mailing list. Additionally, the study was announced and explained at one of the community forums. Ideally, my partnership with the organization would have provided access to potential participants. However, participants were generated using the snowball technique. Using my background as a Caribbean immigrant, and my knowledge of the site, I looked for participants who fit the criteria. Each participant was then asked to forward my contact information to anyone who would fit the requirements and would be willing to participate. The employed means to recruit participants was the most beneficial. While the targeted participants were not 'vulnerable' in the sense that they would be at risk through participation, there was a chance that some of the participants could be vulnerable in one's immigration status was discussed. As I explained earlier, immigration status of participants was not at the forefront of the study. However, it is an integral part of the discourse on migration and can affect how and if participants engaged with the study. Snowball sampling helped to alleviate issues of trust that arise between interviewer and individual participants. Referrals among

participants allowed potential participants additional security if they chose to participate in the study.

The aim of the study was to understand the experiences of Caribbean immigrants living and working in New York City. Twenty-five participants provided answers in semi-structured interviews which were utilized because the study required more information than can be gathered through surveys or similar methods, while allowing for flexibility in the questions asked. I wanted to have a conversation with each participant about a specific chapter in their life and believe that this was the most effective way to do so. Many of the studies included in the literature review utilized similar methods of gathering data. However, how the data is used is significantly different. It was important that the participants have some control of the narrative. The interviews were conducted at participants' homes, workplaces, and at the interviewer's home. In addition to note taking, the interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder with participant authorization. Detailed notes were taken for the participants who refused to be audio recorded. The interviews varied in time based on responses, lasting from 15-45 minutes.

After each interview, I collated the notes and any supplemental information pertaining to the interviewee and placed them in a folder organized by date of collection. At the end of the interview, or in some cases the following day, the interviews were transcribed so that they could be coded and used for analysis. Transcribing the interviews was a long process that involved listening to the recordings multiple times, noting the inflections in participants' voices, and filling in gaps using the notes I had taken during the interview. Transcribing the audio

recordings soon after completing the interviews was integral because I was able to more easily remember the discussion. Deciphering what my participants were saying as they became passionate about what they were discussing was easier. It was especially helpful to be a Caribbean immigrant examining other Caribbean immigrants because I was aware of the colloquial sayings and how these impact the discussion at hand.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, this study relied on participant observation. This involved sitting in on community meetings at the community center, informal gatherings with participants, and becoming familiar with the neighborhoods inhabited primarily by Caribbean immigrants.

Methodology:

Prior to conducting research in Brooklyn, New York, I examined census data associated with that location as it relates to Caribbean immigrants. Based on personal experience, I was aware that there was a large Caribbean population living and working in that city. However, I wanted to be able to see the population in conjunction with other ethnic groups. I was aware that the number presented through the census is simply an estimate, especially in regards to a population where it is difficult to account for fragments that may be undocumented. However, it was imperative to get some background information about the population I was hoping to understand.

When I arrived in Brooklyn in June 2014 to conduct research, I moved into a community where the residents were predominantly Caribbean immigrants. These were the people I wanted to get to know and understand their experiences, so it was imperative that I was able to share their space and understand how their spatial location impacts their daily life. As a Caribbean immigrant myself, who was living in a community with other Caribbean immigrants, I was able to see how they use the space in their neighborhoods. For them, it was just a neighborhood where they live. What was happening in these Caribbean communities in Brooklyn is specific to Caribbean immigrants. Immigrants have been moving into spaces and shifting the image of the neighborhoods for years. However, what Caribbean immigrants have done is reformulated almost every aspect of life in their communities to reflect the countries they have left behind. Some of my participants noted that they enjoyed living in Brooklyn because they had many comforts of home easily available for their consumption. Throughout the neighborhood there was an abundance of food markets that boasted the familiar foods, fruits, and drinks that Caribbean immigrants were accustomed to. The goods available in stores spill out onto the sidewalks, encouraging customers to come in. Goods that would be difficult to find elsewhere in NYC are abundant in Brooklyn.

Living with other Caribbean immigrants and observing their activities, I was able to examine how they interacted with each other. On more than one occasion, I noticed people who did not seem to know each other, offer advice to each other. In some cases, it was something as simple as informing the other of a better sale on goods elsewhere or strangers who were riding in the same car service talking about

the new Caribbean music that was playing through the speakers or what was happening in their home countries. There seemed to be a shared camaraderie among them where they understood why they all migrated to the United States, and therefore try to help each other, no matter how small a gesture it would seem to someone from the outside. While shopping at a food market, I overheard a woman arguing with one of the store attendants about the quality of goods available for the price offered. As she put it, she was not going to pay “house and land for food [she] would throw away back home”. At this point, two more women joined in the discussion about the declining quality of produce offered and threatened to take their business elsewhere. By the end of the discussion, the women had found out which country the others were from, while one told the others to put back produce they already had in their shopping cart because the store across the street had it on sale. It does not take much for Caribbean immigrants to connect. As this example shows, the connection is almost instantaneous.

Through participant observation, I was able to understand a point that underscores my entire thesis: although my participants are all Caribbean immigrants with a similar history, they have salient identities specific to their individual countries that inform how they understand and portray themselves. This is evident from the Caribbean restaurants that delineate the specific country whose cuisine you would be sampling should you choose to dine at that establishment. I sat through a rambunctious fifteen-minute discussion about whether the dish was called ‘rice and peas’ or ‘peas and rice’, and which countries were wrong for saying it one way. At the core, Caribbean people in Brooklyn are proud of where they are

from and they want you to know it. From the smaller, lesser-known islands, to the well-known larger islands, the Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn represent their native countries with pride. In other places it would be considered rude to ask someone where they were from; but in Brooklyn it is almost second nature. This is not limited to solely Caribbean immigrants. Even those who are born in the United States would reply, "I was born here but my family is from..." when asked. In Caribbean immigrant neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Caribbean culture has become the default, with everything that falls outside of that realm being the exception.

When you walk the down street in a Caribbean neighborhood during the summer, there is a distinctly different feeling than walking down a street, even in Brooklyn, that is not inhabited by Caribbean immigrants. There is a gauntlet of different accents, various versions of loud music, and local taxis known as dollar vans that announce the latest in new musical performances. At times, it is as if you have been transplanted out of Brooklyn. If not for the looming brick buildings, it would be easy to imagine yourself back on a Caribbean island. Instead, you have to settle for the transplanted island that Caribbean immigrants have created in Brooklyn.

Participant observation in this project was especially influential in linking the manifestations of race, class, and gender, to the everyday experience of Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn and allowed for a critique of how these effects have become engrained in the everyday experiences of participants. I find it necessary to explicate these experiences because they directly impacted the methodology of this study.

So, for example, I mentioned the use of pseudo taxis in the form of dollar vans above. At first glance it may suggest that Caribbean immigrants are adapting to their environment by finding alternate means of transportation. However, when examined more closely, it becomes clear that the use and operation of said dollar vans is a testament to how state practices further marginalize and jeopardize the safety of Caribbean immigrants. In New York City, where the subway and busses are the main source of transportation, there is an abundance of busses and trains for use. Still, at times it is faster and more economical to utilize alternative sources. Like the busses, dollar vans travel along the main streets frequented by Caribbean immigrants, only stopping to drop off or pick up passengers when necessary. However, unlike busses and more formal taxi services, dollar vans are not regulated. Although dollar vans offer service at an economical price, there is a continued issue of safety as reckless driving has become synonymous with service. Very rarely do dollar vans adhere to the rules of the road, as their goal is to transport the largest amount of people in the shortest amount of time. Unlike traditional taxi services, there is a set price per ride that is uniformed across dollar vans. Passengers need not worry about paying more for travelling longer distances, and therefore often utilize the services of these dollar vans. At this costs, passengers must decide between safety and economically convenient transportation.

Although Caribbean immigrants have reformulated the space and created an entity that benefits their needs, there is a lack of regulation that renders them vulnerable that has remained unfixed. Most notably, in 2013 a dollar van collided with a taxi leaving eleven people injured. In most cases, this would spark a call for

reform. However, this did not happen in Brooklyn. There is no protection for the people who use these dollar vans as would be afforded by using more formal taxi services and the use of said services are not an option for Caribbean immigrants because these taxis do not operate in Caribbean neighborhoods. In summer 2013, the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission introduced green Boro Taxis to serve areas in New York City not commonly served by yellow medallion taxis, such as Brooklyn, Bronx, and Queens. However, these taxis still operate where they do not function in the manner in which they were intended. Often, they are only available in downtown Brooklyn, an area that has seen dramatic change with the erection of the Barclays Center, a sport and entertainment arena, and other affluent communities such as Park Slope, and the gentrified Williamsburg and Bedford Stuyvesant. They do not go into Caribbean neighborhoods or the neighborhoods that they use, therefore their services and all of the securities that come with it are not afforded to Caribbean immigrants. Caribbean immigrants continue to be excluded from protection. Services that have become commonplace in other neighborhoods are nonexistent to Caribbean immigrants and this is a reality that transcends their need for transportation, and is a reflection of other support needed in other aspects of their lives.

The exclusions are truly evident when you understand the experiences in conjunction with the larger world. I began to understand the depth of the lackadaisical treatment of Caribbean immigrant's safety and the difficulties associated with something as simple as access to safe transportation when a participant described having to take a cab home late at night after a long day of

work. The cabs that she refers to are available outside of major train stations and bus stops. These cabs have no identifying markers and often look like personal cars. Essentially, passengers are entering unmarked cars, with strangers they would have a hard time trying to find again if need be, and leading them to their homes. These cabs set their own price and are subject to change at the will of the driver. There is no dispatch service to which one can report unsatisfactory service and the safety of the passengers is contingent on each driver. This has been a practice that has been used and has become commonplace all while participants have cited their discomfort with utilizing such a service. However, when their options are whether they should wait on a deserted street late at night for a bus, or take their chances in a cab, the cab usually wins.

At the core of this study was the use of ethnographic interviews because I wanted to be able to let the participants drive the narrative. Getting started and finding participants was somewhat difficult because the participants coming into the center I was working with were unwilling to participate. This is one of the most frustrating things about conducting this kind of research. Potential participants are not going to immediately sit down and speak to you, and give up their time, if they do not know or trust you. One of the most important steps in the research/participant relationship is trusting each other enough for the latter to open up and genuinely participate in the process. Therefore, initially, it was difficult to find participants willing to sit down and talk about their experiences since moving to the United States.

When I was in the early stages of designing this study, I participated in a research methods course that was aimed at helping first-time researchers conduct effective research. During one of the classes, when discussing the positives and negatives of recruitment techniques, it was suggested that the snowball technique as a way of recruiting could lead to contaminated data. During the early stages of my recruitment process, I shied away from using this method. However, after being unable to find participants and speaking to my advisor, I realized that in studies like mine, the snowball technique is optimal because it helps bridge the issue of trust that is necessary to discuss something as personal as one's experiences. Participants were more likely to participate having known someone who also took part in the study. I used my status as an insider to this community to get the first set of participants, and from there asked them to recommend my study to other people who would be willing to participate.

One of the most difficult parts of conducting ethnographic interviews was asking the right questions. This may seem strange considering that I went into the interviews with prepared questions. However, it is very difficult to preempt what you think you may want to know and the right questions to ask in order to get the data you want. During the earlier interviews, I relied heavily on the preselected questions, varying only slightly to ask clarifying questions. Although participants were talking, it was difficult to predict the general themes that would manifest from the interviews and it was difficult to foresee what was important to understanding Caribbean immigrant experiences. These interviews were less telling than the interviews that were conducted later. After I became more familiar with

interviewing, I learned to listen in a way that allowed me to really grasp what participants were saying versus what they were trying to say, and finding the right questions to ask in order to make their thoughts more clear.

During the interviews, I got a first glimpse into the sometimes contradictory statements made by participants and knew that this would have to be explored further in analysis. At times, I felt like some participants would say what they thought I wanted to hear, instead of offering up their real experiences. At these times, it was imperative that I find a way to restate what I asked, or attach the question to another topic in order to gauge their response. When I realized what was happening, I became more aware that this is the data that I was looking for. The discrepancy between what is said and what is meant is the line where participants are saying what they think is ideal and disclosing their true feelings and this is where I received some of the most telling data throughout this research.

Although all of these methods adopted have some nuances that can be fixed, they work together to provide a cohesive picture of life for Caribbean immigrants living and working in the United States. The census provided a preliminary analysis of the site before any data is collected. Through participant observation, I was able to step back from the personal narratives and apply my individual interpretive lens as a Caribbean immigrant and a researcher. It is a precarious position that I believe worked in my favor because I have knowledge of the general experience, but as I came to learn, the individual is more nuanced. Ethnographic interviews brought the experiences to life. They put a voice to the more generalized narrative that explores

Caribbean immigrant experience and made for a telling account of what being a Caribbean immigrant living and working in Brooklyn, NY entails.

