

4-1-2011

# Gwan Ah Foreign: Multicultural Education and the Schooling of West-Indian Transnationals

Alisa Cox-West  
*Trinity College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>

---

## Recommended Citation

Cox-West, Alisa, "Gwan Ah Foreign: Multicultural Education and the Schooling of West-Indian Transnationals". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2011.  
Trinity College Digital Repository, <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/51>

# Gwan Ah Foreign: Multicultural Education and the Schooling of West-Indian Transnationals



Alisa G. Cox-West  
Educ 400: Senior Research Project  
Educational Studies Program  
Trinity College, Hartford, CT  
Fall 2010

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration is not a new phenomenon in the United States. Immigrants have been fleeing their homelands in search of the American Dream and in hope of improving their lives. Some have cited poverty, famine, and civil unrest as the main motivation for uprooting and far travels. West Indian immigrants from the Greater and Lesser Antilles have been settling in major cities such as New York, Miami, and Boston since the early 1900s. Currently West Indian immigrants make up a little less than 10% of Hartford's population. The majority of them reside in the North End of Hartford in the Blue Hills, Asylum Hill, and Albany communities. It is without a doubt that they face trials and tribulations, as any other immigrant group would, as they attempt to navigate Hartford and adjust to American society. However, they make up a significant part of the workforce and due to their high home ownership rate in the Blue Hills area, it is apparent that they are quite successful in their quest for academic and economic success. Through interviews and round table discussions with West Indian students this study attempts to uncover the underlying factors that propel West Indian immigrants to success, and the trials that they face as they discover their identity in a highly-racialized society, and navigate the Hartford public school system. It also sets out to illustrate how the identity created by West Indian immigrants is used (whether latent or otherwise) as a defense mechanism which aids them in their quest for academic success. The study will be guided by the research question: *To what can we attribute the success of West Indian students in Hartford public schools?* Some other questions for investigation are: *What is the process of self-identification for West Indian students in a hyper-racialized society? What are some challenges that one faces as a West Indian in Hartford? How does schooling play a role in the success or failure of West Indian immigrants? Who are some key change agents that aid West Indians in their pursuit of success?*

---

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While literature on West Indian success in Hartford is scarce, theorists and educators have written extensively on academic achievement, race, and identity formation which can be used collectively as a framework for this study. Academic achievement often spans everything from competency to level of education. For many intellectuals it is defined as the measure of growth after the completion of a subject, course, or task. However, it is implicitly defined as the underlying aspect that improves one's social standing and as a tool of modernization. Academic achievement and the measure of what is learned in the classroom is the result of the content of what is taught in the classroom, how it is presented to the students, as well how the students receive it. Nonetheless, due to socialization taking place at every stage of life and in every social institution, it is important to consider the effects of societal factors on academic achievement and schooling.

For many students race, ethnicity, and culture all shape how they perform academically, and can often predict their level of academic achievement. Morgan (2010) explains that the level of academic achievement for African Americans is quite different from that of their white peers because they essentially have different learning and communication styles. He categorizes these two learning and communication styles as field-dependent or field-independent, meaning that students who come from cultures which highly place an emphasis on “cooperative learning methods of teaching” are considered field-dependent, while those who are more detached and competitive are field-independent. He suggests that it is the fault of the educator for they often “essentialize” minority groups as if they are all the same, and therefore do not adapt their teaching styles to reflect their student body. This act of *essentialization* is actually rather detrimental to the academic achievement of minority students because it has the potential of

diagnosing students incorrectly and mistaking a difference in cultural capital for cultural deficit (Rue & Brown et al. 2001; Maddern 2009). Therefore, we can attribute the difference in academic achievement to the learning styles of students of color which is strongly influenced by the cultural capital of students.

While cultural capital plays an indirect role in the academic achievement of students of color, Orr (2003) argues that race, class, and culture collectively affect the economic capital of a family which further affects the level of academic achievement possibly attainable by the student. She argues that economic capital, or the equity and wealth that one possesses, greatly affects one's academic achievement because it determines the connections made and avenues opened to students in their quest for academic success. Set out to explain the gap between Black-White test scores, Amy Orr (2003) analyzed the effects of wealth on academic achievement and found that wealth can be converted to cultural or social capital as theorized by Bourdieu's (1986), which is used to the advantage of Whites and an explain the disparities evident in the test scores. Orr's study which analyzed a subset of the data set of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth demonstrates that wealth or economic capital contributed to a "hidden curriculum" which promoted greater college expectations, better quality schooling, greater unlimited educational resources, and social acceptance. All of these have been known to boost the confidence and comfortability of the student, as well as the worth of the educational experience. While her findings on the impact of wealth on academic achievement based on age were too insignificant to explain the widening racial gap in test scores as children get older and progress through school, her overall findings were significant enough to contradict the notion that educational opportunities are equal and based on merit.

