

# West Indian Immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area: Identity, Community & the Economic Crisis

Master Thesis Latin American & Caribbean Studies

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## Abstract

Over the years a lot of attention has been paid to Caribbean immigrants in New York City. In this thesis the research focus moves from the East coast to the West coast, and takes a closer look at the experiences of West Indian immigrants living in a quite different location: San Francisco and the Bay area. The research is mostly concerned with their identity, community and how these are affected by the economic crisis that manifested itself in 2008. Through interviews with 21 West Indian immigrants one gets a better understanding of how they see themselves and what makes them different from other groups in the US. Their connections to their background, their social relations and ties to other West Indians matter a great deal to them, and this also shows in their concern with the (lack of a) West Indian community in the area. The crisis might be a complicating factor, reinforcing a process of declining activity and participation already taking place, together with difficulties involving the younger generation.

I'd like to thank those far away across the Atlantic who made my field work and great experience  
and made writing this thesis possible,  
thank you for your time and help, and for the opportunity to talk to so many great people,  
each with their own story to tell.

Without all of you I really could not have done this.

*“When you come to the States, no matter how long you stay here, you never have that feeling that you belong, you don't feel that sense of possession. But you just go back and from the time when you get off that plane and you're on that ground, you feel it's yours. You're always home, every time you step off that plane, no matter how long you've been gone, you come back and you have that sense of ownership...”*

*(Brian, St. Lucia)*

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# Introduction

There is a long history of people from the Caribbean moving to the United States. Most of them make the decision to migrate to find a better life for themselves and their families. The history and development of the Caribbean, both the region and its people, are characterized by movement and diversity (see for example Henke 2001; Conway 2003; Randall 2003). The American Dream and its promises pulled, while deteriorating situations in many Caribbean countries pushed, and in time the US became the number one destination for these immigrants<sup>1</sup>. The Caribbean region and its diaspora are often seen as central to research concerning concepts as mobility, migration and transnationalism, as well as notions concerning identity and social networks. The immigration process itself, and more specifically the construction of identities and social relations in the context of mobility, have been the focus of extensive research for decades, not only within the region itself but also outside.

One of the most popular places for doing research on Caribbean migrants outside the region itself is New York City. If America is the land of opportunity, of milk and honey, then New York City is its capital and the ultimate place to go to. With its long history as a main destination for immigrants from all over the world and having the largest share of Caribbean immigrants living in the US, New York City provides an excellent research location. However, it is a very specific context. The diversity and size of immigrant groups, their networks and strategies, their socioeconomic position and geographic location, together with many other factors are connected to New York City itself and its characteristics. This influences choices made, opportunities and resources available and the daily strategies and experiences of the people living there.

For my own research on West Indian<sup>2</sup> migrants I decided to take the road less travelled and picked San Francisco and the Bay area as my fieldwork site<sup>3</sup>. One reason is the research done by professor Hintzen (2001) among these immigrants almost ten years ago. He claims that their identities as West Indians are build around notions of success and achievement, often through education and work, and displayed through (material) symbols such as house ownership and middle or upper class life styles. The notion of West Indians as a model minority (Model 2008) is related to this as well, with certain levels of succes reinforcing this notion of doing better in society than African Americans. This type of identity may be vulnerable to changes in economic circumstances, such as

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 - Table 1 & 2 for some data on Caribbean immigration to the US.

<sup>2</sup> From the independent English-speaking Caribbean : Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago (Henke 2001). When using the term West Indian I am reffering to these islands, otherwise I will use the term Caribbean or a specific country. See Appendix 2 for a map of the region.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3 for a map of the area

the current economic crisis which manifested itself in 2008. I see this group of immigrants as providing an interesting opportunity to see how this crisis might affect their lives as West Indians in this specific context.

Another important reason for me is the already considerable amount of literature on West Indians in New York City (for example Foner 2001; Rogers, 2001; Waters 1999). I believe there has to be a balance in the literature, to avoid undue generalizations about West Indians or the use of context specific theories outside of that context, without one being aware of the differences between one location and the other. At the moment it seems the scales tip towards New York City and that there is a gap where literature about West Indian immigrants in other locations should be. Research in a different location, such as the San Francisco Bay area, can provide some balance through additional insights and demonstrate the importance of attention for the social geographic context.

### Central research question

In this thesis I address the following research question: What are the consequences of the economic crisis for West Indian immigrants' identity and community in the San Francisco Bay area? This was inspired by the notions of success and achievement Hintzen (2001) found to be central to the community in this area. I wondered, if being West Indian in San Francisco is linked to this, how does a change in the economic situation affect their identity and community? Success and achievement, and through those two this type of identity, are linked to resources such as employment, income and house ownership, and these are vulnerable to the current economic crisis. These changes might have a serious impact on the ability of West Indians, both individuals or families, to meet the expectations of success and achievement and the material display that comes with it. And a loss of economic and social capital and "degradation" to lower class status could lead to exclusion from the community according to Hintzen (2001). However, the individual cases of exclusion he described were not related to a macro phenomenon such as the current crisis, which affects many people, not only West Indians, at the same time.

This economic crisis had been brewing for years and began to visibly manifest itself in the course of 2007. Large financial institutions and banks got in trouble due to unhealthy credit and loan constructions, and needed government support in order not to crash. Stock markets began to crash and halfway through 2008 the effects were felt by Americans throughout the country, and soon enough by everyone around the world as well. A main factor in this crisis is the fact more and more people were able to get loans they couldn't afford, thinking they could sell their houses with profit as the housing market kept growing. However, this 'housing bubble' collapsed and values began to decline rapidly. This led to a chain reaction, involving people not being able to afford their

mortgages, leaving financial institutions in a difficult position and being no longer able to extend new loans which affects both individuals and businesses, and the entire economy became unstable in a short period of time. There was a huge increase in evictions, foreclosures and unemployment rates reached new historical highs. Unemployment rates in California went from 5,3% in June 2007 to 12,3% in June 2010, with the nationwide rate going from 4,6% to 9,5% . California is also in the top 5 of states with the highest foreclosure rates in May 2010, with one in every 186 housing units being affected by this. The Bay Area has some of the highest housing prices and most expensive places to live in the US. It appears the rate of foreclosures steadied itself, however it remains extremely high. Whereas in the beginning of the crisis bad lending standards were the main reason, now it's mostly due to unemployment and reduced income. Things seem to be changing slowly for the better, but the economy is far from stable and will take a lot longer for full recovery<sup>4</sup>.