CHAPTER 3: PRE-MIGRATORY EXPECTATIONS AND LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES

During the interviews that I conducted in conjunction with this research, participants have stated that their expectations about what life would be like in the United States differed drastically from their experiences since arrival. Many described it as a “shock” or an awakening that they did not expect. Some of these discrepancies can be attributed to the United States’ reputation as “the land of opportunity”, which is one of the reasons these participants saw migration as a viable option in changing their situation. However, the discrepancies between pre-migratory expectations and post-migratory experiences seem to be rooted in information that supports the “land of opportunity” idiom as well.

In an attempt to understand the vast difference in the expectations and experiences in the US labor market, it is necessary to examine how notions of what immigrant life is like in the United States is disseminated and understood both in the Caribbean and the United States. Other than “what [they] know about America”, participants cited that their main source of information was other Caribbean immigrants; some they knew in their home countries and others they met post migration:

“You know people travel here and come back and tell you news and what not. I have friends that travel and we always want to come here. And when we get the opportunity, the visa and so on, I say I’m going to find out what is America

about. And then I come” (Interview by author with Lorna, June 22, 2014).

Like most information circulated through this community, it is based on word of mouth. Caribbean immigrants learned what to expect from others who have moved to the United States in search of work opportunities but still retain ties to their home countries, and they have shared their post-migratory expectations with others who remain. These groups of hopeful immigrants then aim to replicate the “success” of moving to the United States in search of the available opportunities.

How then do the expectations and lived experiences differ so greatly when the information is coming from those who are living and working within the space? Some participants have admitted that when they share their experiences with others, their stories are not reflective of the whole experience of what it really means to be a Caribbean immigrant in America. Some admitted that the idea of “making it” in the United States has affected how they present their life upon returning to or when interacting with others from their home countries:

“I had no relatives or anything. So I decided to come to New York to be a babysitter because everybody is trying to have a better life and when you say you’re going to New York, you think you’re going to have a better life. So I come to New York and I didn’t know what I was coming to” (Interview by author with Jacinta, July 29, 2014).

“I guess you know, I wanted to better myself and you know back home, you hear about foreign and you want to experience it because you want things and curiosity, and you hear that it’s better living and life up here so I wanted to make a better living for me and my child” (Interview by author with Bernadette, July 26, 2014).

Further discussion revealed some of the reasons behind the misrepresentation. Of the responses, most commonly, participants cited that many before them had come and succeeded and they liked the implications of what it meant to live and work in the United States. “Everybody had something and it didn’t seem like they has a hard life but they didn’t tell you how hard the struggle is” (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014). The inaccurate depiction of “real life” serves no purpose other than to support the idea of what America has come to represent for Caribbean immigrants. For many Caribbean immigrants, the United States is seen as one of the few avenues through which they can change the circumstances of their life in their native countries. Unfortunately, glorified representation of post-migratory life does more damage than good, only benefiting the United States labor market and its need for cheap labor at the expense of Caribbean immigrants.

Pre-migration Expectations and Post-migration Realities

Prior to migration, Caribbean immigrants learn what to expect about life in the United States in two ways: through imagery of America as the “land of opportunity”, and firsthand accounts from immigrants living and working in the

United States who retain ties to their homeland. The former is distributed through movies and other symbols of cultural expression, such as sensationalized stories of model immigrants who defy odds and exceptional rags to riches stories. The latter, although a more personal account, provides supplemental albeit inaccurate expectations of post-migratory experience because of individual personal pressures to adhere to the ideal America façade as explained above.

The personal accounts are the most effective in contributing to the narrative that promises a better life in the United States because it is disseminated by someone with whom the immigrant is familiar. This, more than anything else, together with the false images that are presented on television about life in the United States, including the material wealth of some Blacks on television contribute to communicating the imagery of a “better” life available. What results is a discrepancy between Caribbean immigrants’ expectations and their lived realities upon migration to the United States that have left many unaware and more easily susceptible to “doing what I have to do” to survive. For many, “doing what I have to do” ensures that they remain in precarious positions in an already stratified labor market while holding themselves accountable for their shortcomings.

Considering who controls the means of disseminating information is especially important when understanding how an inaccurate depiction of American reality becomes cemented as the true experience. Exploring how these “truths” become engrained can be explained by examining the implications of intellectual hegemony and how it works in an age of information sharing. When discussing intellectual hegemony in the context of globalization, Branislav Gosovic argues that

“the intellectual hegemony imposed by the North is of vital importance because one of the key aspects of globalization is its increasing standardization and uniformity in thinking regarding the world economic system, the development process, and the prescriptions and strategies for action” (1). Not only applicable to information that maintains one’s position in the global North as mentioned above, the concept of intellectual hegemony is easily transferrable to include the dissemination of all information as it relates to people and their interactions. Often, those in the global South follow the suggestions and teachings of those in the global North because they hold more respect for the ideas of the global North and defer to the creators of those ideas as superior thus supporting notions of the intellectual superiority of the North. This is especially evident when examining the social and economic relationship between Caribbean countries and the global North.

In relation to Caribbean immigrants in America, the United States’ position of superiority allows them to control the discourse on all matters relating to the United States, including the dialogue that labels the United States as the “land of opportunity” that draws immigrants in the first place. This dialogue and the benefits of said dialogue that arise from it via a mass influx of immigrants moving to the United States helps to solidify the United States’ position in the global North. These are geographic locations that have inherent economic and social connotations as well as distinctions based on their locations in the larger capitalist global structure. The cheap labor provided by Caribbean immigrants make all other work possible and it is essential that there is a constant supply of people willing to do this work. It then becomes easy to understand how a discourse that pushes immigrant success

stories and readily available jobs presents the imagery that encourages and supports Caribbean immigrants to move to the United States.

Most important in the discourse put forth by the United States that fuels the migration of so many Caribbean immigrants is the idea of meritocracy. My participants have stated in many ways that they believe that opportunities are available as long as they are willing to work for them. These are participants that hold multiple jobs in order to survive. For them, it is not matter of why the opportunities are so difficult to attain, but instead there needs to be an increased effort on their part to attain them.

“My life would have been better if I had managed certain life situations differently. I had a divorce. But had I not done that, which I have no control over, if I had my family with me, I think I would have been more relaxed and stuff here. But I don’t think, even after I did all this, I tried to get myself qualified and all that, I’m not paid what I’m worth. But it could be my fault. I may not have done enough to say, stick to one thing” (Interview by author with Leslie, July 25, 2014).

Participants are reassured by the notion that as long as one works hard they are able to achieve anything they want, and this ensures that when Caribbean immigrants move into the United States’ borders they view themselves as the reason for their position within the larger context instead of questioning the hierarchical structure they enter. Further, this absolves the United States of any

responsibility in acknowledging their contribution to the precarious position that Caribbean immigrants inhabit and remain in despite their efforts.

Meritocracy as part of the dialogue is also one of the reasons many of my participants remain in the United States even after they realize that what was promised is not what is available or attainable. Instead of moving on, they seem to adopt and invest further in the premise of meritocracy, which manifests into the “you have to do what you have to do” epistemology that they reiterated during the interviews.

“It was hard...and on top of that I was working and going to school at the same time. I couldn’t stop working because I needed the money to take care of my kids and that was tough. I have two kids, and I’m a single mother, and I’m trying to manage all this work and school stuff. It was hard. I couldn’t get used to such a fast pace. Sometimes I would be so tired that all I can do is take off my shoes and just sit down and fall asleep wherever I land. It was rough but I had to do it”. (Interview by author with Pauline, July 31, 2014)

“The more money you get is the more tax you pay. You understand? More money you work, more money they tax...There’s no money to buy food and all that. When I tried to get food stamps they tell me I make too much and all that so they ain’t give it to me...and where I am now, I have to put

down some [money] for rent at this fortnight before I can pay my rent the next fortnight and it make it rough. It's really, really rough. But I still not giving up. I fighting still. Somebody have to do it, And there are people who need help. So right now I'm going to work every night until twelve" (Interview by author with Lorna, June 22, 2014).

"In regards to opportunities here, you have to be like a middleclass person because if you're not it's very difficult. When your overhead is very high and you're not making enough money, you're gonna be suffering. So it was difficult but I made it happen because I used to do two jobs or per diem sometimes. Like roughly three jobs but I used to do what I had to do to make sure everything is right" (Interview by author with Marcia, July 18, 2014).

Understanding how the discourse is manifested and reiterated points to the multiple factors that contribute to Caribbean immigrants migrating and remaining in their new space. It is not simply understanding that the premise of "available work" in the United States and how migration is encouraged, but also how it works in conjunction with other factors in Caribbean immigrants' home country such as inadequate work that is reiterated by the promise of a better life with migration. More specifically, it is about understanding how intellectual hegemony and control

of the discourse helps to encourage Caribbean migration. Additionally, it is about understanding this in conjunction with factors in their home countries that encourage migration and how this is all mitigated by each country's location in relation to globalization and their power in the larger capitalist structure. These forces work in tandem to supply an abundance of cheap labor that helps to create an unequal hegemonic relationship that is symbolic of both the United States and the Caribbean countries' location within the larger global world, as well as their relationship where the United States preys on the vulnerability of Caribbean immigrants and their lack of access to alternative sources for advancement.

Leslie, a former secretary who moved from Jamaica to the United States in 1992, provides a description of her expectations of the space she would live in after moving to the United States.

“What I first thought was beauty and glamour and then when we came it was totally different. I am not accustomed to life not like home setting where you have a backyard and a front yard and you have all of your family around. Here, you live in an apartment. And so that beautiful rose garden is not what you see. It's just pictures” (Interview by author with Leslie, July 25, 2014)

The discrepancies between expectations and lived realities prove once more to be a shock to Caribbean immigrants moving into this space. Space is more than the physical settings that Caribbean immigrants inhabit. Based on Leslie's experience, space then becomes a metaphor for her overall experience as well as a reflection of

her reality. She describes the disconnection between the images she knew to be true and those that she experienced upon arrival. Although she is describing the physical limitations on space, she is also describing some of the mental constraints that accompany migration. The physical limitations are easily identifiable. The mental constraints are interpreted as Caribbean immigrants describe their experiences and the 'shock' and struggles they endure.

For Leslie, the life that she expected was the quintessential experience that is supported by the American Dream narrative. She came expecting to see rows of homes, behind white picket-fences that protect manicured lawns. Instead, like so many other Caribbean immigrants, she moved into an urban space that resonates more closely with bleakness than it does the American Dream. Like Leslie, many participants cited the dominating aura of the landscape that seemed to intimidate more than it welcomed. Perhaps, the landscape that they are moving into is more telling of the Caribbean immigrants' future in the United States: bleak, dominated by an unfamiliar structure that they would need to adapt to in order to "make it".

"Well my husband was a citizen at the time so we came, but it don't matter how many people tell you what to expect there is never, it never prepares you for what to expect. In the terms of the move, what to expect when you come here. The culture, the total change in culture, especially the freedom that we had, that kind of thing" (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014).

Most literally, the looming structures are the dominating skyscrapers that remind the immigrant that they are not at home, but instead, they are in a foreign

place where they are no longer in control of their own space. In some manner, all of the participants mentioned the shock of seeing the space that was to be their home. For some, this entailed describing the harrowing process of learning to navigate the space when “all of the buildings looked alike” or becoming accustomed to life in an apartment, where the constant presence of someone surrounding their space left them feeling “anxious and cramped”.

“I cried so many times. I had so many problems. I remember one day when I came here I went to look for a job. I went by my friend, I said I need a job. She wrote down on a paper. I found an agency but I couldn’t find my way back. I took the train, but instead of getting to Brooklyn I got to the Bronx. By the time I got back it was all the way in the night. When I got there, they said I was just about to report you missing. Because I was gone all day. I found myself all the way in the Bronx” (Interview by author with Jacinta, July 29, 2014.)

“It was hard because I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know anything so I had to map my way around and you know, search and feel my way around. Walk with pen and paper to see where I am so I could get back home” (Interview by author with Agatha, June 24, 2014).

In most cases, for those who travelled with family, it was learning how to live with children in a space that no longer encouraged play at home as they were once

accustomed to doing. For many, it is the above nuisances that have some of the biggest impacts on their migration experience.

A conversation with Bernadette, a market research analyst prior to migration, revealed how expectations and realities clash post migration. For her, she began to realize that life in the United States was not like the stories she had heard from others who had moved to the United States. She recounts:

“I wanted to better myself and you know back home you hear about foreign and you want to experience it because you want things, and curiosity and you hear that it is better living and life up here, so I wanted to make a better life for me and my child... At first it wasn't bad but after a while it took me a long time to get a job so after a while it was depressing because I was used to working back home. It took me six months or more before I would get anything” (Interview by author with Bernadette, July 26, 2014).