The theory that economic capital can positively affect academic achievement if one is wealthy is further supported when analyzing the classroom dynamic and composition. Jepsen and Rivkin (2009) defend this notion in their study which focuses on the effects of smaller class sizes on academic achievement. Together they investigated the effects of the class-size-reduction program in California public schools and found that smaller class sizes raised achievement in math and reading. This coincides greatly with the Orr (2003) study in that the effects of smaller class sizes also brought about the increase in unqualified teachers in schools of low income neighborhoods. Consequently, it is proven that correlation existed between income and educational attainment in that schools with greater financial resources were capable of hiring a greater amount of staff and a greater amount of qualified staff to suffice their small teacher-student ratio while those of lesser income were not afforded the same.

As previously mentioned, academic achievement is greatly affected by race, class, and cultural capital. However, it has also been argued that in regards to race, there are minority groups who are successful in U.S. public schools. John Ogbu's (1987) cultural ecological theory is the framework used to best understand the phenomenon of West Indian success. He proposes that voluntary immigrants, who purposely migrate to the US rather than by way of conquest, are more likely to succeed than involuntary immigrants because their perception and response to the schooling is non-resistant and receptive. Their cooperative attitude, Ogbu (1987) argues, is a result of viewing schooling as a necessary step to social mobility and just another factor in the process of becoming American. Schooling therefore is not a threat to voluntary immigrants because their recent migration has not yet formed the oppositional cultures and identities that involuntary immigrants have formed through years of oppression and experience with prejudice within social institutions. In agreement with Ogbu, Olneck (2009) argues that immigrants are

---

receptive to U.S. schooling because it is used as a means to adopting American culture which is the primary goal of immigrants working to gain cultural, social, and political clout in America. He also highlights that the main misconception of immigrants is that they want to preserve cultures separate from the American mainstream culture, when in fact, his results found that the preservation of their culture was secondary to the adoption of U.S. mainstream culture. Albertini (2004) and Gilbert (2009) both disagree strongly with Ogbu and argue that in fact Black immigrant youth mistrust their teachers and as a result resist education. They found that while mistrust does not occur significantly in middle school, it does occur significantly in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, which makes their academic achievement no different to that of their non-immigrant peers. Rather, Gilbert (2009) argues that there are other factors that attribute to their academic success.

Lopez (2003) argues that it in fact one's dual-frame of reference attributes to their success because they,

“contrast their present situation with that which their parents had left in the home country. An intense feeling of guilt and obligation toward a sacrificing mother, along with the dream of ending family hardship, leads these young people to emphasize academic success as a means of bring honor to their families.”

In other words, the dual-frame of reference, or the ability to view one's life in regards to the success, failures, and struggles of their elders, becomes the catalyst as well as the sustenance necessary for academic and economic success. Immigrant boys and girls use this reference as motivation to improve the social and economic status of their families and the conditions of their communities.

Stacey Lee's (2005) study of race and immigrant youth highlights the way in which immigrant youth struggle with highly racialized societies. Lee refers to this as the process of racialization or “the way race informs immigrant encounters with social institutions and shapes

immigrant identities” and suggests that it is a necessary process in becoming American. She explains that allying oneself with a specific preset racial category is difficult for immigrants because they often are unable to identify with the histories of the members of those racial groups, however, they relinquish to that request because they feel obliged to do so because they desperately want to be American. A study done by Xue Lan Rong and Frank Brown (2002) further proposes that Black immigrants are in fact more disadvantaged than their non-immigrant peers because they struggle greatly to racially identify in U.S. society. This struggle is instrumental in the way that immigrant students perceive discrimination which affects their self-esteem and indirectly effects their academic achievement (Seaton et al 2008; Thomas et al 2009).