One can think of many questions concerning the possible effects of this crisis on the West Indians and their community. For example, if someone loses their job or house, and with that part of their symbols of success and achievement, is this attributed to individual "failure" and being "not West Indian enough", or to the economic crisis as an external cause? Is the crisis perceived as a threat to individual households only or the community as well? One can imagine that if the crisis hits enough West Indians, this can have major consequences for the community, especially if large numbers of members are excluded in a relatively short period of time. As Verkuyten (2005:55) writes, "social identities are continuously under negotiation. These negotiations can involve the question of whether a certain distinction should or should not be created and emphasized". Maybe a redefinition of West Indian identity or "who belongs" is taking place as a strategy to get the community through the crisis. For if the existence of a community is important for its members to guarantee their possibilities of upward mobility and distinguishing themselves from African Americans to "escape" racism (Hintzen 2001; Waters 1999), it is in their interest to keep this community functioning. A new definition of West Indianness possibly creates room for solidarity strategies, with community members supporting each other. Also, times of economic hardship can increase anti-immigrant sentiments, which in turn can lead to increased efforts from West Indians to emphasize their status as a "model minority". In Chapter 4 there will be more attention for the effects of the crisis.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a very short description of a much more complicated situation, based on several sources:  
<http://www.bls.gov/lau/#tables> (Bureau of Labor Statistics)  
<http://cashmoneylife.com/2008/09/29/economic-financial-crisis-2008-causes>  
[http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/housing/2010-06-10-foreclosures-may\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/housing/2010-06-10-foreclosures-may_N.htm)



### Research setting & design

I spent four months in the San Francisco Bay area, three months in San Francisco and one month in San Jose, February through May 2010, to find answers to my questions and learn more about the West Indians living here. For my research I chose a qualitative approach, through personal interviews, complemented by a survey. Besides this being mainly an explorative research, there's also a testing side to it, as I wondered to what degree the findings by Hintzen (2001) and Model (2008) mentioned above were still relevant in this specific setting. Therefore I wanted to talk to people who have been in the US since before 2008, when the crisis really began to manifest itself in day to day life, and who are first generation immigrants, born in the Caribbean. At first it turned out to be a lot harder than expected to find participants, mostly due to the fact they live very spread out and the lack of central West Indian locations and organizations. Things had definitely changed since Hintzen did his research, as I would find out in the course of my research. I conducted 21 qualitative interviews<sup>5</sup> all around the Bay varying from 50 minutes to 3,5 hours, using a topic list. In addition I attended several events<sup>6</sup> and attempted a survey<sup>7</sup>. I got in touch with most participants through snowball sampling, with several different 'starting points'. Even though there might have been some self selection due to there being smaller personal networks within the larger group, I believe I got a fairly varied group of participants whose experiences and views proved to be quite insightful.

### The San Francisco Bay area vs. New York City

Before moving on to the theoretical framework, a little more information on the West Indian immigrants in the Bay area and what distinguishes them from West Indians in New York City is in place. At the time of Hintzen's research there were 9,019 West Indian immigrants living in the San Francisco Bay Area. There is no spatially concentrated community, with West Indians instead living spread throughout the area. At the core of this group are mostly persons who came from elsewhere in the West Indian diaspora instead of migrating directly from the Caribbean region. Often they relocated for work or study purposes, and there are many military personell, professionals, skilled workers and students living in the area.

Probably the biggest and most obvious difference between San Francisco and New York City is the sheer number of immigrants. Not only are there many more West Indian immigrants in New York City, there are more immigrants in general. The state of California does have more than twice as

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<sup>5</sup>See Appendix 4 for an overview of participants

<sup>6</sup>The most important being a meeting by the West Indian Bay Area Professionals meet up group at someone's home in San Francisco; a Meet 'n Greet event by the Jamaican American Association of Northern California in Oakland; and a fundraiser event to honor Tomi 'Tabu' Seon and all he did for several communities in the area.

<sup>7</sup>See Appendix6 for some of the findings.

much foreign born inhabitants compared to the state of New York (9,859,027 and 4,236,768 respectively in 2008, or 26.8% and 21.7% of state populations<sup>8</sup>). Yet these immigrants are more spread throughout the entire state of California or concentrated in Los Angeles, while New York City is a main immigrant destination. The 2006-2008 American Community Survey<sup>9</sup> estimates there are some 283,974 (35.6%) foreign born people in San Francisco City, compared to the 3,048,991 (36.7%) in New York City. Percentage wise the two are close, but in absolute numbers there is a big difference. There are about 1,254 West Indians living in the city of San Francisco, making up 0,2% of the population, while there are 616,693 West Indians in New York City, or 7,4% of the city's population<sup>10, 11</sup>. In the wider region of San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland combined there are 10,731 West Indians (suggesting an increase since Hintzen's research<sup>12</sup>), which is still only a fraction compared to New York City<sup>13</sup>. In chapter 2 I will provide a closer description of the West Indians I met.

These statistical factors shape the social and geographic context these immigrants live in and the opportunities available to them. It is important to keep this in mind when looking at the West Indian immigrants in San Francisco, for their location lacks the multitude, diversity and concentration of ethnic groups found in New York City. In San Francisco, their most important "others" are not other ethnic groups which might be competing to occupy the same place in society. Instead, their "others" are mainly African Americans, even though they both face racism based on their skin color. According to Hintzen (2001) the different context leads them to make different choices regarding identification, emphasizing an identity as foreigner to distinguish themselves from African Americans, over an ethnic identity to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups. Not to say there is no ethnic element present at all, only that being a foreigner is more important to them than ethnicity in dealing with race, in which they differ from the New York City based immigrants. Since many if not most theories are based on New York City, it might be easy to overlook this.

Other important differences concern location, migration background and class. In New York City, most ethnic groups including West Indians tend to concentrate in certain neighborhoods. This is not so much the case in San Francisco and the Bay area, where the immigrants live spread throughout the 9 different counties amongst 7 million people. As will be described in Chapter 3, this has important consequences for their sense of community and ability to organize themselves. Also,

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=747#6>

<sup>9</sup> All figures come from <http://factfinder.census.gov> and are based on the U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 1 – Table 3 for data on West Indians in NYC

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 - Table 4 on West Indians becoming legal residents in 2009

<sup>12</sup> It's difficult to obtain exact numbers as census forms do not have a "West Indian/Caribbean" category.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/housing/houses-California.html>, see Appendix 5 for split up of West Indian immigrants by country of origin in several cities in the Bay area.

there being a large enough group of West Indian immigrants in New York City leads to there being many more businesses catering to their specific needs and interests. Another difference is that New York is often where immigrants arrive in the US for the first time, while most West Indians in San Francisco come from somewhere else in the US and already have some experience living in the US. New York City is also a lot closer to the Caribbean and therefore it's easier and cheaper to visit friends and family who are still there. Furthermore, in New York one finds more low class West Indian immigrants, while those in the Bay Area are mostly middle or upper class, with a good educational background and career (Foner 2001; Hintzen 2001). These demographics are reinforced by California's social economic structure, where there is little opportunity for those without a higher education or professional background. And this type of background is linked in turn to how the West Indian immigrants living here construct their identity around notions of success and achievement (Hintzen 2001), which are linked to economic resources and therefore are more vulnerable to the economic changes as mentioned before.

In the first chapter I present the theoretical framework used for my research. Here I take a closer look at the concepts of immigration and transnationalism, the concepts of identity, community, race and ethnicity, and how these are interconnected. Then I'll describe my research findings in the next three chapters, the first one focussing on the West Indian immigrants in the Bay area, followed by a chapter about their sense of community and the issues surrounding this, and finally a chapter where I take a closer look at the consequences of the economic crisis. In the final chapter I'll return to my original research question and present my conclusion.