For so many Caribbean immigrants, Bernadette's story is their story. They move to the United States, where the promise of work is foretold as a means to an end. However, this avenue to advancement is riddled with obstacles as brought forth by the realities of race and class that serve to hinder instead of aid. Prior to migration, Caribbean immigrants do not experience the effects of race and class as it manifests in the United States. Therefore, when they move into a space where race and class dictates experience, it is difficult to understand their location within that structure. If working in the United States as a Caribbean immigrant was supposed to be a way

for advancement as described and held true by so many Caribbean immigrants hoping to migrate, their experiences would reflect that. Instead, what has become their reality is an endless cycle of experiences that keep them stagnant in the same position instead of moving forward.

Using Bernadette's story as an example, it becomes apparent how a system that promises "opportunities" welcomes while simultaneously hinders any attempts made to attain said opportunities. As a market research analyst in her native country, Bernadette was able to find work. However, upon arrival in the United States, she was told that her qualifications are not acceptable for the position. Furthermore, when she seeks work outside of her trained field, she is told that she lacks the necessary experience needed. With no "experience" and being no longer qualified, she finds work in a school cafeteria. She works long hours for little pay. This is further exacerbated by a strained relationship with her fellow employees, whom she feels are taking advantage of her because she is "green" (new to the country). Frustrated with her work, Bernadette decides to go back to school. However, she is unable to attend many programs because she is told that her education credentials are not valid. As a former market analyst, she is now required to obtain a GED in order to move forward. Bernadette, who has a fulltime job, with a young child at home, now needs to attend GED classes in order to have a chance of moving forward. In many cases like these, some aspect in life is sacrificed. Most often, it is the opportunity to receive the required education that loses out to providing for one's family. These necessary sacrifices, coupled with the insurmountable challenges that have become roadblocks in the immigrant

experience, makes it is easy to understand how Caribbean immigrants who move to the United States end up working and remain in low wage work, fighting a seemingly never-ending battle to reach the available “opportunities”.

Regardless of one’s status in their home country, participants had the same expectations of life in the United States. Their life in the United States was supposed to be “better”. For many, this meant better work and all of the amenities that come with that. However, across class lines, participants were shocked by what it means to be an immigrant in the United States. Although, I cannot claim that in all cases participants were consciously aware that their status as a Caribbean immigrant working and living in a stratified system is a contributing factor to understanding their position and by extension worth in the labor market, they are aware of the hidden difficulties that were withheld from the “land of opportunity” narrative. In some cases, what is born of this is a level of resignation to a lifestyle that is now apparent post migration. It is the birth of the “you have to do what you have to do” narrative. It is coming to terms with a process that entails struggle and sacrifice to maintain a minimum lifestyle, and in the case of those who experience downward social mobility, a lifestyle that is worse than the one in their native country. They must exist in a space that makes it difficult to return home because in moving to the United States, so much has already been lost. They then begin to understand and perpetuate the same process that caused others to withhold the true experience of life in the United States in fear of being unable to make it in the “land of opportunity”. It is all of these combined factors that has made it difficult to create a cohesive narrative between Caribbean immigrant’s expectations and their realities.

Community Networks: Supporting the Caribbean Immigrant experience

For Caribbean immigrants a large part of “doing what you have to do” is finding ways to adapt to surroundings and making it work for their needs. This is exactly what Caribbean immigrants have done in Brooklyn, NY. In Caribbean immigrant communities, residents have attempted to create a “home” within the United States. However, this comes at a price that entails consumerism and mass consumption of events and experiences associated with the Caribbean culture they left behind. Culture is a set of shared customs, beliefs, and ways of life of a particular group that is created by the people and their experiences as they navigate life. Culture helps to shape how they identify themselves, and it is evident that Caribbean immigrants have implanted their culture into their communities in Brooklyn. When any immigrant move into a new space that already has a pre-established culture, they also bring their own cultural experiences that have helped to shape how they view the world. In Brooklyn, NY, Black Caribbean immigrants have effectively transplanted their culture within American borders by way of food, atmosphere, and the resources available for consumption.

The transplantation of Caribbean culture is evident in the food, music, stores and festivals in Brooklyn. In Brooklyn, the types of food that can be found in Caribbean homelands are imported into Brooklyn for consumption, usually from the same countries they left behind. The stores and supermarkets that are selling these goods vary from small corner stores and food markets on every street corner, to the large chain supermarkets that are within the neighborhoods. The setup at the food

markets are akin to those of many traditional produce markets in the Caribbean where transactions occur within an open space. Catering to the needs of Caribbean immigrants in such an extensive manner is representative of the foothold that Caribbean immigrants occupy in some communities. At the core, it is a signal of the shift to Caribbean dominance within this space and a testament to the constantly growing population. However, this shift comes at a price. While I understand and acknowledge the importance of food in these communities in a foreign space, an examination of how these necessities reach their destination in Brooklyn provides a seemingly symbolic representation of how many Caribbean immigrants also came to occupy this space.

Many of the mini-supermarkets and produce markets are businesses owned by Caribbean immigrants. However, these markets operate within the global economy where acquiring goods is done at the cheapest price, despite the effects that it may have on the economies and livelihoods of other nations. The food that is consumed in Brooklyn comes from the countries that Caribbean immigrants have left behind and is often procured through exploitive practices that prey on smaller nations. International dominance that is exerted through trade damages smaller nations in order to pacify consumption practices within the dominant nation. In other words, Caribbean countries are exploited in order to supply goods to Caribbean people living in the United States. In this sense, the very same system that is providing the comforts of home, to help acculturate Caribbean immigrants so that they would remain within the space, is also working to ensure that Caribbean

immigrants would see working for low wages in the United States as the better option in order to support their family in their countries of origins.

Caribbean immigrants' foothold in Brooklyn, NY is somewhat tempered by the apparent commodification of national identity in the form of island paraphernalia. There are stores and street vendors who specifically sell items from immigrants' countries of origins such as clothing, handmade leather goods, and flags of all sizes. Although the products are sold year round, there is a surge in products and consumption during parades, sporting tournaments and festivals. While I was conducting research in the summer of 2014, I had the opportunity witness the netball tournament that has become a staple of the Caribbean immigrant community in Brooklyn. The tournament is much more than a sporting event. It is a social event where Caribbean people of all nationalities come together to enjoy a sport popular in many of their islands. Organized events, like the tournament, draw new and old Caribbean immigrants alike. However, the most popular expression of Caribbean culture in Brooklyn is the Caribbean Day Parade also known as Labor Day in Brooklyn. Every year, around the Labor Day holiday, there is a celebration of Caribbean culture. Similar to the atmosphere of carnival in many islands, people don costumes and dance to the current popular music by soca, reggae and calypso artists. In the weeks prior to the parade, there are steel pan competitions, concerts, and countless parties. The event has grown into such a spectacular event that it is not only for Caribbean people residing in Brooklyn, but African-Americans who reside in Brooklyn, as well as out of town visitors participating in the week long festivities reminiscent of the events they have left behind.

Although Caribbean immigrants are able to impact changes to their surroundings to some extent, their new “home” is still located in a hierarchical socially and economically stratified world that thrives on inequality and exploitation, and the Caribbean immigrant must learn to navigate this space. Learning to navigate the transplanted culture is instrumental in moving forward in the new space because at times it becomes a part of the support structures that Caribbean immigrants have developed. Some Caribbean immigrants have clung to traditional forms of community support such as churches and nationality-specific organizations and groups, but there is a larger support system built into the experience of living in Brooklyn that helps to mediate the stressors of living and working within an exploitive space. This system can only be described as community networks as they serve to aid the process of working and living in the United States as a Caribbean immigrant.

The community networks in Caribbean immigrant communities are a staple of the Caribbean immigrant experience. These networks have manifested in numerous facets, but serve the same purpose: to provide support for Caribbean immigrants. Most commonly, these networks are formally recognized as churches, community organizations, and nationality based groups. However, the networks as discussed by participants are informal networks where information about work, housing, and schooling opportunities are shared. There are no headquarters. There are no meetings. However, the information is always available when needed. Some participants cite the information learned through these informal networks as invaluable sources needed for survival. Some argue that they have made it thus far

because of other Caribbean immigrants they have met along the way and added to their own networks. Instead of navigating a new space alone, what has developed is a series of interconnected Caribbean immigrant networks, where immigrants share information that may not have otherwise been available had they not known other immigrants.

For many, their first connection to this network began when they moved into predominantly Caribbean neighborhoods. Many saw the neighborhood as being a key part in their adjustment to life and work post migration. They live and work within a realm that is governed by the doctrine of capitalism and they are on the bottom rung of the ladder. At times, their wages are only enough for them to survive within these neighborhoods and therefore, it becomes significantly more difficult to acquire the financial resources necessary to fulfill the needs they set out through migration. The economic system, in which they, like all other persons in America are located, is designed to keep immigrants within these communities, while allowing their continued exploitation within the workforce. In the case of my participants, this may not be particularly detrimental but instead a welcomed and preferred choice. However, these community networks cannot alleviate the effects of their reality but instead provide a temporary solace.

The extent of Caribbean networks are most evident from discussions with participants about how they used these networks to secure employment. Many participants cited recommendations from family members and friends as the source of their first job in the United States. In most cases, “someone knew someone who knew someone that was looking for somebody” (Interview by author with Sheryl,

July 29, 2014). While some participants cited other sources such as newspapers and circular advertisements in helping to secure work, all participants used word of mouth at some point when looking for work. In this manner, the networks become a network of references where participants were referred directly to available work. This method of finding work was especially vital for Caribbean immigrants who had recently arrived to the United States; especially when the fields that they are able to enter significantly decreases upon migration.

In all instances, the work entered into was outside of their fields of training. The work that is referred through these networks is often in the domestic sector, or other low wage work; work that makes all other work possible. Historically, African American women took jobs in the private sphere as domestics in the homes of whites. However, after years of being treated as second-class citizens in their own country where they were relegated to domestic work, African American women took a stand and left the domestic field in large numbers in pursuit of professional work or other fields of employment that they felt were less demeaning. While this shift is taking place, a vacuum developed for increasing numbers of domestic workers who were needed in the changing US economy that demanded two incomes for most households³.

The shift from domestic work for African American women began after the Civil Rights Movement erupted and with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965.

³ For a more detailed exploration of the shift in domestic workers see Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers*, (1985), Mary Romero, *Maid in the USA*, (2002); Enobong Branch, *Opportunity Denied: Limiting Black Women to Devalued Work*, (2011); Eileen Boris & Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (2012).

This coincided with an increase in migration from many parts of the world including the Caribbean. In regards to Caribbean peoples, many Caribbean nations were gaining independence. They were independent with dependent economies that no longer had the support of their former colonial powers. An inhospitable environment at home fueled the migration of many Caribbean women to fill the void left by African American women in the domestic market. When Afro-Caribbean women enter the US labor market, they are “raced” insofar as they are seen as black women who can be easily exploited because they are perceived as having no initial ties to the United States. In this capitalist era of neoliberalism, there is a need for cheap labor that facilitates all other work. With Caribbean immigrants replacing African American women in the homes, social production outside of the home continues with no threat to the existing economic structure. Further, delineating work within these sectors as illegitimate work allows for the exploitive practices that are rampant in this line of work. This makes Afro-Caribbean women ideal candidates for low wage work in the domestic sector as it marks them as cheap, disposable labor that is constantly replenished as Caribbean immigrants move into the United States.

The abundance of low wage work, and the ease with which Caribbean immigrants are able to find these jobs but are turned away from work in their trained fields, is a verification of the downward and lateral status of Caribbean immigrants that helps to mark them as cheap labor, and at times disposable labor. Migration has a designated space for Caribbean immigrants and it is not in the fields they are trained. On the surface, the abundance of jobs available may seem like the

“opportunity” that Caribbean immigrants are seeking. However, it begs the question of how this “opportunity” is measured if no one wants the work available? Here, we are able to see how the misconception arises between the expectations as described above, and the realities as experienced in the United States. Jobs in these fields are always available and workers are always needed to fill these roles. In this manner, the Caribbean immigrant is invaluable and thus welcomed. However, their success in the labor market is determined by their willingness to accept low wage work as sourced through other immigrants and shared through community networks.

It is the use of these networks that support the Caribbean immigrant’s ability to survive. The coping methods used within informal networks such as these are a response to dealing with the devaluation of their work and the need to adjust and move forward. These informal networks can be viewed as one way, among others, in which Caribbean immigrants are reclaiming some of the dignity that is stripped away with migration. They first assert their agency by repurposing the community that they live in. The informal networks further compound this because they are representative of something that they created through their own connections. They found ways to combat some of the stressors that are associated with migration by working within a system designed to stymie their progress.