#### PARTICIPANTS

For this study seven men and women between the ages of 19 and 27 years old were interviewed individually and participated in a focus group discussion. They are all immigrants from the West Indies who have settled in Hartford and surrounding neighborhoods. This specific age group was targeted because it is important that they are able to look at their academic career in retrospect and articulate their experience both in the United States and abroad. These men and women were recruited through email due to a previous relationship I formed with them through my position as the Caribbean Students Association president, as well as my participation in events at the West Indian Social Club of Hartford and the Sportsmen Athletic Club of Hartford.

In addition, interviews were conducted with Mrs. Gertrude Desmangles who is a former Hartford educator. She has worked for the Hartford Board of Education for decades and was instrumental in the creation of the West Indian New Arrivals Resource Center throughout Hartford County. Mrs. Desmangles was recruited through her husband Prof. Leslie Desmangles of the Religion department.

Four of the seven young participants migrated from the country of Jamaica. Ronald, a 25-year-old from Port Antonio, Jamaica is the only participant who has attended all three years of middle school in the United States. He migrated here with his mother from a small rural town in Jamaica and settled in Meriden, CT with his uncle. He attended middle school in Meriden and then high school in Hartford after his uncle moved to open a business. Ronald has since graduated from CCSU with a bachelor's degree in fine arts and media with a concentration in photography.

Paul is a 24-year-old young man who is originally from the notorious city of Kingston, Jamaica. After moving to St. Mary, Jamaica which is a rural agricultural-based town in the hills of Jamaica, he attended school for one year and then moved to Hartford, CT. He attended high school at a large public school in Hartford before moving to East Hartford. He spent a few years at Capital Community College, and has recently graduated from Central Connecticut State University.

Sean and Cassandra are 22-year-old fraternal twins from Portmore, Jamaica who recently migrated to Hartford after their father relocated and remarried. Since their arrival five short years ago, they have both completed their GED at a local community college after a short stint at a large Hartford public school and are currently pursuing their interests in nursing and computer science.

The other participants are from much smaller islands in the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean. Dawn, is a 27-year-old mother from Christ Church, Barbados who is a University of Hartford alum. She migrated to this country in the middle of her 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and completed both middle school and high school in Hartford. Since she first settled on the border of Hartford

---

and Bloomfield, Dawn has moved to West Hartford where she now lives with her husband and son.

Allison is a 25-year-old recent graduate of Central Connecticut State University from La Horquetta, Trinidad. She first arrived in the U.S. at the age of 14 and settled in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She moved to Hartford at the age of 16 where she attended the local high school and became involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Hartford. She currently lives with her mother in the North End of Hartford.

Kim is a 19-year-old from Castries, St. Lucia. Her mother migrated to Boston when she was 6 years old, and eventually settled in Hartford with distant relatives. After Kim's grandmother passed away her mother sent for her and she migrated to Hartford in 2007 at the age of 17. She is a recent graduate of a Hartford Public School and is taking classes at MCC.

#### IDENTITY

"I didn't know I was black until I came here." Paul declared. This is the best way to explain how the participants thought about their identity and how they self-identify within the United States. Identity for West Indian immigrants has been complicated in most respects because race in the United States is constructed completely different from other nations, and racial/ethnic categories are limited and do not reflect the multiethnic people of the Caribbean. Due to the fluid nature of race, and the fact that it changes based on the society in which it is established, West Indians often struggle to identify because the categories in the U.S. are so rigid. Allison had the most difficult time adjusting to the racial categories in the U.S. and explains,

"In Trinidad everybody is mixed up. So you can be Black, White, Dougla, Indian, Chinese, Syrian, or Spanish. We don't just have Black and White; and a lot of people are everything mixed up in

---

one, not one specific thing. That is why when I fill out forms I will check other”

In other words, Trinidad, as well as most of the West Indies, consists of a population that primarily identifies themselves as Creole because they are descendants of a plethora of ethnic groups who migrated to the islands to work in agriculture before and after the slave trade. Through inter-marriage, we are left with groups such as “Douglah”—someone of African and Indian descent—which cannot be translated to the strict racial guidelines of American society. It is this frustration with the obligation to identify as one or the other that makes transition to life in the Hartford, and anywhere in the U.S. quite difficult.