# 1. Theoretical Framework: Migration & identity construction in the U.S.

There are many theories and concepts related to both immigrants in the US in general and West Indian immigrants more specifically<sup>14</sup>. In my research the main focus is on identity, community, race, ethnicity and how these come together in the lives of West Indian immigrants in the US. First a brief look at immigration is in place, and especially in relation to the aspects of transnationalism and identity.

## Immigration & Transnationalism

As mentioned before, migration is often seen as a characteristic of the Caribbean region. The constant movement of people has brought many to the US, which is nowadays the main destination. With continuing developments in transport and communication technology, immigration rates keep growing. It is the US context I will focus on for my research. Many authors point to how migration (both to the US and elsewhere) has become a normal strategy for Caribbean people to improve their socioeconomic situation (Conway 2003; Foner 2001; Waters 1999). Fog Olwig (2003) claims it is an integral part of life and a regular practice in many families, where at a certain stage in life migration is considered a normal decision. Kearney (1995) states there exists a “migration culture” on the islands and moving somewhere else has become an important option to improve one’s life. There are both push and pull factors at work in the process of migration. Examples of push factors are lack of employment or education possibilities, or deteriorating conditions caused by economic crisis or political unrest. Pull factors are for example family members who have already migrated and better opportunities. And then there are individual factors such as personal characteristics, resources or what one sees as a desirable livelihood (Fog Olwig, 2003; Foner 2001; Hintzen 2001; Waters 1999).

Previous theories assumed that an immigrant would come to the US, assimilate with time into the new society, and let go of ties to their country of origin. This American “melting pot” ideal however has been challenged in recent decades (Eriksen 2002; Rogers 2001). For earlier immigrants (mostly European), assimilating and becoming Americanized led to advantages and improvement of their socioeconomic position. Only this is not the case for the most recent wave of people coming to the US, as most of them are not white and upon arrival in the US they are confronted with its racial

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<sup>14</sup> Much is based on New York, yet is still useful as a wider framework.

discourse positioning white versus black. They do not automatically “melt” into US society but often maintain distinct identities or develop a more hybrid identity such as “Puerto Rican American” (Henke 2000; Hintzen 2001; Waters 1999)<sup>15</sup>.

Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1995) suggest to call these immigrants “transmigrants”, referring to the transnational links between the movers and stayers. According to them, these links which form for example through the maintenance of relationships with family and friends, return visits, frequent contact, business interests and the sending of remittances, place the immigrants in between two (or even more) nations. This leads them to develop multiple identities which are context dependent and enable them to deal with living in more than one place. It also provides them with a sense of security and belonging which they can feel is lacking in their new society. They define transmigrants as “immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc 1995: 48).

There is disagreement to what extent all West Indian immigrants can be seen as truly transnational in the way described by Glick Schiller et al (1995), and if one should distinguish between this group and those migrants with little or no transnational ties or characteristics. Many become firmly embedded in the US, or decide to apply for American citizenship (though this is often with the intent of sponsoring others to come over) and many do not return to their country of origin, or only for short visits (Waters 1999; Foner 2001). Here one can find a connection to Fog Olwig’s (2003) argument about the importance of the views and experiences of the immigrants themselves. She warns that too narrow a focus on links between nations and nation based identities alone might cause one to miss important processes linked to for example family networks or local identities.

As described by Hintzen (2001), West Indian immigrants in San Francisco use their country of origin as a reference point while constructing a public identity to negotiate a place in society. They choose an immigrant identity not primarily to stay in touch with their roots and family, but to adapt to and deal with the new social structures they encounter, using those roots and connections in this process. This approach points out that their actions and connections to their country of origin are more linked and directed to their life in the US than a life in between two places. One can wonder if this makes them transmigrants as defined by Glick Schiller et al (1995), or more migrants who use their background to improve their situation in their new environment.

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<sup>15</sup> This affects not only those coming from the Caribbean but people coming for example from Latin America or Asia as well, yet I limit myself to theories concerning West Indian immigrants for my research.

## Identity

“Awareness of growing dispersion, decentering, interpenetration, and general complexity of globalized and transnational communities is reflected in anthropology as a rising concern with identity” (Kearney 1995:556-557). Not only culture but also identity is increasingly seen as not being strictly bounded to a certain space or location but as extending beyond borders and groups, being flexible and dynamic instead of static and unchanging (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Kearney 1995). It is more about “a logic of both-and-and” (Kearney 1995:558), with multiple identities co-existing. This is illustrated by one of Rogers’ respondents who replied to the question which identity is most important to him: “Jamaican, Caribbean, American, in that order” (Rogers 2001:176). Depending on the context one identity is at one time more relevant and emphasized, and at another time largely irrelevant. This takes place however within the limits imposed by external factors and structures (Eriksen 2002; Verkuyten 2005)<sup>16</sup>.

Theories and concepts related to identity are usually located somewhere on the continuum between the primordialist's approach assuming that one's identity is seen as given at birth, as something essential and unchanging, and the constructivists approach which points to the social and cultural constructed nature of identity, as something changing and fluid. Verkuyten (2005) describes instead of constructivism the circumstantialist approach as being opposed to primordialism. Here is the focus on structures, strategies and ideologies which are mostly external influences shaping identities. However, as Verkuyten (2005) writes, there is no point in opposing the two positions, for they are both useful, with one concerned more with meaning and the other with function. They should not exclude but complement each other, and “a focus on the level of interaction and everyday practices helps to overcome the duality of function and meaning” ( Verkuyten 2005:89). In people's lives there is not only one identity relevant, nor do they make as conscious distinctions between types of identities as in abstract theories.

Vertovec (2001:577) presents a summary of the most important identity theories, according to which “identities are seen to be generated in, and constructed through, a kind of internal (self-attributed) and external (other-ascribed) dialectic conditioned within specific social worlds. This holds for both personal and collective identities, which should be understood as always closely entangled with each other”. The existence of these “others”, both inside and outside one's group, helps to define who one is and who belongs to this group and who does not. Identification does not

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<sup>16</sup> There is an awful lot written about identity, which makes it impossible for me to give a complete overview here of all relevant concepts and theories. Here I shortly describe what I see as some of the most important concepts. For a more elaborate description of identity (and its relation with ethnicity) see for example Eriksen 2001 or Verkuyten 2005.

only come from oneself but is relational and involves reacting to perceptions of others as well as yourself (Eriksen 2002; Larrain 2000; Verkuyten 2005; Waters 1999). Society can have a big influence on how people see and present their identity and that of the group, responding to existing images and expectations and making use of the available space and resources.

For my research is the concept of social identity important. "Social identity is about the relationship between the individual and the environment" (Verkuyten 2005:42), and it is about "categorical characteristics ... that position or locate people in social space" (2005:43). An important aspect of social identity is that it concerns more enduring, long lasting factors and has a collective component. Social identities are not fixed but constructed, and people can challenge meanings given to them. Verkuyten (2005) describes three components of social identity. First is the "sociostructural component", the classification of people according to criteria which can be combined in different ways and can change over time. The second component is cultural, "accompanying manifestations of behavior, behavioral consequences and normative expectations" (2005:46). This adds social meaning to a category, and this meaning can be contested. The third component is about judgment, what belonging to a category tells about a persons or a group. This often leads to essentializing, where "by attribution of an essence to a group, the very nature of the groups is defined" (2005:48). Someone is however not simply a "victim" of imposed labels. There are both "personal interpretations and sociocultural constructions" at work (Verkuyten 2005:61). Often identity and one's sense of identity coincide, but this is not necessarily the case. Through this possibility of interpretation there is agency and people can try to distance themselves, though this can be difficult with some social identities, such as those based on skin color.