Although the networks proved to be a valuable resource for many, some participants still denounced any kind of Caribbean unity. Sheryl argued that “people did not look out for each other” because they were only concerned with helping themselves and “making it”. I point to this as an example that highlights the sometimes contradictory experiences that are shared by the participants and how

that affects how I understand and present the information gathered. She cited a family member's unwillingness to help as the source of the statement. However, she also told me of the family members who provided a place for her to live upon arrival, and friends who helped her find a job and provide information about school and other opportunities that she may not have otherwise known about. I propose that the root of this statement depends on the participant's expectation of what "help" means. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, it is imperative to understand all of the intrinsic markers that shape experience, especially when trying to understand the experience of Caribbean immigrants. Whereas an individual from a working class background, who may not be accustomed to benefiting from community ties in this manner may see these community networks as invaluable, a participant who is more privileged may benefit while denouncing the use, or even existence of such networks as important. In instances such as these, it is necessary to step back and see how intersectional realities work together to dictate outlook and experience.

Prior to migration, in many of these Caribbean countries issues of race and how it relates to class as it is understood and manifests in the United States did not arise. Race, as it manifests today, is a socially constructed idea that is used to demarcate and group people based on arbitrary characteristics. However, although there is no basis for grounding race in truth, race has become a pervasive part of human interaction and thus carries real implications that affect experiences, especially for Caribbean immigrants who are unfamiliar with race as it exists in the United States and are unfamiliar with navigating race in a racist system. There were

distinct differences in class positions and thus that is how many of these Caribbean immigrants are able to understand a stratified system and their position within it. However, upon migration to the United States, and entering a hierarchical structure where class is mediated by race, Caribbean immigrants are first “classed” when attributed the status of immigrants in a working class environment, and then “raced” through interactions and employment. Immigration then becomes the instance through which Caribbean immigrants become familiar with intersecting realities of oppression.

Many participants failed to realize that their class in their home country does not translate to their position in the United States. Leslie describes the contrast between what she thought was a better life, and what she experienced in the United States.

“Well the culture shock is not having [what you thought was here]. I am a trained secretary in Jamaica. Coming here, your secretarial qualifications don’t work here. You have to get upgraded here. So you have to grab at a job, which was babysitting, or home care. Patient care or something like that. So for me, that was a little challenging. Because you need references and all this...so there was this shock and change for me” (Interview by author with Leslie, July 25, 2014).

Leslie’s experiences serve to reiterate the downward mobility that Caribbean immigrants often encounter. While there are Caribbean immigrants who were from working class backgrounds in their home country, some immigrants who experience

the most stark social mobility experiences occupied more privileged backgrounds. They are often more educated and have held more prestigious jobs in their home country. However, when they move, and their social status does not translate, they have similar experiences to other Caribbean immigrants, despite their backgrounds.

When added to the realization of the effects of race on one's position within said system, there is a compounded effect that leaves a stark difference between one's expectations pre migration and their experiences post migration. The shock that so many expressed during our interviews amplifies the realization of these intersecting realities. Although they came for a better economic life, which would entail upward mobility, this is not their reality. Their socioeconomic move was not even lateral. Instead it is a downward where their now important race helps to erase the benefits brought forth by their class. Their experiences amount to them understanding that there is an injustice in their new position, but gives them very few options for challenging said injustices.

Overqualified and Undervalued in the Workplace

In addition to being "raced", one of the harshest realities that many Caribbean immigrants face upon arrival to the United States is the immigrants' diminished worth in the work place. As mentioned earlier, immigrants are sought after as cheap sources of labor, making them very valuable to the US labor market insofar as they are needed to complete work that others refuse to do. However, when I am discussing diminished worth I am exploring the diminished worth of the workers' skill. Diminished worth in the workplace is discussed here underscores

the fact that many of the Caribbean immigrant's acquired skills do not translate into any form of equal status in the US labor market. In the case of some of my participants, they left high paying jobs that required years of schooling to occupy jobs in the domestic sector.

Marcia, a Caribbean immigrant from Jamaica describes her experience:

"I come here and I have a bachelor's degree in business management. I used to work for an insurance company and my income was good. But because of opportunities to come here and live, and I can educate my kids and because of crime and all of the craziness back home, it would be better to grow them here...I went on and tried to do the good things but it wouldn't work so I ended up taking them back home and they stayed with their dad and I came back by myself...Anyway, I had a friend in New Jersey and she got me a job as a Home Health Aide because they wouldn't accept anything I brought here. I felt so bad. It was so degrading because I had to clean people's [poop]...Anyway, I did what I had to do to survive." (Interview by author with Marcia, July 18, 2014).

A common thread of humiliation was the resounding sentiment when faced with the harsh fact that they would not be able to simply enter their trained fields but essentially "start from the bottom". Marcia's story is not uncommon but instead speaks to the complicated nature of understanding these women's experiences. Her

social class status in her home country would necessitate that her work value translates to her new environment. However, their status as immigrant denotes that their work experience in their home country is negligible, thus relegating them as sources of cheap labor.

Similar to Marcia's experience, Sheryl describes her experiences:

"Somebody told me they had a friend who asked about a babysitter. Now, my background is in public relations and marketing. I didn't have no intentions of coming to babysit nobody and starting from the bottom...[but] I wasn't doing anything and I'm not getting anything else so I said maybe I should just try it...coming here with a degree in public relations, nobody wants you. Nobody hires you. You have to go back to school. After spending money back home, I have to come here again to spend money to learn what I already know and I'm saying, why?" (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014)

Sheryl was adamant about working in her trained field. She described going on interviews and being qualified but turned away. She points to race as the underlying factor as well as her status as an immigrant, more specifically, a dark skinned immigrant with an accent. She argues that she has never experienced anything like this in her native country because she was always able to use her connections. She always "knew" somebody. At this point in the discussion, I had to step back from the discussion to differentiate between what the participants were saying and what

they meant. As I've stated before, race and the effects of racism do not manifest in the Caribbean as they do in the United States but similar results are reflected in how color, lighter skin and darker skin, works in a similar manner as race. The Caribbean is a multi-ethnic region with people of African, East Asian, Caucasian, and South Asian (known in the region as Indo-Caribbean) ancestry and these categorizations have different connotations for how Caribbean people experience life in the Caribbean. (Please see footnote #1 on page 11). Just as the social class structures remain as remnants of colonization and colonial rule, colorism and the manner in which it is used was born of the same structure. These groups, with the exception of those of South Asian ancestry, have enjoyed a status above Blacks. Whereas race as we understand it in the United States may not be an active agent in Caribbean social relations, colorism as it manifest in the Caribbean is a contributing factor to experience and carries the same connotations, especially when compounded by class.

Here, I am not denouncing the presence of color as it is presented in the Caribbean as a contributing factor to understanding Sheryl's experience in her home country. Instead, I posit that Sheryl's class as she explains it helped to mitigate her racial experience. Her family's connections and influence in her home country do not translate to her new location post migration. Thus, there is a vast difference in how Sheryl understands her location in the labor market. Coupled with her status as an immigrant in a stratified space, it becomes apparent how color and race are compounded to affect not only the individual's position but also their ability to understand their location in their new space.

By exploring the experiences of the women above, it is easy to identify some of the shortcomings of previous work on Caribbean immigrant experiences. As mentioned earlier, in some cases, there is no clear distinction in delineating class backgrounds in the home country as a contributing factor to affecting experiences and expectations post migration. There is a blanket approach to talking about the experiences of Caribbean immigrants, which provides a skewed analysis that limits the representation of the Caribbean immigrant experience. In her work, Mary Waters describes work and adjusting to menial labor as a seemingly seamless transition for immigrants:

“In addition to being willing to work for low pay, the immigrants are not bothered by the low status of these jobs to the degree a person born in this country would be. Because immigrants exist between two societies-- home and the United States-- their sense of self is not tied to the work they do as it would be back home or if they had grown up in the United States” Waters (113).

Waters’ work, however, does not account for the distinct variance in experiences based on class differences. The sentiments expressed in the above excerpt from Waters are reflective of the working class Caribbean immigrant experience and that has been reiterated by participants. The Caribbean immigrant who had limited options in their home country views the menial jobs as a stepping-stone to something better. They hold fast to the idea that this is a process of “making it” and the experiences they endure are necessary to succeed.

How then does one justify paying overqualified workers minimum wage and in some cases less to do the work that others refuse to do? It begins by understanding how overqualified workers become viewed as sources of cheap labor. When qualified Caribbean immigrants move into the United States, they must adhere to requirements as set forth by the host country. Although they may have been employed in similar positions that required similar qualification in their home country, the host country has deemed these qualifications void. Even though the immigrant may find the particulars of this exchange absurd, it is difficult to combat the effects because they are no longer operating within the small niche of their homeland. Their worth is determined by who they were in America: Black, working class women. In this country the residue of slavery still plagues all human interactions that involve people of color and specifically Black people, Caribbean immigrants are operating on the larger global stage. It is no longer about their qualifications, but instead, their worth is determined based on their home country's location in relation to the global North and more specifically its relationship to the United States. History affects their present location. Whether it is their personal history or the history of their home country, all of these factors contribute to Caribbean immigrant experiences in America.

As I mentioned above, Caribbean immigrants are "raced" and "classed" as are all Black people in the United States. In the case of my participants, where the majority of them are women, their experiences with work are amplified by their gender. They are seeking work in an economy that has historically devalued and pigeonholed Black women's work. The history of work for Black women in the

United States has had them working in the domestic sector: a sector that is heavily populated by Caribbean immigrant women. Therefore, to answer how someone as overqualified can be underemployed is a simple matter of understanding the position of Black women and their place in the labor market. Their qualifications have been invalidated. Why such low wages? Neoliberal theory as explained by David Harvey would present the argument that the “market” regulates the economy that in turn affects the wages that people are paid. However, when the “market” that is described is simply an extension of the biased, hierarchical capitalist system, it is easy to understand how the government absolves itself of protecting a group of people while benefiting from their exploitation. It is not uncommon for Caribbean immigrants to have multiple jobs simply to be able to earn enough money to survive. An economic system that necessitates multiple jobs for survival ensures that the employees’ options are limited, leaving them more likely to remain in working conditions that many would not have otherwise endured. The “opportunities” that Caribbean immigrants migrated to the United States are then made possible through low wage work, which makes it hard to succeed and even harder to transcend.

An unregulated market, coupled with a high amount of available labor has contributed to the large availability of low wage work, as well as the stigma of immigrants as cheap labor. This lack of regulation also makes it very easy to continue exploitive practices that stymie access to the benefits of “opportunities”. Their expectations and lived experiences in the United States labor market are dictated by a combination of a stratified market that controls and delineates their

worth, access to Caribbean community networks that provide resources in the form of job referrals, and the constant need to make the most of the “opportunities” present in the United States. I asked some participants after living in the United States how their expectations lived up to their experiences. For many, they argued that it was all part of the process of living in America: “you have to do what you have to do to survive”. For others, it was a rude awakening to their location in a much larger global market. Aptly put, “America was oversold. America is oversold. You can come and you can get any job. Anything you want to do you can achieve it, which is true but it is oversold. They never prepare you for the fight to get what you have to get” (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014).

CHAPTER 4: JOURNEY TO A “BETTER” LIFE

Throughout this study, participants prominently discuss the premise of a “better” life. For many, this is the reason that led them to move from their native country and settle in the United States. Generally in our discussions, a better life is presented as an improvement on their experiences in their home country. However, there is no singular measurement for what this life looks like. For some, it is an improvement on one’s living situation. For others, it is easier access to education for their children. For all, it is improved access to work that may not have necessarily been available prior to migration. At the core, the immigrant’s perception of the possible trajectory for advancement that is fueled by discourse surrounding migration as discussed earlier helps to pinpoint the overwhelming need for a “better” life. Essentially, the conditions in their home country that are a result of their position in the larger global context have created an environment where many are unable to live the life they want, and instead need to seek “better”.

Are you better off in the United States than if you had remained at home? It seems like a simple question that would require either a yes or no. However, this was one of the most complex questions for my participants to answer. For many, a heavy sigh preceded their answer. Some refused to provide a concrete yes or no answer to the question. Instead they opted to answer in some variation of ‘some things yes, some things no’. When participants did provide an answer, they followed the answer with an explanation that in some ways refuted their initial answer. In these instances, it is imperative that my role as interlocutor in this project be one

that tries to decipher the complexities of these statements as well as retain the participants' initial meaning. So what does it mean when participants say that they are better off in regards to available opportunities in the United States but their lives would have been less stressful and better for their families if they had remained in their native country? It means that the measures for "better" do not stop at the individual's perceived success. It means that the measures for better can change over time and manifest as something new as circumstances change. "Better" is not solely about the Caribbean immigrant's existence in the United States, but also what it represents in terms of 'making it'. "Better" is being able to send money, food, and clothes back to one's homeland to those who were left behind, even when it is difficult for the Caribbean immigrant living and working in Brooklyn to provide for themselves. "Better" is making sacrifices so that their children are able to have the opportunity to transcend their parent's reality.