All seven participants self-identified as West Indian or West Indian-American. However, the four participants from Jamaica all gave preference to a Jamaican-American identity or simply a Jamaican identity when asked by their peers to identify themselves. Race in their home country was less important because nationalism was more emphasized and the term West Indian is still something rather foreign. Ronald explained,

“Well when people ask me I say that I am Jamaican. Every now and then I’ll say I’m West Indian or Caribbean-American or Jamaican-American. But I always say Jamaican first because that is what I am. I don’t have nothing against anyone who says they are West Indian but that is still very new to me. I still think as if I am living in Jamaica. After all, Jamaica is what made me who I am.”

For West-Indian immigrants, pride and unity are placed at the forefront of their country’s values which results in the nationalism that is portrayed in Ronald’s rhetoric. It is also evident in the motto of Barbados—“Pride and Industry”, Jamaica’s “Out of Many, One People”, and Trinidad’s “Together we aspire, together we achieve”. For the participants, mainly those of Jamaican origin, identifying with their original national identity felt more natural to them because they were socialized to believe that being Jamaican, Trinidadian, Barbadian, or St. Lucian was primary and

all other identity markers were secondary. Choosing to self-identify in another way left them with a feeling of betrayal in which they chose another identity over that of their native country.

In regards to racial identity, none of the participants self-identified as African American. Five of the participants explained that the term African American and/or Black does not account for their multifaceted cultural identity so they have opted not to use it. They admitted that their refusal was due to the negative portrayal of African Americans in society, and the stigmas that are placed on African Americans in regards to education and work ethic. Sean explained,

“Well everybody says how Yankee people dem ah lazy people. Dem nah never look for work and dem ah collect all de checks and welfare and ting from de government. So why would I associate wid dat. No matter where we go people ah say Jamaicans ah have de most jobs. Dem ah hard working people. And dat feels good. Dats what meh want fi hear.”

While they do understand that generalizations and stereotypes about African-Americans are often myths and are used to perpetuate racism and discrimination, they fear that self-identifying with that racial and ethnic group would have a negative effect on their image in society. They also admit that it is their separation from “African Americans” that makes them successful because they avoid the negative stereotypes and the stereotype threat that are associated with that group. As previously explained by Sean, West Indian or Caribbean people have a reputation for being hard-working and diligent people. They often work more than one job because they have to support families here as well as in their native country. Thus, they believe that identifying with anything less than the values they uphold is a disservice to their community and their legacy.

Gender was also another important element in self-identification. While others spoke indirectly about gender, Dawn candidly discussed it because she strongly felt that being Black in Barbados was not as important as being a woman because there was gender discrimination in regards to employment, schools, and societal gender roles.

“To be honest I think being a woman was more so on my mind when I was living in Barbados because race didn’t really matter. Everyone is practically Black—Whites are the minority. So things are more classified based on gender...Everyone knows what men run things in that country. And although we have had some great women in politics, women still are left with the domestic jobs and the expectations for them are lower than for men. Men does make all the money and we are expected to let them take care of us so we aren’t pushed as much. I still hate that which is why I try so hard to break it.”

She also further explained the importance of femininity and how much society depended upon women for survival and success. For the men, their identity was very much grounded in hyper-masculinity. They reflected on the high expectations for them to excel economically and take care of their families. This also seems to explain why all of the male participants were the first to leave their home country and settle in America.

#### EDUCATION

The participants were asked to compare and contrast their schooling experience here in Hartford and in their native country. Five of the seven sample participants stated that they felt the education they received in their home country was superior to that which they received in Hartford. Many participants explained that they were forced to be left back a grade when they registered for school in Hartford despite having already learned the material that was required for advance classes. According to Mrs. Desmangles, this is rather common for West Indian students because they have been educated in the British or French system which is often not recognized by the Board of Education. They are then incorrectly placed in classes based on their ability without any consideration for their previous achievements. All seven participants explained that while it took some time for them to get adjusted to the teaching styles of Hartford classrooms,

---

they benefited greatly from it because it forced them to think critically, work in groups, and explore new talents. Kim reflected on schooling in St. Lucia,

“Everything was cumulative so it was definitely a harder curriculum. We also had to commit everything to memory. I was surprised to come here and see that kids did everything on the computer. If I had the opportunity to do this back home, things would have been a lot easier.”