### Community

Identity is not the same as identification, which is a process through which an individual is linked to a group. Here Anderson's (in Verkuyten 2005) concept of the imagined community comes to mind, where members of a group feel connected with one another without there being direct personal links between individual members. "Community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call 'society'" (Cohen 1985:15). Or as Verkuyten (2005:64) states, "as soon as people identify with their group, that group becomes the basis for thinking, feeling and acting". Yet identifying as a member of a group is not the same as identifying with that group. When one identifies with a group, there is also personal and emotional attachment and a sense of unity. If something happens to the group or another member, it affects those who identify with the group as well. Identification processes can lead to a sense of belonging, but also of exclusion if one is not recognized as a member of the group (Verkuyten 2005; Hintzen 2001).

Cohen's (1985) work on the symbolic community is quite useful in the case of the West Indian immigrants in the Bay area. One aspect he mentions is that of location. When one thinks of community, one often tends to think of a group of people in a certain area. However, community can be connected to location in different ways. On the one hand sharing a specific location can be one of the reasons to feel part of a community, for example living in the same village. On the other hand, having shared a location in the past, such as coming from the same country, can cause a sense of being part of the same community, even as the members of this community might be spread out over a larger area now. This can be just because of the location, but can also have to do with aspects linked to that location, such as language or local traditions people brought with them as part of their ethnic identity. And with geographic boundaries becoming less important in these times of increasing movement (Slocum & Thomas 2003), as is the case with West Indian immigrants, other boundary markers become more important.

Boundaries are another important aspect of community (Cohen 1985). Here one group differentiates themselves from other groups. But it is also what makes those inside members of that group. Cohen writes "the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community, and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction", and "boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or another with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished" (Cohen 1985:12). Identity and community are closely related. As described by several other authors as well (Eriksen 2002; Larrain 2000; Verkuyten 2005; Waters 1999), both personal and collective identities are relational. The involvement of a multitude of people in these interactions can be linked to the notion that these boundaries are not made up of objective, given facts. Instead they can be better "thought of as existing in the minds of their beholders" (Cohen 1985:12). Persons both on the inside and on the outside can have very different ideas about the boundary and what it exactly implies for them personally and their relations with others. Yet still there is a sense that, despite maybe having different ideas on a personal level, the larger group together is different in a significant way from other groups around them.

This consciousness or awareness is another important aspect of community according to Cohen, "its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests... and think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere" (1985:16). This is why he talks of a "symbolic community", as it is through the use of symbols that people are able to have a sense of sharing certain aspects that make them members of the same community, while still having room to make those aspects fit their own personal situations, experiences and interests. One final aspect that is of interest here is pointed out by Etzioni, that a community is itself "part of encompassing social entities" (1996:188). People do not only have



loyalties or connections to one community, but are involved with other groups as well, and it depends on context which connections matter most at a certain time and place.

### Race & ethnicity in the US

Race and ethnicity are two other key factors playing a role in the social identity construction of West Indian immigrants in the US. Ethnicity “refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as culturally distinctive” (Eriksen 2002:4). This goes back to the “others” mentioned earlier for it is through social interactions that people place themselves inside a group, and at the same time outside other groups (Verkuyten 2005). Difference between groups in itself is not enough to speak of ethnicity though. “Only in so far as cultural differences are perceived as being important, and are made socially relevant, do social relationships have an ethnic element” (Eriksen 2002:12). But cultural difference on its own does not create ethnicity, which is about more than what Barth described as the “cultural stuff”. Looking at the limits of a group makes clear that ethnic groups are not isolated and that, as Barth was the first to point out, these boundaries are not an unproblematic given, but are contested from within and without. An ethnic identity can also be about behavior, social organization, or a shared history or ancestry (whether imagined or real) (Hutchinson & Smith 1996; Eriksen 2002; Verkuyten 2005).

Ethnicity is different from race, as ethnicity is not necessarily linked to biological factors while race is about physical attributes made socially and culturally relevant by links to socio-cultural characteristics (Waters 1999)<sup>17</sup>. However, both race and ethnicity can be part of the construction of social identities (Verkuyten 2005). Ethnicity is not the same as class, as there is not always a hierarchical ranking involved of one ethnicity above others while class distinctions evoke notions of “low”, “middle” or “high” classes. Within an ethnic group there is a sense of a common culture, which is not always the case within a class group. One thing class and ethnicity have in common is that they are not fixed but can change over time and both involve inclusion and exclusion as some people do belong to an ethnic or class group, and others do not. Both are also linked to one’s social position and can influence each other, yet class does not as easily determine race or ethnicity as those can affect class and social status (Baronov & Yelvington 2003; Eriksen 2002; Waters 1999). Some people for example find it hard to believe someone with black skin is middle or even upper class.

Categories of “us” and “them” can expand or contract to adapt to changing circumstances, perceptions, needs or other reasons. There are no clearly established criteria for ethnicity, for some

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<sup>17</sup> Though for some ethnic groups blood and ancestry can matter a great deal, ethnicity does not *require* a biological foundation (Eriksen 2002).

groups it includes for example common ancestry and blood ties, but this is not always the case. However, all have a shared culture connecting their members, setting them apart from others and making a difference in interactions. There is not only change but also continuity with the past, through the common ancestry (Baronov & Yelvington 2003; Eriksen 2002; Verkuyten 2005). In the end, it is about “the way in which a group is imagined that makes it an ethnic group; that is, the fact that a group understands itself in a particular way” Verkuyten (2005:81).

Identity in the US is strongly related to a dichotomous racial discourse, which differs strongly from the experiences most West Indian immigrants bring with them from their home country. There one often finds a more subtle understanding of race. Other factors, such as ethnicity, class or religion are often more important to one’s identity (Baronov & Yelvington 2003; Vickerman 2001). Smedley (1998) describes how race emerged in the US in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the context of colonialism and slavery. It served to legitimize white superiority and create a color hierarchy, based on supposedly biological differences between groups with different physical traits, linked to socio-cultural differences. With time “in the United States the biophysical features of different populations, which had become markers of social status, were internalized as sources of individual and group identities”(Smedley 1998:695). With the end of slavery black people remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy and continued to face many obstacles to integration and upward mobility, while at the same time they as well came to think to a certain degree in terms of black inferiority and white superiority.

Verkuyten (2005:52) describes this type of social identities as “stigma identities ... a master status that cannot be ignored and serves to define the essential character of those who are classified”. Being black is associated with stereotypical images such as being lazy, dumb or violent. These negative associations lead to racism and blocked or limited opportunities. “American society had made “race” (and the physical features connected to it) equivalent to, and the dominant source of, human identity, superseding all other aspects of identity” (Smedley 1998:695). Even as it is an invented, socially constructed concept and not a biologically given fact, its role in people’s everyday lives remains and it continues to inform their actions and perceptions (Eriksen 2002).