Defining the individual "better"

"Better" extends past the personal and reaches into the communal goal. So how do we begin to understand participants' "better" and what it really means? First, it is important to explore the qualities participants believe to have made their life better in the United States. In addition to this, it is imperative to examine the grievances participants have raised in regards to their experiences and how this affects how they understand their "better". Finally, we must take stock of what these sometime contradictory experiences mean in relation to the larger social world. By combining all of these elements, we are more able to obtain a cohesive

understanding of what “better” really looks like for Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn.

Below, some of my research participants define what “better” off means:

“Yes. I think that I am better off here. I don’t think that I was going to go very far back there. I don’t think so. Because when I came here, I was already a clerk for 14 or 15 years and I didn’t see myself going anywhere...People that I left there, I go back there and every time I went back they are still a clerk.” (Interview by author with Jacinta, July 29, 2014).

“I think so. Yeah. I’m better off. Even though it is tough now I am better off because back when I leave home, at that point it was already hard. That’s why I left. The shop was losing business and I didn’t have no place to find a job. I mean you know, every year it gets harder and harder and I used to like it back then when I first came but now it’s just stress and headache but I’m still doing better. I was able to bring one of my sons and he’s up here now working and making things better for himself. I have a daughter now and she’s in school and young but I’m glad that she can grow up with options, you know what I mean? Options and opportunities can make a big difference.”(Interview by author with Patrice, August 1, 2014).

“Yes, definitely. If only for the opportunities and the things that I have been able to do since I came here I know that it was worth it. The things that my children were able to do and accomplish alone is worth it. My cash flow is better and my education is better. Back where I’m from people don’t really go back to school. Once you’re finished you’re finished and that’s it. Even if you wanted to go back you couldn’t because there’s no place to do it. The job opportunities are better here too because look when I didn’t like HHA anymore I was able to go back to school and do something else. I’m not saying that it is easy but it’s possible. Here your choices are endless.” (Interview by author with Pauline, July 31, 2014).

For Suzette, a young woman who has lived and attended school in Jamaica and the United States for an extended amount of time, the answer is no. Suzette is one of a small amount of participants who stated that life would have been better had she not migrated to the United States. During the interview she stated:

“I was forced by the hand on the man (laughs). The white man. He told you there’s money here and opportunities and I’ve been here and yes there is money here to be made but I feel like you have to rob, steal and kill to kind of get your hands on it because you work hard and all the government does is take away all your money in taxes and you can’t afford anything so

then it's like why come here? And then with opportunities, yeah, I have a college degree and I have a shitty job so what is the point of me doing that? I probably shouldn't have gone to college. Twenty thousand dollars in student loans like hmm maybe I should have kept my high school diploma" (Interview by author with Suzette, July 18, 2014).

As discussed throughout, it is easy to understand how the idea of available work and access to money encourages people to seek the United States. Access to money in this sense goes beyond having enough money to survive in her current situation and translates to being able to reflect long term growth that is promised and associated with the United States. It reflects a need to have excess resources that may make it easier to maintain a "better" way of life than was possible in her home country. However, as it is evident from Suzette's interview, this was not her experience.

Instead of experiencing the promised riches, she has a "shitty" job where she "can't afford anything". This is a pained reality for so many Caribbean immigrants as it testifies to the harsh realization that immigrants moving to the United States to "make some money" must endure. Their reality becomes one in which they are working to survive and surviving to work. Very few are able to reap the benefits of their labor to grant them what they really wish for. Whether it is labeled as moving for the "opportunities" or something else, at the core, it manifests in one's ability to attain tangible capital. However, the reality of their experience is they are working hard with very little chance of advancement that has resulted in a stagnant understanding of what "better" represents.

The work that Caribbean immigrants often enter into upon migration is not conducive to providing a “better” life. We have already explored how Caribbean immigrants are entering into a space that makes it difficult for them to attain work in their trained fields and how this in turn helps to force them to engage in low wage work. Working in low wage jobs and living in one of the most expensive cities in the United States has fostered a cycle in which most of the money earned is spent living in the United States. Supporting those who remain in their home countries that they have left behind, a goal for many who have migrated, becomes increasingly difficult. In some cases, the decision becomes one where Caribbean immigrants must choose between their survival in the United States and providing for those who remain at home. In this sense, Caribbean immigrants are not ‘making money’, but instead are treading the proverbial economic waters. In other words, instead of earning enough wages to make a “better” life, what becomes the reality for Caribbean immigrants is that their wages are not their own for their benefit. Instead, they are forced to fuel the very system that makes it difficult for them to ‘make money’.

Again, there is no singular definition of “better”. We can only understand how each individual determines their “better” by acknowledging the participant’s social location prior to migration and how this in turn affects how they understand and represent their experience. Ann, a Jamaican woman who migrated at a young age and believes that she is better off because of it stated:

“Yes. I mean if you had lived at home you would have to find ways and means of surviving because people living out there, some of them are off than some of us living here in America.

But me coming, and coming younger you get opportunities to do things and a lot of things wasn't available when I was younger. Now things get modernized but even things a little hard with some people. But certain things I have, if I live in Jamaica I wouldn't have. Certain thing you have to have a good job to get it. It's expensive with food and clothes. Yes, you would have clothes but not the amount that you have now...So it's a little bit easier when you can take a twenty US dollars and go shop and you can get rice and meat. In Jamaica, it's kind of little bit" (Interview by author with Ann, July 28, 2014).

For Ann, "better" is measured by the fact that she is able to have more material possessions than she would have had if she remained at home. It is significant to note that more does not have to be a substantial improvement from her previous situation. Her social location prior to migration is the driving force behind her understanding of her life in the United States. She moves beyond the notion that it is not possible to survive in her native country when she notes that survival is possible if one is of a certain class. Acknowledging the intersecting realities of oppression and the ways in which class mediates experience in Caribbean countries helps to understand the foundations of "better" and how a few material goods can change a dominating experience to resemble one of "better".

In addition to understanding the complexities of "better", and how "better" is constructed, examining the social conditions prior to migration in relation to the

participants' location in the United States is necessary. This is predicated on understanding the expectations prior to migration and the negotiations and concessions made post migration in order to achieve the "better". This includes understanding how work and education received in the home country is devalued upon arrival and how this impacts one's baseline for measuring "better". Logically, one would infer that participants who were of a higher status in their home countries would argue that their lives would have been better had they remained at home. However, Caribbean immigrant experiences do not follow a logical trajectory. Although there are a few participants who were well off prior to migration who believed their lives would have been better had they remained at home, a larger number still believe that their life was better because of migration and the opportunities afforded to them in the United States.

Bernadette, the former market researcher notes:

"I think this is a tough question but to be honest I am doing much better here. I think that I have been much better and I could have done much better too but I think that the life I was living there is less stressful but I think that I have more opportunities up here. I have more opportunities still to get things done...it's better here but you know what you have? You have stress. It's just a different level of stress." (Interview by author with Bernadette, July 26, 2014)

For her, “better” is not measured by her experience thus far, but the opportunities that are still possible. Bernadette’s experience is a testament to the concessions and negotiations that Caribbean immigrants often make as part of their migratory experience. Like so many others who came before her, Bernadette believed that her better would manifest upon arrival to the United States. However, after years of living and working towards “better”, there is no tangible evidence of what “better” looks like for her. In fact, in Bernadette’s case, there is downward social mobility with migration. She has testified to the struggle in obtaining work as well as education post migration and while other participants seem to occupy a form of lateral mobility, Bernadette’s social position has declined because of her experiences through migration. Whether it was a conscious decision, or one that was forced through the effects of migration, with this downward mobility brought the need to negotiate new ways of measuring better. For Bernadette, this means shifting her understanding from one which reflects what she has done thus far, to one that explores the possibilities still to come.

Instead of the pre-migration understanding of better, such as material goods and upward social mobility, Bernadette has shifted her better to represent the possibilities that were promised with migration. Although it is not uncommon for Caribbean immigrants to adjust their plans post migration, Bernadette’s concessions and negotiations are then explained away by a ‘doing what you have to do’ logic that continues to hold migration as the ultimate goal for advancing, even when the results of migration prove otherwise. By adjusting how better is measured, the goals of success remains solely with the individual’s abilities and not on the compounded

effects of race, class, and gender on Caribbean immigrant experience. This relinquishes a system that invites immigrants into a space where their imminent degradation is ensured while helping to solidify the narrative of individual accountability. No one wants to be the example of the person who is unable to make it in the 'land of opportunity'. The narrative that drives Bernadette and those like her to keep fighting for what is available for them is the same narrative that encourages them to rethink how they examine better to fit into their experiences despite the realities of their existence.

The ability to reformulate and reassess how "better" is measured leaves a skewed understanding of what success with migration entails. Often, the new measures of "better" are never accomplished, as Caribbean immigrants are unable to meet these new standards that they have set. In order to claim success, instead of adhering to "better" Caribbean immigrants enter into a cycle where they are constantly changing what their "better" represents in order to fit their current experiences and continue the narrative of imminent success with migration to the United States.

"I like how you have variety. You can choose. You have a lot of options. You know? That's what I like, versatility. If you don't want to stay in Brooklyn, you can go to the Bronx. There's a lot of opportunities there for you to get to. Most of all there are opportunities here for the kids. Back home a lot of my family members they go to high school and do well in high school and they can't even go to college. I wouldn't have been able to

afford to send her to college. Those are the things that I wouldn't change" (Interview by author with Bernadette, July 26, 2014)

Variety and options as described above allow for inaction to represent action. Here, their experiences in the United States become a representation of possibility instead of reality. This means that as long as they are chasing the possibility, they can legitimately argue that their life in the United States is "better" than their life in their home country. By accepting and adapting to these measures of "better", it is unlikely that Caribbean immigrants will be willing to acknowledge the realities of their migration as not being conducive to their success.

It is evident that participants' location prior to migration as well as their shifting ideas of "better" influence how participants answer whether or not they are better off in the United States. However, there is another factor at play that influences how participants respond that hints at how the larger hegemonic structures invade the personal experiences of Caribbean immigrants as they maneuver their new space. As discussed in earlier chapters, intellectual hegemony is used in the narrative that paints the global North as the ultimate goal for advancement. This narrative extends beyond pre-migratory expectation and continues to influence how Caribbean immigrants experience life in the United States. The notions of the United as dominant permeates the discourse that supports that life in the United States should be "better", despite the actual experience, and many Caribbean immigrants replicate this discourse because they believe a failure

to do so reflects their inability to succeed. In answering whether she is better off Sheryl notes:

“Yes and no. I think I would have been better off financially and better off as a family unit because back home is more family oriented. You spend more time with your family. You would have more time together. I say that because I remember going to work and dropping off my first son with my mother and finishing work at four. I could go to my mother and sit down and talk or I go home to my husband with my son and it didn’t seem like the day was done. So I remember that. Here, I have to hustle to get home and I have no time to cook and sit down and talk. I don’t see my husband sometimes because we work different shifts and by the time I turn around my sons are on their way out of the house. So I enroll in school because I don’t want to go home and sit down alone doing nothing, So I feel yes right now I would have been better off if I had stayed at home. But on the other hand I’m thinking that it’s good to be in America in the terms that everybody is saying ‘ooh they live in America’. When I go back home it’s like oh you’re the daughter that has the sons and live away. You know, and my mother is proud that I am living in America and when I come home everybody wants to see me and my children. It kind of give me

a rush. So that's a good thing" (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014).

It may seem trivial but this is the power of discourse in inviting Caribbean immigrants to the United States. "Foreign" and what it represents is welcoming to those who want to do "better". It is suggested that once in America, the individual is better off and more successful than those they have left behind. Evidence of how the dialogue is constructed and the power it yields in inviting Caribbean immigrants is solidified when Caribbean immigrants attach a status to living and working in the United States. These ideas are based on preconceived notions of what their life can be *if* they are willing to work for it. Additionally, there is also an aura of exclusivity that is attached to the narrative of migration. Among Caribbean immigrants there appears to be an unspoken rule that living and working in the United States is a signifier of success. During some of the interviews, participants mentioned having the "opportunity" to get a visa when so many before them were unable to do so. Some participants felt as though they were among the lucky who had been selected to make their lives better. Restricting access reinforces exclusivity in controlling the amount of people allowed into American borders. The lengths that people go to in order to obtain the opportunities promised in America is a testament to the power of dialogue and reach of intellectual hegemony. Therefore, when Caribbean immigrants are granted access, they see this in itself as an accomplishment and use this as the baseline for measuring their success, even as their experiences suggest otherwise. Instead, they choose to reshape their ideas

of how better is evaluated and in turn they help to reinforce the structures that limit their advancement.