Ronald interjected stating, “I was so happy when I found out I had art class every day and music class every day. We didn’t have these options in Jamaica and when we did it was only for a short time.” Most students explained that the curriculum in their home country was based on agriculture, Caribbean history, mathematics, and British literature. Subjects such as art and music were considered extracurricular and were often taught after school, briefly during the week, or taught at a community organization such as Kiwanis Club, church groups, or scout groups.

Three of the seven participants spoke greatly about the gender specificity of the courses they took in their native countries and emphasis placed on gender roles in their classrooms. Paul described his experience,

“I hated my school so much. Not only because it was all-boys but because we were just learning engineering and agriculture. I liked reading and English but they just assumed that men needed to know these things in order to get good jobs.”

He further explained that his passion for English and history was not fully explored until he came to the United States which is why he never demonstrated his full potential while in Jamaica. Dawn and Cassandra both agreed that the curriculum was very gender-based in Barbados and Jamaica which they illustrated in an extensive dialogue about sports and how much time was spent preparing boys for soccer and cricket matches. Allison too explained that in some schools in Trinidad, boys would begin to prepare during the spring for annual Sports Day events around the country. On this day, students would compete against each other on teams which they call

---

“houses” and the winner of the tournament-style event would win bragging rights for the year. The male participants, she explained, would begin practicing very early in the year and the school day would often end early just so that the boys could practice and perfect their athletic skills.

One of the major reoccurring themes from the focus group was the importance of cultural and religious expression in the classroom. All seven participants explained that the major difference between Hartford Public School classrooms and classrooms in their respective native countries was that there wasn't much room for cultural and religious expression. Many of them stated that they were excited to see so many different children in their classroom when they first arrived and that they expected to learn greatly from their peers. However, they were surprised by how little the culture of their peers was reflected in the curriculum and embraced in the classroom which then forced them to inquire outside of class. According to Allison, in her home country of Trinidad, culture and education went hand-in-hand. Trinidad's annual Carnival is embedded in the curriculum because Carnival season is a major part of every Trinidadian's life. She stated,

“After the new year, everything is geared towards carnival. We learn about playing mas' in school and we even make costumes in a mas' camp on the school compound. Schools prepare for [steel] pan competitions and we hold fetes in order to raise money for the sports day...They don't have nothing like that here. Not even for 4<sup>th</sup> of July.”

Allison later explained that the lack of a culturally infused curriculum takes away from one's pride in their heritage and culture. She explained that learning these things in school is what separated Carnival from any regular pop culture entity because it gave students a sense of pride in their country and their history. Other students agreed and expressed the frustration they felt in having to always explain their culture to not only their peers but their teachers. Paul reflected on

---

the matter by saying, “Maybe if they taught students about other cultures, they wouldn’t be so ignorant to foreign people. The worst part is knowing that even the teachers don’t understand what you’re about. Isn’t that something!” Paul’s sentiment became the consensus of the group in which the participants all felt that the lack of cultural appreciation and knowledge from peers and teachers was a result of a history of culturally deficient curricula. Furthermore, the students struggled with the reality that America is the most culturally diverse nation, yet the school curriculum reflects a homogenous history and dedicates short segments of the year to cultural activities. Dawn expressed how frustrated she was when learning about African Americans during Black History Month and the way that the curriculum was designed to only mention three or four important figures, it only lasted a week, and as she said, “it is like they forgot that it was us on the boat that was brought over to the United States. They make it seem like slaves came directly from Africa and we don’t have any real importance.” The way in which public schools “sum up” or “gloss over” African history and culture is not only upsetting to the participants in the study, but it is offensive in the way it essentializes people of African origin.

#### SUCCESS

When participants were asked to define success they did so in terms of academic and economic success in which they were intertwined. They believed that acquiring the former could lead to the latter and they were often not mutually exclusive. In regards to economic success all participants defined it in terms of material wealth and the improvement of their family and community. While the ideology of the American Dream was very much imbedded in their definition and measurement of success, it was not grounded in individualism the way that American society regards it. Dawn measured her level of success by the material things that she has been able to acquire through her hard work. She declared,

“Yes I would say that I am successful because I am 27-years-old and I am happily married with a beautiful son and I live in a beautiful house in West Hartford. I’m not gonna say that it was easy, but I came here from a one-room house in Christ Church to a three-bedroom house in the suburbs and I accomplished everything I wanted to.”--Dawn