West Indian immigrants coming to the US are confronted with this strict racial discourse, which can be quite a shocking experience (Bashi Bobb & Clarke 2001; Waters 1999). The “one drop principle”, which basically states that having any African ancestry makes you black, stands in sharp contrast with the more subtle color continuums found on many Caribbean islands, where often money whitens and class and skills tend to matter more than skin color (Baronov & Yelvington 2003). However, once in the US they soon discover that they are being lumped together with the African Americans, having the same physical appearance. Being socially identified as African American comes with being associated with the stereotypes, negative images, blocked opportunities and downward

mobility linked to this group. This can keep them from reaching what they came for to the US, improving their livelihood and upward mobility (Fog Olwig 2003; Waters 1999). Waters (1999:332) states that the least Americanized immigrants get the best economic payoff, being “rewarded for maintaining strong ethnic ties and punished for assimilating into American minority communities”. As a consequence, many West Indian immigrants try to distinguish themselves in order to avoid the negative associations that come with an African American identity. One way to achieve this is to emphasize a different (often ethnic) identity and their background in the Caribbean, whereby accents play an important role as a marker of their being not African American, for their appearance remains the same.

### *Identity strategies in a racialized society*

How do these concepts of immigration, identity, ethnicity and race come together in the experiences and strategies of West Indian immigrants in the US, and specifically those in the San Francisco Bay Area? It appears to be a core theme in the literature that many try to avoid being “lumped together” with African Americans. They perceive and experience being labelled as black as limiting their opportunities and socioeconomic mobility, through the pervasive racial discourse still dominant in the US. “...when West Indians lose their distinctiveness as immigrants or ethnics they become not just Americans, but black Americans” (Waters 1999:5). By emphasizing a non racial identity, these West Indians try to claim a place in society but outside the racial structure. This can be as ethnic Americans, immigrant Americans, or not as Americans at all, as long as it is a non African American identity (Hintzen 2001). Positive aspects of “West Indianess” are put to the front in order to distinguish themselves. Here one recognizes Verkuyten’s (2005) idea that people can challenge and try to distance themselves from a certain social identity their environment imposes on them. At the same time, the immigrants themselves often hold negative views of African Americans as well, thereby reinforcing or at least not challenging the existing stereotypes they themselves want to avoid. In the long run this works only in their own disadvantage, for the basic racist structures and ideas remain intact (Waters 1999). Maintaining a not (too) Americanized but more transnational oriented identity linked to the country of origin also provides these immigrants with an “exit option”, providing a way back home if strategies to deal with obstacles in the US such as racism fail (Rogers 2003).

As Hintzen (2001) demonstrates in his study of West Indians in San Francisco, the social geographic context matters a great deal for the opportunities and resources available to West Indians to claim a place separate from African Americans. San Francisco is different from New York in many ways, as described earlier. The West Indian community here consists of almost exclusively middle and higher class families and individuals, with few low class immigrants (Hintzen 2001). And

class is an important factor influencing the capability to maintain an ethnic or immigrant identity and distance from the African American identity. "West Indians in high socioeconomic-status positions do have available to them the prerequisites for displays of achievement consistent with their identification as a model minority" (Hintzen 2001:13). Access to resources, education, housing and living environment are only some of the things connected to class and important to identity construction (Waters 1999).

Even the development of a West Indian identity itself and what being West Indian entails is connected to the specific context. In the Caribbean people tend to identify mostly with their own country or local environment, and do not always feel part of a larger community spanning the region or some part of it. As an immigrant from St. Vincent told Basch (2001:136) "... the sense of unity is not as great in the islands. Since we're in a melting pot in New York, we see ourselves as Caribbeans". This sense of belonging to a group of people coming from all around the Caribbean region often only develops after migrating and coming in contact with others with the same background. Being in a new, different and at times even hostile environment, which tends to place all immigrants from the Caribbean in one and the same category (if not just the African American category), can stimulate the development of a broader, West Indian identity and awareness of similarities and common experiences in the US.

Foner (2001:5) describes how racism and discrimination are "the most obvious common thread in the New York West Indian migrant experience". Yet in New York City it is easier to maintain a more national or local identity since there often exists a community from one's home country. In San Francisco where there are less immigrants from the same place, this becomes more difficult, making a broader identity as West Indian more attractive as a way to get in touch with people with the same kind of background and experiences. And as Verkuyten (2005) writes, most people look for a sense of belonging to a group, to be a part of something and not just on your own, and one could expect immigrants from the Caribbean to be no different in this. It can also help to gain recognition as a distinct group and gain visibility in society. However, what form and content West Indianness is given depends on many factors, such as the context, the possibilities and resources, and the goals of both individuals and the community.

#### *Claiming a space as West Indians in California*

Differences in location and context create a different type of community, organized around a specific West Indian identity constructed in the socioeconomic context of San Francisco. According to Hintzen (2001) the specific context of California lead to three available options for West Indians "for the --- construction of their self-representation and identity". Being black linked them to the racialized space occupied by African Americans, and the afore mentioned possible negative associations which

they want to avoid. Being foreign immigrants linked them to two other spaces, one occupied by the group of Mexicans and Latinos, and the other by the group of Asians immigrants. The first of these two is in California seen as mostly “undesirable” because of the strong connections to illegality and the popular view they take away jobs and are a burden to tax payers. The Asian immigrants are on the contrary seen as desirable and as a model minority, thanks to the “visibility of highly educated and wealthy immigrants from ... Asia” (Hintzen 2001:16).

Whereas the position of the group of Latinos to some degree resembles the socio economic position of West Indians on the East Coast, Hintzen (2001) identifies some factors which placed West Indians on the West Coast in another space, that of the model minority, next to the Asian immigrants. One factor is the already existing general perception throughout the US of West Indians as a model minority, as I will explain later. Another factor are the local pull factors, which “worked against the unskilled and low skilled and favored the qualified and educated” (Hintzen 2001:17). The presence of the group of Mexicans and Latinos leaves little room for West Indians trying to find work in the labor intensive or service sector. This combines with middle class West Indian’s being “well suited to exploit opportunities for the skilled and educated in California’s economy, by using their racial identity to gain access to the “affirmative action” positions available to the African American population” (Hintzen 2001:17).

Central to being West Indian in the San Francisco Bay Area are two “types” of social identity, connected to the public image and expectations, and the effort to avoid the stigmatized identity of African American. One is a more ethnic identity as exoticized West Indian, which serves to place them outside US society, and therefore outside the American racial discourse. They present themselves as “permanent foreigners”, but desirable, accommodating and welcome foreigners (Hintzen 2001; Bobb & Clarke 2003). Through the use of popular understandings by the local white population of what West Indianness is, they create an image of exotic but accommodating foreigners, often through music and food as well as events such as the San Francisco Carnaval. These are boundary markers which the public recognizes as West Indian (Hintzen 2001). This reminds one of Verkuyten’s (2005) description of how essentialized characteristics are ascribed to a group to define them. Other locations and opportunities to display this identity are for example West Indian clubs and restaurants which are often furnished in an exotic and stereotypical way (Hintzen 2001).