Education as a renewed signifier of “better”

Initially, for Caribbean immigrants “better” is represented by social mobility through work. However, upon arrival to the United States, there is very little visible upward social mobility. Instead, most commonly there is a lateral move where Caribbean immigrants occupy similar locations to those in their native countries in a new setting. There is a realization that their expectations are not aligned with their reality and therefore participants reimagine how they would measure their experiences in the United States. For many, this is reimaged through how they view education. Education has always been important as a marker of success for Caribbean people. As mentioned earlier, when participants first migrate, they understand advancement as it manifests through work. However, when advancement did not manifest through work as they originally presumed, participants shifted how they measured and demarcate their “better”. One way in which they do this is through education. Thus, education becomes a renewed signifier of “better” that shifts “better” from reflecting the personal advancements of the participants, to one that includes advancement through education, even if it is not their own. In their experiences, education has always been a steadfast way of marking advancement, and therefore a return to this marker helps to ensure that they are more easily able to provide tangible references to their “better”.

This is especially prevalent with participants who have children and moved with their family. In answering whether they were better off than if they had remained in their home countries, participants point to educational opportunities for their children in mitigating their acceptance of their life in the United States as “better”. In this sense, their children’s education is an extension of their experience. By connecting their success with their children’s in this manner, Caribbean immigrants have found ways to extend the possibilities for success and achieving their “better”. Their success is no longer dependent on their individual success in the labor force because they have allowed for alternative measures of success as deemed important by them. “Better” then becomes a communal effort instead of an individual effort insofar as it can be achieved for many by one person. The responsibility for achieving said “better” still remains solely on the immigrant. There is still the same premise that the opportunities are available as long as one is willing to work hard that does not account for the impending obstacles that they face.

Participants who believe that they are better off in the United States cite educational opportunities for their children in supporting this claim, whereas participants who argue that they would have been better off at home, often use educational opportunities available to their children in order to support why they continue to remain in a place they believe to have contributed negatively to their experiences. For Marcia, who has a bachelor’s degree but found work as a Home Health Aide upon arrival, her life would have been better had she remained at home. She is aware of the obstacles and hardships she has had to encounter with migration

but she sees options and education for her children as a redeeming factor. Marcia notes:

“I would have been better off if I was in Jamaica honestly... Yes because I changed and came here to live I had to start over. I started life over. Certain things that I have accomplished already I have lost them. I walked away. I walked away and leave everything and I have to start over now. Which that doesn't bother me because material things are just, like I have a life and I'm still going on and I can still accomplish stuff again and that's not really important to me because I'm gonna die and leave it. For real, so as long as they're happy [children] and as long as they understand themselves and they have education and they go for what they want I'm good.” (Interview by author with Marcia, July 18 2014).

She started life over. It's a simple statement but it captures the essence of the reality of migration. Migration is not about taking what you had previously and building upon it. That is not what migration is for Caribbean immigrants. Migration is leaving what they have built behind and starting over in a place that welcomes and supports their labor but not their efforts to succeed financially. They are starting over in the workplace where they often have to become recertified in order to work. They are starting over in communities where they have to adjust to life in a new space and acclimate to a new culture. They are starting over in a place where they are held

accountable by standards they did not help to create. Race and class mitigate their experience as immigrant women, and education is seen as a means through which they can combat the realities associated with migration that they were previously unaware existed. Education for their children allows them in some ways to transcend their location and realities. Based on this premise, and the same narrative that brought them to the United States, their children *should* be able to do “better”. Their children *should* be able to navigate their space without facing the obstacles that participants did when seeking work. Leslie notes:

“You know, in some ways it’s half and half. Maybe my eyes are open a lot more now that I’m here and if I knew some of what I know, if I were home, I would have been a lot much better...Because I think I was fine at home. We have our own house, we have all the stuff you know. I had a good job as a secretary for a school and all of that. It’s just that urge where people say come to America that made you think coming to America was all that. For my kids though, I think taking them to America, the education that they got, the system that they got advanced them further...So I think I had it had its ups and downs. Pros and Cons but for them it’s great.” (Interview by author with Leslie, July 25, 2014).

Among Caribbean immigrants there is an importance that is placed on education that suggests that an education will somehow erase the effects that race and class

have on experience. For some, education is the means through which they can help manifest their parents' ideas of better. For others, obtaining an education and being unable to transcend the location and achieve the "better" that is promised through education, it is a reminder of the underlying realities of class and race in influencing their possibilities.

In an attempt to understand the validity in using education as a measure for "better" among my participants, I turn to my interviews. I was fortunate to have interviewed a pair of mothers and daughters about their experiences living in the United States as Caribbean immigrants. Although both of the mothers had differing views on whether or not they were better off in the United State, both of the mothers involved cited education for their children as a measure of "better" that is possible. Based on their narrative of "better", their children *should* have been able to transcend their parent's location. Therefore, I look at the experience of their children in order to understand how education influences "better".

I asked the children the same questions I asked their parents. The most important to this narrative being: Are you better off here than you would have been back home? And generally the children's answers aligned with their parent's. In response they note:

"It's kind of hard because I didn't live that life as an adult to compare it so I don't know but I do know that when I was there my dad did have plans for me to go to University. He did save money to pay for me to go to University. He didn't think to give me the money to use here because I'm supposed to have

money here so life would have definitely been different. I probably would have been happier...I'm extremely unstable at this point and I believe...I strongly believe that if I was home and I had went to University and gotten a degree there I would have a job because my dad knows everyone...and I don't mean to sound privileged but it would have been better than me coming here and I know no one. That's the huge thing in America, it's who you know" (Interview by author with Suzette, July 18, 2014).

"I mean, I always thought I had a good life in Jamaica. I had no problems really...but I know that there is a lot of opportunities that are here that aren't in Jamaica. In certain areas I think I'm better off here" (Interview by author with Janet, July 26, 2014).

The discrepancy with education as a signifier of better arose, when Suzette noted that she would have been better off had she remained at home. Since moving to the United States, she has obtained a bachelor's degree but by her estimation she is still "extremely unstable". She lives with her mother because she is unable to afford to live on her own. For her, the promised stability of her home country is more welcoming than the opportunities promised in the United States. Education was supposed to be how she made her life "better". However, she is still in the same location that education was supposed to help her transcend. Education did not help with social mobility as she is experiencing the lateral mobility prevalent with

Caribbean immigrants. In her case, education was not enough to catapult her towards the promised success. Instead, her education is a reminder that even with the “necessary” tools, there are underlying factors that mitigate her experiences as a Caribbean immigrant.

Among my participants, both families would have been considered better off in their home country. Bernadette was a data analyst and Marcia has a bachelor’s degree in business management. However, upon arrival they obtained work outside of their fields. They started over. They acknowledged that their idea of better was not manifesting as promised and pointed to their children’s education and the possibilities that accompanied that, as being an additional marker for determining “better”. However, the question still remains, is education a feasible measure for better? Based on the interviews conducted, it is illogical to surmise that education is the ultimate measure that will transcend the complexities associated with immigrant life. It is not an impossible task, but like adapting to the realities of migration, it is important that Caribbean immigrants realize that realities of education. Education does not guarantee access. They still live in a circumscribed world where their experiences are affected by their race, class, and gender. The narrative that fuels the belief that with education comes success, is the same narrative that allows for the normalization of “if you work hard, you can achieve it”. The narrative associated with success simply shifts as the Caribbean immigrant evolves and adapt to life in the United States.

“Better” is the reason that Caribbean people moved to the United States. Yet, there are still discrepancies as to whether or not what they are experiencing in the

United States is really “better”. Although I respect the participants’ right to demarcate their notions of “better”, I posit whether their notions of “better” and how they understand “better” is to their detriment, as it is not an accurate reflection of “better”, but simply starting over in a place that breeds the same results as their home countries. “Better” and how they see it is determined by their location prior to moving to the United States, in relation to their position in the United States post migration. However, participants are still working within a neoliberal context that encouraged migration out of their home countries. When they move to the United States, they continue to operate within that context and thus, lateral and downward social mobility occur. In addition to this, they are Black, female, and working class and these markers, in this social context breeds an experience that is not very different than the ones they left behind in terms of achieving “better”. However, instead of questioning this, participants simply explain it as a process of migration, and “doing what you have to do”. So the notion of “better” as they understand it is fragile and is contingent on many factors that change and shift in order to mold and solidify that what they are experiencing as “better” even if there is no way of concretely proving that their life is “better”.

The notion of “better” is ever changing and is contingent on factors that Caribbean immigrants decide. But, the fact still remains that at the core, “better” is rooted in the idea that United States is the means through which this “better” can manifest. What manifests from this is that any experience in the United States becomes an illusion of “better”, despite the reality of said experience. Participants have come to believe that because this experience occurs in the United States, it has

to represent “better” and therefore, this notion goes unquestioned. Upon migration, participants do not necessarily move into a “better” space in the labor market and they occupy roles where they must still sell their labor but still, they label their experiences in the United States as “better”. Even within their neighborhoods, where they are surrounded by other Caribbean people, they are still located in the neoliberal capitalist structure that governs and permeates all aspects of life and this too is labeled as “better”. So while they may feel some security within these communities, they are still susceptible to the effects of living in United States which have proven to be detrimental to them experiencing “better”.

Still, ideas supported by intellectual hegemony and the dominance of the United States are driving participants to see their lives in the United States as “better” and helps in solidifying hegemonic notions of “better” that will affect other Caribbean immigrants who will inevitable move into the space. It is because of these ideas, and the continued belief of the US as a place to achieve “better” that participants return to their home countries and perform presentations of the availability of “better” in the United States despite their experiences.

Understanding why Caribbean immigrants are living and remaining in the United States despite their depreciated position is not linear. It is a messy, convoluted set of experiences that is rooted in the personal as well as the political. Although I may point to the gaps in their notions of “better” and what that really means, there is a general consensus of struggle among Caribbean immigrants. The most basic analysis of the Caribbean immigrant’s need to migrate in search of a “better” life would suggest that immigrants are seeking a lavish lifestyle in the

United States at the expense of American citizens. Without taking into context the narratives of opportunity at the center of American discourse about migration that promises what would be considered a lavish lifestyle for some, it is difficult to refute this analysis without understanding how Caribbean immigrants see their “better”.

When one takes into account all of the external factors as discussed, it becomes clear that migration for those who are given the opportunity is not an option, but instead a necessity. For many that I interviewed, the need for migration stemmed in a need to obtain basic materials for surviving and in doing so, it has manifested as “better”. Whereas some of the more privileged participants saw migration as an avenue for ‘new experiences’ and educational opportunities, for many of the immigrants who were working class in their home country, migration allowed them to do something that was difficult in their home country; provide for their family.

As explored by my participants, often, migration entails leaving their family behind. For those who are fortunate enough to travel with their families, there is need to reformulate and restructure the familial unit in order to acclimate to life post migration. Understanding Caribbean immigrant experience in the United States cannot be understood by looking at singular parts of their experience. All of these factors must be taken into account in order to understand the seemingly contradictory experience of Caribbean immigrants and in order to understand what a “better” life looks like for them, when it is unclear otherwise. Although they have admitted to being oversold and misled about what to expect post migration, according to many, their experiences living and working in the United States still

represents something “better”. However, it is important to note that in some cases, this presentation of a “better” life that is supposed to happen with migration is a skewed manifestation of ‘making it’ in America that fuels the narrative that welcomes other Caribbean immigrants with false expectations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis is an examination of Caribbean immigrants' experiences in the US labor market and utilizes a political economy framework of historical materialism and Black feminist theories to examine these experiences through a gendered lens of intersectionality that sees gender, race, and class as equally important in understanding Black women's lives.

In locating participants' experiences in the United States, I begin with a thorough analysis of Caribbean economies in order to understand factors causing mass migration from the region. This examination is rooted in historical materialism and points to a history of colonial domination and exploitation that underdeveloped Caribbean economies as one of the leading factors contributing to Caribbean peoples' migration. Through globalization and social constructions of race, class, and gender, the global North, in this case the United States, has created and sustained ways to extract as much cheap labor as possible from peripheral countries, i.e. countries in the Caribbean region. This relationship that started with colonization and continues today accounts for the dominance of capitalism that stifles any attempts smaller nations make at advancing. In turn, Caribbean economies are unable to compete in the global economic market and only function as subsidiary entities that support to the global North. In other words, these economies are unable to support the people who live in this region, and thus migration becomes the means through which Caribbean peoples attempt to deal with this reality.