Through her dialogue about success and achievement she measures her success by how closely it matches to the American Dream and how greatly it contrasts with the life she had in her homeland. Kim measured her level of success by the improvement of life for her family. She said, “I am successful because I have a good job and my family is living good. That’s why I came here in the first place.” Essentially they measured their success by the advancement of their families economically and socially, and use the accomplishment of goals as the rubric of measurement. For West Indian immigrants social mobility is extremely important, however, it is deemed even more important when the community as a whole advances. Higginbotham and Weber (1992; 437) explain,

“Especially among many of the Black women, there is a sense that they owe a great debt to their families for the help they have received. Black upwardly mobile women were also much more likely to feel that they give more than they receive from kin. Once they have achieved professional managerial employment, the sense of debt combines with their greater access to resources to put them in the position of being asked to give and of giving more to both family and friends.”

Therefore, these young women have articulated the desire to give to their families and communities as a token of appreciation for their continued support which has motivated to achieve their goals. It also leads back to the notion of their countries’ mottos which all have themes of togetherness and unity. The unity that they feel has not necessarily made the struggle easier for them; however, it does motivate them to achieve all that they can because their success has become a communal effort.

Four of the seven participants measured their success by the failures of others. Ronald explained this by saying, “I would definitely say that I am successful because I graduated from college. Not too many people can say that. Out of all my niggas on the block, I made it against all odds.” Here his success is determined in relation to his neighborhood peers who struggled with issues resulting from poverty and therefore did not attend college. As a result, Ronald further explained that the young men he grew up with are now working menial jobs and do not have the education necessary for propelling them to a higher paying position. Many of them currently work in physical labor jobs, fast-food jobs, and retail jobs throughout Hartford, West Hartford, and Meriden. In addition, Ronald and Cassandra both defined their success in regards to the highest level of education they have attained. For Ronald, graduating from college marked success because he believed that it was not an accomplishment that everyone achieves and it was a dream shared by his entire family. For Cassandra getting her GED was enough to declare success. She states, “Yes I am successful. May not have done tings de way I dreamed but I have my GED and meh have a good job. I’m blessed so meh can’t complain.” Her success is therefore weighted in the goals that she has accomplished, but also in her ability to persevere. While society may consider her GED as a shortcoming, Cassandra further explained that it was a success because she came to this country a few years ago and was able to accomplish this goal in a short time. Also, the job that she has provides outstanding benefits which are extremely important to her.

#### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the interviews and focus groups there are key matters to be addressed. First, West Indian immigrants have a different experience from other immigrants and should be treated as such. When arriving in this country, most West Indian immigrants with the exception of those

---

from Hispaniola and a few small Francophone islands are English speakers. Therefore, they need not be placed in ESL and remedial classes, but rather evaluated by the school administration to identify where they are behind, and areas that they will need additional help and attention. It is also important to recognize the unique history and cultures of West Indian immigrants because essentialization is very detrimental to their character. They often come from British education systems and need teachers to understand the style in which they have been educated. According to Gertrude Desmangles, many West Indian students arrive ahead of their classmates. However, they are often wrongly assessed and their cultural capital is mistaken for cultural deficit. While their methods for doing things are different from the status quo, it is not in any way less efficient.

Secondly, Ogbu's theory is grey rather than black and white. While Ogbu argues that West Indian immigrants are successful because they are receptive to schooling, he does not ever account for the fact that it is the persistence of the West Indian community that greatly attributes to the success of their children. It is not necessarily that West Indian students do not experience any trials in their academic careers, or that they are passive people, but rather that their success comes from the rally of support from their community. The New Arrival Center also speaks greatly to Ogbu's flawed theory.

The New Arrival Center/West Indian Program was created in January of 1985 and was designed for newly arrived students from the West Indies who were transitioning to Hartford Public Schools. The program wanted to assist new arrived West Indian students because not all students had attended school in their home countries consistently due to unforeseen circumstances such as hurricanes, family hardships, and illness. Some also had learning disabilities that were not diagnosed in their home countries because of the lack of resources and money for testing and therapy. The first New Arrival class was taught at Hartford High School

---

and consisted of about thirteen students. These students were enrolled in intensive Reading, English, Math, and Civics courses that were designed to prepare students for mainstream classrooms by teaching courses in a cultural context familiar to the students. This was comfortable for both the teachers and the students because many teachers were of West Indian heritage and were able to connect with the students on a cultural level that bridged the gap that often existed between students and teachers in mainstream classrooms. While the New Arrival program grew and encompassed over 15 schools throughout Hartford, it was closed completely in 2009 due to budget cuts.