The other is a more socio-economic identity, based on notions of success and achievement, which can be linked to the idea of a “model minority” The status of being seen as a “model minority” gives West Indian immigrants a social and cultural identity which helps to distance themselves from the African American underclass image (Hintzen 2001; Waters 1999). It demonstrates their ability to live up to the ideal of the American Dream, with good employment, house ownership, good education, and their adherence to good family and work values. “People use their identities to

ensure the most beneficial and desirable social positioning for themselves, both individually and collectively”(Hintzen 2001:4). But it is important to note that “they develop “immigrant identities” that *differ* from the dominant group’s identities but are not necessarily *opposed* to those identities”(Model 2008:144), as compared to African American’s identities which are often seen as oppositional, against the white dominant identity (Fog Olwig 2003). This enables West Indians to be connected to American society, while keeping a distance from this society’s darker side, racism, without resisting the whole society.

### West Indians as a model minority

The idea of West Indian immigrants as a model minority requires some attention for it is quite central to many theories concerning West Indian identities. At the core of this idea is the observation that black immigrants fare better in socioeconomic terms than African Americans. A closer look however shows that it is mostly immigrants from the English Caribbean who do better, while for example Africans or Haitians do not. As the West Indians appeared to be doing better despite being black as well, they were presented as a model minority, “... a label for an ethnic minority whose members encounter discrimination but who nevertheless attain social and economic succes” (Model 2008:xii).This success however only exists when comparing West Indians with African Americans<sup>18</sup>. Yet it keeps coming back in politics and the media, being a popular theory for which Model (2008) mentions three reasons. First, it suggests racial discrimination is not the obstacle African Americans claim it is. Second, it suggests that African American’s own behavior is to blame for their economic shortcomings, which “lets whites off the hook and places the responsibility for African American problems squarely on the shoulders of African Americans” (2008:1). And third, the achievement of immigrants can be used as an argument against affirmative action programs, which has quite some opponents.

There are three main types of explanations for the supposed West Indian black immigrant success. The most heard explanation basically claims that the immigrants have a cultural advantage. Whether this comes from their historical background or more contemporary circumstances is debated, but proponents of this explanation state that West Indians have a culture which makes them more succesfull than African Americans, who are assumed to have an “inferior” culture causing their failure (Model 2008). A second explanation is based on white favoritism, which states whites have a preference for dealing with West Indians. Some say this is because of the American love for things British, others say West Indians do not confront Americans with their own history of slavery as

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<sup>18</sup> One of the major points of critique is that the idea is based on comparisons with African Americans only. When compared to for example whites, West Indians are not so much a success story anymore.

African Americans do, and there are those who say it has to do with West Indian's different attitudes, creating a "comfort factor" towards white Americans (Model 2008; Waters 1999). The third explanation points to positive migration selectivity, meaning that those who make the decision to move to the US are already more ambitious and motivated than those who stay behind, and therefore have a bigger chance at success (Model 2008).

Model (2008) tested these three theories and found positive selectivity to be the only explanation for the greater success of West Indian immigrants. This means West Indians are not a black success story but an immigrant success story, undermining claims by some that there is no issue of racism in the US for West Indians are black and do make it in society. Model shows they make it *despite* being black. However, as she also points out, the effect of positive selectivity can wear off, for example if people immigrate to join family, and as networks develop to help the new immigrants. This decreases and changes the resources and type of personal characteristics needed to make the move. Another important point to keep in mind is that even as research might say the success is caused by selectivity and not a cultural advantage or white's preferences, this does not diminish the role these ideas play in everyday reality. Respondents (both black and white) of several researchers (Waters 1999; Hintzen 2001; Rogers 2003; Bobb&Clarke 2003) all talked about the role of differences in culture and values, their better relationships with whites, advantage of coming from the Caribbean, and so forth. For them, things like these do make a difference, and therefore makes them as real and relevant as selectivity.

A fact possibly complicating this theory is that many West Indians living in the Bay Area moved here coming from elsewhere in the US or the worldwide diaspora, and not directly from the Caribbean. This might change the role of positive selectivity, for Model (2008) looked at the migrant's advantage when leaving their home country. Experiences in the US might affect the characteristics and available resources linked to positive selectivity. I expect the selectivity factor to remain relevant, as moving within the same country also requires a certain type of resources and motivation. At the same time, moving or migrating is more part of US history and culture, possibly making it a smaller step to actually do so.

#### *Identity & exclusion in the San Francisco Bay Area*

Whereas the exotic side of West Indianess places them outside of society and its racial structure, the model minority side distances them from African Americans while offering a connection to America's middle class society. A West Indian identity based on success and achievement excludes however those West Indians who do not have sufficient social and economic capital to demonstrate this through the necessary material symbolic display (Hintzen 2001). This exclusion of lower class immigrants serves to protect the popular understandings of the West Indian identity based on

success and achievement found in the Bay area. Inclusion of low class West Indians puts the entire group at risk of being associated with African Americans through the link provided by the low class immigrants. This social mechanism can be connected to the processes of identification described earlier, since “the success of the other person or the group becomes one’s own success and increases positive self-feelings, whereas failures become one’s own failures that diminish positive self-feelings” (Verkuyten 2005:67). The exclusion of West Indians not fitting into the community is also supported by the context of California, which offers place for the skilled and educated only. A way into the community does exist for a few low class West Indians though, connected to the exoticized image they present to the public. Some can become what Hintzen calls “cultural promoters”, representing the exotic, foreign side of the community’s identity to others, for example by organizing events or as a DJ, thereby claiming a function in the community and legitimizing their (Hintzen 2001).

All this however does not mean that West Indians in the Bay area do not have any connections with African Americans. They need them to be able to make the most of the opportunities, through the political power and networks of the black community. For this they do associate with African Americans, but only the middle and higher class blacks, and mostly through professional and formal relations. This is related to another difference between New York and San Francisco pointed out by Hintzen (2001), for in New York there is a history of relations and connections between African Americans and West Indian immigrants. The presence of a large group of working class West Indians facilitated these bridges between the two groups, for they occupied the same socioeconomic position, allowing for a better mutual understanding and an awareness of shared interests. There is no such history of relations between West Indians and African Americans in California, where the two groups both occupy a different socioeconomic position. This leads more easily to misunderstanding and tensions and reinforcement of the negative views of the other held on both sides. In the next chapter I’ll take a closer look at the West Indians living in the Bay area and their identity.



## 2. “We bounce back”: Who are the West Indian immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area?

*“Because it frames who I am, it is my foundation, I cannot be anything more or anything less than Jamaican because that is who I am. So it is not trying to be different or identifying myself, but I’m Jamaican, it’s who I am, I’m this crazy Jamaican momma.”*

*(Sarah, 48)*

Before one can say anything about their community or the impact of the economic crisis, it helps to know who these West Indian immigrants are in the first place. Therefore I’ll start with a closer introduction of the West Indians I interviewed, their experiences coming to and living in the US, and their identity.