Their post-migratory experiences are examined with the narratives of the participants at the forefront. Caribbean women who migrated after the 1960s share

their experiences living and working in Brooklyn, NY. From the included data that was collected in the summer of 2014, it is evident that there are distinct differences between pre-migratory expectations and post-migratory experiences. These differences and how they are explored are informed by participants' social location prior to moving to the United States and can be used to understand how Caribbean immigrants locate their experiences post migration. In other words, accounting for participants' race, class, and gender, is instrumental in understanding how they see themselves in America. Additionally, these social realities inform how they formulate notions of "better". "Better" and what it represents is at the core of this study. All of the included experiences are motivated by notions of a promised "better" and this thesis examines how "better" is described and adapted as Caribbean immigrants navigate the US labor market.

In order to understand how ideas of success and "better" manifest in a manner that allows people in the native countries to see migration as a viable option, even when the Caribbean immigrant experience in the United States is a reflection of strife and seemingly unending hardship, it is imperative to recognize the everyday conditions that influence their understanding. In some cases, what clouds one's perception is the ability to provide some form of material good for those who remain at home and are struggling more than those residing in the United States. Here, more is a relative term as it is determined by the individual and "better" is about the materiality. Their goal is to escape what they see as economic hardship and anything more than what was previously available signals "better". In this instance, the individual is able to gauge their ability to provide aid for those who

remain in the country based on their own personal standing and whether they are having 'hard times'.

Most generally, among those who remain at home, as well as Caribbean immigrants residing in Brooklyn, NY, there is an assumption that those who remain in the home country are in a worse economic position. This is due to the fact those who remain in the home country believe that the United States and migration represent a life that is "better" than the one available in their native country. An interview with Lorna provides a clear view of the conflicting experience of having to provide for those who remain in the home country when one is unable to provide for themselves post migration. She states:

"Even when I travel back to Jamaica, I like I always carry down barrels. They expect it. I go down and went to buy things and sometimes I say what?! The price is like oops! Chicken is like 2 or 3 hundred a pound. Oxtail is 5 or 6 hundred a pound. So compared to up here where I can go to the meat market with \$20, it's like, I can come out still. But down there when I go in with \$20 I come out with nothing – a pack of chicken. You can't get that down there. \$5 can't get you nothing down in Jamaica now. Absolutely nothing. No. If you had \$5 here you can go buy a pack of chicken for \$2 and a pack of flour and come back and cook. You go down there it's like \$200 a pound. \$5 is not

\$200 in Jamaica so it's hard⁴...It's hard on people. Every time they call me crying and I see how things are and I am going home and I try to buy as much as I can and put it in barrel and ship it back home. So at least it can serve them a little time. All they have to buy is meat... I used to send a barrel to my kids. But sometime, now my job is like when I used to work I used to work private so I used to have more money. Now you work with the company. So you used to get like \$800 a fortnight and now you only carry around like \$500 or \$400 so you can't do things, so you can't buy them things. So when I'm going home, I carry home like 3 or 4 barrels when I go home next year. Now I go grab a few things when they're on sale so that mean I will have a certain amount of things to go and carry."

(Interview by author with Lorna, June 22, 2014).

Lorna's recount of navigating a fluctuating economy highlights how a country's location in relation to the global North can impact social relations. Lorna is from Jamaica, a country that has seen currency depreciation. Unlike other countries of the Anglophone Caribbean, Jamaica does not use the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (XCD) and instead uses its own Jamaican Dollar (JMD). Unlike the XCD which is tied to the US dollar and has had a steady, non-fluctuating exchange rate, the JMD is not linked

⁴ Please note that this interviewee is engaging in some exaggeration here because at the time of the interview, 6/2014, the exchange rate on one US dollar was \$JD110.00. Her larger point, however, that what \$US5.00 would purchase in Brooklyn at that time, its equivalent of \$550 in Jamaica could not purchase the same is a point well taken.

to a larger currency and thus exchange rates fluctuate and change constantly with no way to regulate it in an unstable economy.

As simple as it is, this shows how the political becomes personal and how that in turn affects how people understand their location. It is even more evident here how integral individual experience is in influencing how “better” is determined. As evident from Lorna’s interview, her financial situation has changed. Yet, because she believes that she is better off than her family in Jamaica, she makes concessions and finds alternate ways of providing for those who remain at home; often at the cost of her own survival in the United States. Sacrifices like these allow Caribbean immigrants residing in the United States to perpetuate the notion that life in United States is “better”, and thus those at home should expect certain amenities from people who live abroad.

Based on interviews with participants, there seems to be discrepancy between how those who remain at home understand the concept of work in relation to everyday life expenses. The stigma attached to living abroad supports the idea that material goods are more affordable and therefore more readily available. This belief is rampant and I have witnessed a similar dialogue in my own travels to my home country or other Caribbean islands that my friends call home. At some point during the trip, usually at the end, someone living on the island would ask for an item I brought on the trip. Usually referring to an article of clothing, the request is usually followed by some variation of “you live in America where you can get it cheap”. There is an inherent assumption that Caribbean immigrants living in the United States are better off because they have transcended the space of home and

therefore have access to the amenities available abroad. However, what Caribbean immigrants living in the United States fail to acknowledge is that the availability of goods does not necessarily translate into being able to access said goods. When they do return, they fall into the confines of presenting themselves as better off. As shown by Lorna above, a trip home is carefully planned so as to prepare for the number of barrels and packages that are sent back. These packages become a signifier of the promised possibility. What those in the home country are not privy to is the reality that at times, those returning home are packing these barrels for months. They are constantly checking for sales on nonperishable items because they cannot afford to buy the amount they need otherwise. However, when they return home they perpetuate notions of easy access to material goods as they want to be associated with success in the United States based on what they have been told that success is supposed to look like.

In chapter 3 Sheryl noted that she enjoyed being associated with life abroad and what that represented. Being referred to as “the one with the husband and kids that live in America” is important to how she views herself, while influencing how she views and understands her experiences in the United States. Undeniably, those returning home to visit do not want to be associated with failure. Failure in this case is the inability to provide the material goods that represent the “better” that is promised with migration. For Caribbean immigrants, many before them had migrated and succeed. Therefore, the inability to do so would be a reflection on the individual and not on the experiences that prohibit the individual from achieving better as originally intended. Instead of acknowledging that their expectations differ

greatly from their experiences in the United States, Caribbean immigrants facilitate the cycle of deception about the reality of life in the United States and help to contribute to the pressures that support that working more while receiving less is part of the experience on the road to “better”.

It is evident that Caribbean immigrants are exploited post migration. The realities of race, class, and gender affect them as they move into a hierarchical system where they must learn to maneuver and locate themselves within this structure in order to move forward. However, the burden of the Caribbean immigrants’ position in the United States and the labor market cannot solely rest with a racist, sexist, capitalist system. It is apparent that they have had a hand in their continued exploitation as they help to support the vernacular that welcomes them to the United States although their experiences is evidence of a different reality. They are aware that what is promised is not what is available. Yet, they continue to perform the markers that encourage other Caribbean immigrants to move into a space under the same conditions that use them as sources of cheap labor while ensuring that they will remain as such.

Although I point to Caribbean immigrants bearing some of the responsibility in their location, this does not take away from the system that thrives and profits from their exploitation. This is an exploitation that was born and developed because of Caribbean countries and their relations with the global North and a history of exploitation. Caribbean immigrants are paying the price for a broken system that dates back to colonization, and have yet to find a way to alleviate the factors that are insisting that they leave in order to find “better”. Through all of this, there is still a

connection to the home country; one that goes beyond the material goods. The connection is tied to a want to return home to live despite having left in search of “better”. This want seems to suggest that some participants did not view migration as the ultimate step, but as a necessary precursor that will eventually run its course. For some, working in the United States is the something they ‘have to do’ before they can return home. Below, participants expressed the desire to return home at some point in the future:

“I’ll retire and move back home...The quality of life is different. It’s peaceful and it’s more community oriented and safer...But here you have many facilities and they have many resources. So the resources and opportunities are plentiful compared to back home but you still need to be grounded in the culture so I go home every single year. There is no year that I don’t go home. It feeds my soul. It allows me to deal with people that are challenging and keeps me grounded so every single year, even twice a year I’m going. You can experience it a little, but it’s not the same thing as being back there. Like I said you’re engulfed in the sense of community. Here you have aspects of it. You go visit and then we try to have something called Grenada Day and you know there are snips of the culture but it’s not the same. The smells, the sights, the sounds, everything and the people are different...I’m actually looking for land this time when I go back

because I've utilized it to the best of my ability" (Interview by author with Cecilia, July 28, 2014).

"I'm in the process of building my house. Hopefully by next year it's done. When I retire, I will go back. I could go back. That's my home. Hopefully by next year it's done. When I retire, I'm gone" (Interview by author with Jacinta, July 29, 2014).

"We are into real estate and have a lot of houses we are renting and for me, I'm only telling you this because my brothers and sisters are not here, I'm the executive of the will of my parents. I am in charge of everything. So I could leave here and go back and fall back into not having to worry about what I'm going to do. So I have that security. Do I want to go now? No. First my kids have to get married and you know see them on their own...I'm just coming into myself in America and feeling good and I still have a good couple more years to work and to experience America. So I'm not going to say that I'm not going to go back. I am going to go back but not now. If I could have been given a choice I can pack up and go because I have something to fall back on. So I'm not ready to go but I am going to go". (Interview by author with Sheryl, July 29, 2014)

The three women above have very distinct hopes that surround their desire to return home. In some cases, the privileges of the life left behind offers some comfort when participants think about returning home. Whereas Sheryl has amenities in the home country that will facilitate her return and aid in her re-transition, Jacinta and Cecelia must work to create the comforts necessary to prepare for their return.

There is a distinct difference in social class prior to migration among these women that is influencing their ability to facilitate this move. Sheryl's location has provided a foundation that would aid the transition back home because her class allows for the privilege that was present prior to migration to remain even when she has left her home country. The self-sustaining nature of class ensures that she has the option of returning home with no prerequisites hindering her. However, for Jacinta and Cecelia, who did not occupy a privileged social location prior to migration, they once again have to start over, similar to when they migrated to the United States.

There is some sentimentality wrapped up in the want to return because in some cases it seems idealistic and unlikely. During the interviews, it was unpredictable who stated that they wanted to return home and this speaks to how important individual experiences are in shaping their want to return home.

Participants who vehemently argued that they were better off for having migrated stated that they were planning on returning home. In these cases, better off is not synonymous with enjoying the experience and wanting to remain in the United States.

For many, the nostalgia of returning home centers around the idea of returning with retirement. This is an idealistic goal because most often, the women

are not working in jobs that would allow them to support themselves if they retire. Despite their socioeconomic background prior to migration, when participants move to the United States they become working class. For some, this entails downward social mobility, as their status in their home does not translate to the United States and despite their efforts, they remain in this position. The reality of this is abrasive and does not allow for the contingencies that come with moving back home. Below, participants describe the steps necessary for them to return home. In these cases, it then becomes clear that home remains an ideal that comforts the reality of their experience. They state:

“If possible I would have gone back and live if I had money. That’s the only way to do it. Try to save so you can build a house and do little things. You can’t just pick up and go home when you don’t know what you’re going to do. You can’t just do that. You have to make a foundation before you go. Because I’m not trying to stay until I’m old. I’m trying to work on it from now. Sometime after a while the cold gets to you...at the same time I planning I have to remember that I have children born in America and I have to deal with my children born in America...Not exactly at this moment we are gonna leave. Not even in the next two or three years. Maybe further down the line but we are going home” (Interview by author with Ann, July 28, 2014).

There is no place sweeter than home. I miss everything about home. I miss the people. The easiness that everybody move with you know? Just people who look out for each other you know? They don't really have that here in America. That's one of the things I really miss. That is what I miss the most. Even though things are hard I would go back. I'm tired of the hustle and the bustle. I used to like it when I first came up here but not anymore. But I need money...Buy me a ticket and I'm gone. Really I think all it will take is a better job so I can make more money and make things a little easier. I don't need anything fancy. I just need a better job. I just don't know how I'm going to do it or how I'm going to find time to do it. (Interview by author with Patrice, August 1, 2014)

If I could go home, and have a job then have me house and all this stuff then I would stay. Yeah, I'd definitely go back and stay. The freedom. It would be different because I've lived here for so long now. But I could manage it. It would be very manageable still. Relaxed. Yeah you have a yard. I never had sadness problem when I was home. I have sadness problem here. (Interview by author with Leslie, July 25, 2014)

There is no definitive time set to return and a notion that they will return someday is enough to justify their remaining in the United States. The reality for these women

remains that their return to the home country to live is very unlikely. The social structure in the United States does not allow for this transition when there are no support systems in place because the work that they engage in is marginally sufficient to support their lives in the United States. Even when the participants attempt to build their own safety nets, the process is long and arduous because it requires that they add an additional financial burden. However, there are people who have been able to put those safety nets in place and make the ability to return home a reality. Yet, they still remain in the United States because although they have a home, they lack the financial resources necessary to make the move. They are aware that it would not be feasible to return home to the same stagnant market they left behind and expect to thrive. It is this realization along with these checks and balances that prolongs the Caribbean immigrant's stay in the United States, especially when they wish to return home.