Through extensive interviews with Gertrude Desmangles, it became clear that West Indian students succeeded in the classroom because of the support they received from their parents, teachers, and community. She admitted that “students grades improved when they realized that we cared...we didn’t just base success on scores.” Students were able to identify with the teachers in their classroom, because many of them were also West Indian and felt empowered knowing that their teachers supported them regardless of their test scores. Measuring success in the classroom by one’s improvement, ability to accomplish goals, and ability to adapt to a new society proved to be both beneficial and efficient for teaching West Indian students. While Ogbu’s theory revealed itself throughout this study, it is important to point out that West Indians students have academic challenges and learning disabilities that they face in the classroom. However, the push from their parents and the persistent demands of the community ensured that something was being done by the Board of Education for their children. They understand that in order to see the results they want for their children, they have to apply pressure rather than show resistance. Desmangles admits that not all parents understand the academic work of their children, however, they make it their duty to ensure that their children

receive what they need in order to do well in school, and receive the education necessary for upward social mobility.

Ogbu's theory is also flawed in that all of the participants expressed feelings of frustration and resistance when dealing with the cultural barriers within their classrooms. All seven participants expressed negative feelings towards their teachers when they were misunderstood or struggled to express themselves culturally. However, they do not resist the education they are given because they understand the ways in which it could impact their future and understand that their success is shared by their families and communities.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the process of racialization and the push to racially identify with a specific racial group creates more of a divide rather than solidarity in the fight for better education. The feeling of pressure to identify as Black or African American creates great anxiety for West Indian immigrants and makes them resistant to solidarity. As Waters explains, the formation of the "in-group" and the "others" occurs in which West Indian immigrants create an oppositional identity as a means of empowerment and disengagement from what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic violence. However, choosing to separate from African Americans and other minority groups greatly harms the movement at large. It takes away greatly from the opportunity to collectively bargain for better education of minority students and ignores that struggles of brown children throughout the United States. Essentially both immigrants and non-immigrants are facing issues poor funding, overcrowded classrooms, and low graduation rates. While their similarities are much greater than their differences, there is such a great emphasis placed on racial identity that it hinders the opportunity for a strong collective movement, and it creates a competitive attitude amongst both communities.

## Works Cited

- Albertini, Velmarie L.. "Racial Mistrust Among Immigrant Minority Students." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 21.4 (2004): 311-31.
- Gilbert, Shelby. "A Study of Ogbu and Simons' Thesis Regarding Black Children's Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Status and School Achievement." *The Negro Educational Review* 60.1/4 (2009): 71-91.
- Higginbotham, Elizabeth and Lynn Weber (1992). "Moving up with Kin and Community: Upward Social Mobility for Black and White Women". *Gender and Society*
- Lee, S. (2005). *Up Against Whiteness: Race, School, and Immigrant Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- López, N. (2003). *Hopeful girls, troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*. New York: Routledge.
- Maddern, Kerra. "Rispek for paying attention to patois." *The Times Educational Supplement* 29 May 2009: 4.
- Ogbu, John (1998). *Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education*. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 29(2):155-188.
- Rong, Xue Lan, and Frank Brown. "Socialization, culture, and identities of black immigrant children: what educators need to know and do." *Education and Urban Society* 34.2 (2002): 247-73.
- Rong, Xue Lan, and Frank Brown. "The effects of immigrant generation and ethnicity on educational attainment among young African and Caribbean blacks in the United States." *Harvard Educational Review* 71.3 (2001): 536-65.
- Seaton, Eleanor K., et al. "The prevalence of perceived discrimination among African American and Caribbean Black youth." *Developmental Psychology* 44.5 (2008): 1288-1297.
- Thomas, Oseela N., et al. "Promoting academic achievement: The role of racial identity in buffering perceptions of teacher discrimination on academic achievement among African American and Caribbean Black adolescents." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 101.2 (2009): 420-431.
- Waters, M. C. (1999). *Black identities: West Indian immigrant dreams and American realities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.