### *The West Indians in the Bay area*

Being only a very small part of the total Bay area population, within a group of some 10,000 West Indians there can still be quite some diversity and variation. It seems those West Indians who made the move to this region, are part of a more select subset of what could be called the whole immigrant spectrum. Of course, it is hard to write about “who the West Indian immigrants are” as I only spoke to 21 of them. However, many of them can be described as foundational or core members of the West Indian presence or community in San Francisco and the surrounding Bay area and functioned as key informants in my research. Most of them have been living in the United States anywhere between 20 and 50 years. Many of these people have seen the group of West Indian immigrants develop and change over time, contributing and participating themselves, watching others come and go, organizations being founded and ceasing to function, businesses opening and closing, and so on. Some of them helped to start Karijama many years ago, the Caribbean carnival in Oakland, or they have been greatly involved with the Jamaican American Association of Northern California. Therefore, I do believe that a closer look at these immigrants and their personal experiences will help to create a better understanding of who the West Indian immigrants in this area are.

### Coming to America, the land of opportunity

Most immigrants don't migrate directly to San Francisco or the Bay area, but arrive on the East Coast. There are bigger communities there, and often friends and family, to help them getting used to their new environment, while being surrounded by a familiar culture and people. And it's close to the home they left, usually in order to find a better life in the US, "for the pot of gold". The reasons most often mentioned to come to America, the land of opportunities, were study purposes, or their parents moving to the US looking for a better life and bringing them along, or have them come over later on. Carol, who arrived in the US when she was 20, told me she couldn't be sure why her parents made the move across, but she always thought it was to provide her and her brother with an easier future. Someone else said she didn't think people would move from Jamaica unless for financial reasons.

Basic education on their home island is described as being very good, at least at the time when they were growing up there. Many of the immigrants were convinced education is better on their home islands than it is in the US, only opportunities for college are limited. Therefore many move elsewhere for a continuation of their studies, mostly to England, Canada or the United States, often on scholarships. Those who came to study usually went to university, for their bachelor's and/or master's degree, or even further down the academic path. As one Jamaican woman told me, "everywhere I went to was always for education". Only one person mentioned political reasons in addition to economical ones, saying US foreign policy causing instability in Jamaica had made him migrate to the US, and someone else came because of marriage. And there was Richard, stating he'd had enough of Trinidad and that it had been time to move elsewhere. The central motivation when it comes to leaving their home appears to be opportunity. This emphasis on education and opportunity was also found by Hintzen (2001). Be it the opportunity for a better life, future, education or career, most of them decided voluntarily to make the move to the US.

However, upon arriving in the US, all was not always what it seemed to be from back home, watching television or hearing stories from others. First impressions ranged from "a funny smell" and "awful cold" to being overwhelmed and "wowed". However, despite the presence of opportunities seen by most and being amazed at first, many mentioned they thought the people were unfriendly or rude, the streets were dirty, or they hadn't expected to find ghettos and poverty. Sarah, a Jamaican woman who arrived in Miami in 1984, said:

*"What struck me maybe I think was seeing homeless people, a level of poverty that I was not anticipating. I expect to see that in my country, not in America that was portrayed as this place ... The façade of the place just didn't meet the expectations that I had."*

Someone even used “culture shock” to describe arriving in New York. Karen arrived in New York around age 19 and told me she thought it was “scary, very scary in New York. Everybody looked like they were gonna attack you”. Thomas, who went from Jamaica to Boston in December 1967, age 13, described his experience like this, using the snow as a metaphor:

*“...so you have this impression of this fantastic, big clean, everybody doing well, place. As a youngster. And when we came, it was snowing, and so it looked very pretty, when we landed it was very pretty. First thing we noticed when we came out was how cold it was, obviously. We were freezing when we came off the plane. But it was fun for us, playing in the snow and enjoying all of that. The disappointment was, a good example is, when the first snow falls, everything is so pretty and beautiful, but then when it starts to melt, and mixes with the mud, it becomes kind of ugly right. And that’s kinda how it was, after a while you get to look around and you see things are not as pretty as you thought it’d be, people are not as friendly as you’d thought them to be, food is not as nice as you’d like it to be, things like that. After a while you get used to certain things, but even some things, you wish you had but you don’t.”*

The majority of immigrants arrive on the East Coast, in places like New York or Miami, and this was no different for those I spoke with. New York was the number one place to arrive, even if just for a few weeks, followed by Miami, usually because of family already living there. But I also heard Massachusetts, Boston, Michigan or Chicago come by as first destinations. Some moved from their place of arrival directly to the Bay area, while others went to one or more other cities first before finally ending in Northern California. Reasons to start living there varied from work opportunities and marriage to just visiting a friend or family member and deciding to stay simply because they liked it better there. Quite a few people mentioned the weather as an important factor involved in their decision to build a life in the Bay area. One man described it as the best weather of the States and Northern California being the best place to be in the US as a West Indian. And as this example from John shows:

*“And you know the beach[in Trinidad] is constantly warm, 24/7. And then you get here, and live in New York, and it’s like ok, let’s go to Coney Island beach. And you get there, and you see the water, you see the sand, you touch the water and it’s freezing cold and you’re still asking yourself, where is the beach?! Because your perspective of a beach is nice, warm, sunny weather and all that sort of stuff. The sun might be shining outside and it’s cold as heck. I’m like no...”*

### *Feeling comfortable or at home?*

There was quite some variation in whether or not the West Indian immigrants felt at home in the United States, or more specifically in the Bay area, despite all of them having American citizenship. Franklin, who's been living in the US for 37 years now, said he'd never felt at home and that there was "always the yearning to be somewhere else... outside of the US" and that he only still lived in the US because his work took him abroad regularly. Several persons said that even after so many years living in the US, they still felt a foreigner. Or as Helen put it, "it's gonna maybe sound ridiculous, but I've never really felt at home", and she's been in the US for 41 years. It seemed to be more of a general feeling of not being American, not feeling at home here because home is where they came from. Yet at the same time, Karen said she could feel at home anywhere, because to her, home is wherever you are. I heard the word 'comfortable' a lot, in the sense that many do feel very comfortable and really like living in this part of the US, but home is where they were born and raised. Others felt very much at home, having spent most of their lives in the US. For them the cultural diversity and weather in the Bay area often helped, as well as having friends and family around.