Examining Caribbean immigrants' experiences in the United States is complex because although there is a shared culture and similar history, they are all influenced by their individual experiences prior to migration, which in turn shape their experiences post migration. The narratives included herein have added to the discussion surrounding Caribbean immigrants and their experiences post migration. Ideally it would have been good to include the narratives of men, and this something that can be considered for future work and may be beneficial in offering a comparison of experiences when one group occupies a privileged identity, i.e. maleness, but I do not think the exclusion of men takes away from the discussion on Caribbean immigrants' experience. The experiences contained within are reflective

of a struggle that is inherent with migration that occurs in a stratified system and is applicable to Caribbean immigrants in general.

At times, it may seem as if Caribbean immigrants offer conflicting narratives when sharing their experience but this is a testament to the nuances that impact their experience and how they understand them in relation to their lives. This is especially prominent when we examine how they understand “better” even when what they experience in the United States is frequently not better than what they left behind. When looking at their experience it is imperative to utilize an intersectional approach that accounts for race, class, and gender. These Caribbean women face the realities of racism, sexism, and classism simultaneous. The sexism is often racialized and class specific, while the racism they encounter is racism specific to their gender and the position they occupy as working class. Still, there are distinct similarities that occur in experience post migration that contributes to the collective experience that has become the standard Caribbean immigrant experience.

Caribbean immigrants living and working in New York City have been instrumental in shaping not only Brooklyn, NY but impacting the larger global world. Whether it is in the United States, or in other points of migration such as the United Kingdom, Europe, or Canada, Caribbean immigrants leave their home countries in search of a better life for themselves and their families and believe that living and working in these nations is the best avenue through which this better can be accomplished. It is evident that before Caribbean immigrants migrated to the United States they had preconceived notions of what to expect. For Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn, the ideas of what life would be like in America is influenced

by the narrative surrounding America as the “land of opportunity”, as well as tales of people from their home countries who had made the move and was now living in “foreign” successfully. In many cases, notions they believe to be true are riddled with misconceptions that hold fast to the hopes surrounding migration instead of the realities of immigrant experience. What has resulted because of this misconception is an influx of Caribbean people who move in search of “better” but end up trapped in a cycle where “better” as they understand it prior migration does not manifest, or if there is any change to their lives, it is reflected only marginally in their overall experience. What is promised is not what is available. Instead of the economic and social success that delineates “better” that Caribbean immigrants sought prior to migration, they have learned to adapt and make concession on how they examine “better” and what it means for how they experience life in the United States.

Caribbean people’s experiences have been at the forefront of scholarly discussion for years. From prominent historians such as C.L.R James and his recount of Caribbean resistance and resilience and his commitment to combine Marxism with the struggles of Black people, to more recent works by Nancy Foner and others contained within this work who continue to strive to make the experiences of Caribbean immigrants visible, Caribbean people will remain an integral part of the discussion on labor, stratification, and exploitation, especially in regards to the United States and other members of the global North. My work recognizes the contribution of the scholars before me in guiding my understanding of Caribbean immigrant experiences and how they have shaped the foundation for how these

experiences are understood. It is on this foundation that I ground my work, and strive for an even deeper understanding of how Caribbean people experience the social world.

Throughout this work I have shown how important it is to include an analysis that locates experience at the intersections of race, class, and gender, as all of these identities simultaneously affect how Caribbean immigrants understand their experiences in the United States. In order to understand the complexities associated with Caribbean immigrant experience, it is especially important to understand participants' social location prior to migration as it informs how they determine "better". For those who occupied positions of privilege, becoming working class status- an imminent experience for Caribbean immigrant women- is a "shock" that resonates with the precarious position they hold in the labor market. For many, they understood that their "better" would manifest through work but when they migrated and realized what was promised was not what was available, they had to rethink how they understood "better". They are thrust into a hierarchal system that is constantly reminding them of their inferiority in the workplace, as well as in their everyday lives, and for Caribbean immigrants part of living in the United States is dealing with this reality. Still, for many, this is "better" than the life they left behind.

What has developed is an instance where Caribbean immigrants remain in a space that is not conducive to their advancement or achieving "better" and in some instances they are perpetrators to actions that stymie their growth. Yet, despite their experiences in the United States, they still remain steadfast in the belief that

“better” is possible and available, and find alternate ways of measuring “better”. At times it may seem as if Caribbean immigrants have become complacent in their own exploitation but this would be a simplistic, and inaccurate depiction of Caribbean immigrant experience. They have shown determination and resilience in the face of oppression and exploitation and have gone on to restructure a space to fit their needs. Despite working more and receiving less, they continue to provide for those who remain in their home country. There are continuous obstacles placed in their way as they try to navigate a structurally unequal system, yet they continue to work towards *their* “better”. They take jobs in fields for which they are overqualified, and in many cases restart lives they had already worked hard for. Although there are numerous signs that point to the fact that their lives are not better off, they continue to find new ways to transcend their circumstance and remain resilient to the oppressive practices that were designed against them.

In spite of all of this, there are Caribbean immigrants who truly believe that they are better off for having migrated to the United States- and they determine what that looks like. For them, migration is not about whether or not they enjoy the experience, but their ability to do more than they were able to in their home countries. *They* determine how they understand and locate themselves in the United States. Their “better” is subjective, but it is also contingent on the Caribbean immigrant’s ability to cope with the reality of living in a stratified space where they are on the bottom rung of the ladder. Therefore, while someone looking in from the outside will argue that Caribbean immigrants would have been better off had they remained at home, there are Caribbean immigrants who would argue otherwise and

therefore encourage others to migrate in search of work. Again, this is not to suggest that they are complacent in their location, because as is evident from the interviews and how they shared the way in which they have transformed the space around them, dealt with realities of race, class, and gender, and are constantly shifting how they measure their success that they refuse to let their reality limit their possibility. Despite their experiences they hold fast to the belief that “better” is available. It is unclear whether this is to their detriment or whether this is a signal of the unwavering hope that Caribbean immigrants exhibit that fuels their want to do “better” that has helped to foster a community in Brooklyn, NY that continues to thrive in spite of the many factors designed against its survival.

APPENDIX: Summary of included Participants Interviews

1. Pauline moved to the United States with her children after most of her family had already made the move. Her first job was as a Home Health Aide. She worked in the field for approximately 7 years until she went back to school to become a Medical Assistant. She has family and friends who live in Canada and believes that they went there as an alternate option to the United States because they were unable to acquire the necessary visas to move to the United States but still wanted access to education and jobs. She believes that she is better off economically and has a better education. However, she believes that she would have been healthier if she remained in her native country.

2. Cecelia was brought to the United States at a young age and hated the experience. She works as a nurse, which she believes comes easy to her because she is from a family of nurses. She spends a significant amount of time talking about the differences in the spaces and growing up in very different communities by comparing her homes pre and post migration. Community is very impotent to her and that is one of the things she misses the most since leaving her home country. She maintains strong ties to the home country and cites the availability of opportunities as the major reason she is still in the United States. She plans to eventually return to home to live. Although she plans on moving back, she believes that economically she is better off in the US.

3. Marcia moved to the United States with her children and moved in with her father. She stated that she felt like she had to start over because her qualifications were not accepted when she was looking for a job. She began working at a supermarket and then later went on to work as a babysitter in New Jersey. Soon after she went into the medical field where she started as a Home Health Aide and worked her way up. She discusses working long hours and being a single parent working multiple jobs to “make ends meet” and being unable to do so. She talks about raising children on her own and trying to navigate problems caused by an on the job accident that makes it difficult for her to continue working. She cites, crime and the economy in her home country as the reasons she would not move back to live. However, if those conditions improve she would move back because she would have been happier and better off at home.

4. Ann was brought to the United States at a young age. The space she moved into was nothing like she expected. She moved into what she considered a violent space so she missed the comfort and security of home. Her first job was in a store with other Caribbean immigrants but she soon moved into Home Health Aide work because there were multiple jobs available in that field and she liked working with people and the elderly in a private setting. She plans to eventually move back home to live because she believes that she would have a better experience there. This is contingent on her “setting up a foundation” beforehand because although she likes the atmosphere and overall lifestyle in the Caribbean she is aware of the fact that

there is a lack of resources. She cites the availability of opportunities as a reason for staying even though life is hard and this was not what she was expecting.

5. Suzette moved to the United States as a child but moved back to Jamaica shortly after for six years. She has attended school, in addition to working in the US. She discusses the initial shock of moving into the space, trying to adjust and trying to maintain connections with the home country and the problems that arose because of it. She is unsure of whether or not she is better off in the United States. She argues that she may have been more stable economically because of family connections and ties to the community.

6. Leslie spends a significant amount of time describing the shock she experienced when she initially moved to the US. She first came on a vacation but later returned with her husband, and then bringing their children soon after. Initially, the change in language, communal atmosphere, and general respect were challenging to accept. She discusses finding work in the domestic field after being turned away for work similar to the job she had in her home country. She discusses first impressions of the new space and discusses the apprehension with raising her children in a space so different from her home country. She goes on to discuss her experiences as a babysitter and process through which she was able to get her first job. When asked if she is better off she says that her eyes are more open now so that's good but she would have been better off at home.

7. Agatha visited the United States for her son's wedding and never left. She brought all of her children and grandchildren from the Caribbean to give them a better opportunity. The adjustment was difficult because she had to leave her children behind in order to provide for them. This was difficult because she had to provide for herself as well. She found work in New Jersey as a companion aide and has been in that field up until retirement. She eventually went on to become a Home Health Aide. Although it was a lot of money to bring her children and grandchildren to the United States, she thinks she is better off and they are as well because of the opportunities that they could not get at home. All of her family is now in the US so she does not see herself going back to live.

8. Patrice first visited the United States before she moved to live. When she did move to United States she was undocumented because she overstayed her visa in order to remain in the country. She found work as a babysitter and then went on to become a Home Health Aide and is currently working as a Home Health Aide. She moved to the United States for better opportunities that were not available at home and to be able to provide for her children back home. She has family living in Canada who she states are living there because they were unable to get a visa to come to the United States. Although she thinks she is better off in the United States, she would go back home to live 'in a minute'

9. Jacinta moved to the United States after a family visiting her island on vacation hired her as a babysitter in the United States. Prior to that, she was a clerk

but migrated because she thought that it would be a better life. She worked in New Jersey with the family that brought her to the United States but knew that she wanted more so she went back to school. When she decided to leave the family, they threatened to call immigration on her because they didn't want her to go. She started work as a Home Health Aide and went back to college but did not graduate even though she has 45 credits and a 3.4 gpa. She plans on moving back home when she retires.

10. Sheryl spent a significant amount of time talking about the drastic differences between her home country and the United States. From the neighborhoods, to the people, she found things to be drastically different than expected. At home she had a "good" job and moved to the United States to be with her husband but upon arrival she learned that her qualifications were not acceptable. She currently work in the health field but first went through the process of being a Certified Nursing Assistant and acquiring other certificates. If need be she would move back home because her family owns a business and she would be financially secure.

11. Lorna moved to the United States on her own and has been here ever since. She sees America as the land of many opportunities where you may have to work very hard for these opportunities and still be unable to achieve them, but they are there and available to everyone. Her first job was as a babysitter in New Jersey but now works as a Home Health Aide. She enjoyed the work as a babysitter but likes work as Home Health Aide more. She's always wanted to be a nurse but was never

able to do that so this is a close second. In her home country she had her own business before moving to the US. She keeps in contact with people back home who are asking for things because they cannot afford it and even though she is struggling she tries to send back as much as she can.

12. Bernadette moved with daughter to family that was already living in the US. It was difficult to find work because her qualifications were refused. She worked as a research analyst prior to moving to the United States but could not find work in that field upon arrival. She applied for college but was told that the degree earned in her home country was not acceptable and was told to take the GRE in order to qualify. Not being able to find work took a toll and she decided to move out of that field into something that would require less training in order to be able to earn money and support herself. Frustrated with her job, she decided to move into the health field and went to school to become a Medical Assistant. She thinks that she is better off in the United States despite all of the things from home that are important to her that she does not have. However, because of the opportunities available in the United States, she believes that migration was worth it.

13. Janet was brought to the United States at a very young age by her mother and considers herself to be Americanized. While she remembers parts of her life before moving to the US, she is more familiar with the American lifestyle. She would not be able to move back to where she was born because for her that

is not home. She has no problem visiting and acknowledging the culture but for her, America is home.

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