Many have thought about returning to their home country, some only more recently, others ever since they came to the US. However, for most of them thinking about going back does definitely not equal actually doing so. It is an opportunity they like to keep open, but circumstances both in the US and their country of origin keep them from moving back right now. For some it's like the "exit option" mentioned by Rogers (2001). Just a few persons had no intention at all to go back to live there again, only to keep visiting. It was often thought of as being an immigrant thing, wanting to return home. Several persons told me they originally had the intention to come the US, study, graduate or work for a certain period, and then go back home... only then things went differently. People get married, have children, a career takes off, and one gets comfortable with the American standards of life. As Carol said, "If you don't get too caught up, you accomplish your goal and then you leave.... I think everybody has some kind of goal but the goal is lost sight of as the years go by". Like Franklin from Guyana described it, "the problem is, for all intents and purposes, we are Americans in the sense of being ensconced in the structural and financial and support realities of the United States". This idea of getting too used to the way of life in the US wasn't seen as a problem by most, saying how the second they're back home it feels right, natural. It might take some getting used to some differences, but that's to be expected. Most do have the idea in the back of their heads to return someday, only not now. Not before they've raised their children and they've moved out. Not until they're retired. Plans have changed, like they did for Sarah:

*“I felt like if I go away I could come back and be a better person for me and my life and helping others, my family, as well. That was kind of the driving factor back then, to come here and go back. However that has changed, because at that time, when you’re thinking along those lines there’s no family involved, no kids. I came, I got a family of my own and got a daughter, and that did change the whole scenario.”*

And then there are the circumstances in their home countries. Problems with crime, violence and the level of health care were mentioned most often as a kind of barrier, as reasons they would or could not go back now. Especially as one gets closer to the age where health care matters a lot more than it does at the moment. Therefore many considered living part of the time in the US, and part of the time (preferably during winter in the US) in the Caribbean.

For all of those I spoke with it was important to some degree to stay updated about what is going on with the people they know, with their home country or the Caribbean more in general. This also helped them with keeping a real image about what they would be returning to if they’d do so, as described above. The internet is a great help with this, as many check the news online, some daily, others on a less regular basis. Talking on the phone with family and friends who are still back there is also seen as an important source of not only social contact, but information as well. Phone calls still seem to be the main way to stay in touch, as internet infrastructures are not everywhere as well developed as in the US, and as older family members often are not that into using computers. At the same time, people got in touch with old friends through network sites like Facebook and described how Skype made calls a lot cheaper. But everyone who still had family and friends in the Caribbean said it was pretty important to stay in touch, regardless if they called weekly, monthly or even less. It’s a connection to home and their roots, to who they are. Many also went back to visit friends and family, to be what they feel is their true home. “It’s a grounding experience” Brian told me. Some of them tried to go once a year, with almost all Trinidadians trying to go back for the Carnival in February, or every other year or whenever possible. Some have only been back a few times since coming to the States, not having the opportunity or wish to go more often. Visiting people elsewhere in the US was also described as a way to connect to the culture but it’s not the same as going to the Caribbean.

Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1995) suggest using the term transmigrants for immigrants like those from the Caribbean, who seem to be living in between two or more places. However, at the same time I got the impression that most people’s lives were quite firmly located in the US. This is shown for example by their mentioning of the idea to return but not seeing this happen any time soon. They do move back and forth between multiple

locations but appear to live their life pretty much in the US, making me wonder if the term transmigrants would apply to them as a group. It might be the case for some but definitely not for others. As Hintzen (2001) noted, many use their country of origin as a point of reference for their lives in the US, to deal with this new society through the use of their roots and connections. But this does not necessarily imply they're living *in between* different places.

### Being a West Indian in the United States

Even if they'd been in the United States for several decades, the immigrants identify themselves in the first place as Jamaican, Trinidadian, Guyanese or St. Lucian. A West Indian identity is much less prominent or important than this national identity. Most of them said they are aware of being part of the West Indies, with some preferring to refer to the Caribbean as a whole. They recognize the different countries share a history and see many cultural commonalities. There is an understanding they see one does not get with Americans. But ultimately, it's for the majority not the same as the people from their own country. Most say there are still little differences, and only people from back home truly understand them, as in the case of Peter:

*"But one of the things that is important to me is that, or not so much important, but what I notice, is that when you belong to a certain culture, and you interact with other people in that culture, you'll know exactly how they'll respond, how they take on what you say, how to interpret. That is something that I like. Because there often is, I notice with me, even after all these years, people misinterpret what I say some time."*

A few made it clear they don't identify as American at all, even while having American citizenship. That is seen mostly as some practical tool, with no consequences on an emotional, personal level. "...Trinidadian obviously. I could never be an American. I'm not an American, I'm a Trinidadian. I have been allowed to use the citizenship, but I'm not a citizen. It's a perk. They can take it", was how Chris described it. First and foremost they identify as where they're from, with where their roots are, which are very important to many of them. Here one recognizes the order of identities also described by Rogers (2001). Mary said she felt more Buddhist than Guyanese these days, but that she still loved her background and likes to know she can say she's Guyanese. Some of the older immigrants mentioned that it used to be more important to themselves a while ago, when they arrived here. Nowadays it mattered more to them because of their children, who they want to know about their parents' background. A few persons hadn't really thought about it that much before being asked about it, like Thomas who told me:

*"I never thought about it that way, I try to think to see if it is important [that others know I'm Jamaican] and... I wonder if it is, because I want them to differentiate me from the Americans, so that we're not like them, so maybe... .. You don't wanna be stereotyped in a negative way. It's natural I guess. But I don't think it's a conscious thing though."*

When asked what it is that makes them Jamaican, Guyanese, St. Lucian or Trinidadian, mostly mentioned was a different attitude than found in America, another way of life, besides being born there. Ann said:

*"I guess it's just a matter of where I'm from. It's probably as easy and as complicated as that. It's not that it's anything about what I do at home or what I wear or the people I associate with. It's just a matter of my background and that being part of the person that I've become."*

Both the more primordial and circumstantialist approach described by Verkuyten (2005) can be heard. It's both about where they're born, as well as their culture, values and attitude. This supports Verkuyten's suggestion that the two approaches do not exclude but complement each other. The West Indians described themselves as being more easy going, positive, happy, relaxed, not having stress or issues like depression. They said they have a positive outlook on life where the glass is usually half full, and that they are resilient. If it doesn't work the first time then try again, "we bounce back". Being more educated and open minded was often seen as different from Americans (both white and black) as well, together with growing up with a good work ethic and values such as respect and trying your best with everything. "You give your best, you do your best because you're representing yourself, you're representing your family but you're also representing your country," Carol said. Brian described it as:

*"...being down there [feeling depressed] is nothing. So that's when you I think pull up your roots you know, because it's just not a Caribbean disposition to be depressed... You know if you can't run back home you at least mentally be able to go to that space. Take a mental vacation."*

Several Trinidadians kept telling me about their love to party and having more of a Carnival attitude. John said "You just do it and think about it later. Even if you think about it at all, you just do it and then you're done. It's just enjoying life. A different mentality", and Richard told me:

*"We live for the day. I probably changed from that a little bit, but in general the way of Trinidadians, they live for party, they love carnival, they'll spend their last dollar to play*

*mas<sup>19</sup> for carnival and don't have anything to eat tomorrow, that kind of mentality. Not rigid and strict like most people, and I think that's a good attitude."*

It was mentioned by other West Indians as well, but Jamaicans especially seemed to stretch to be hard working, not lazy, and willing to make use of the opportunities presented by living in the US. Not being afraid to dream and challenge themselves, to try and try again. "On the island, you know, failure, at least in my area anyway, failure was not really an option. Because there was no welfare system, so you fail you die of hunger, so you don't fail. Simple as that," I was told by one Jamaican man, who had just restarted his business this year after losing everything due to the housing market crisis. I noticed many of them spoke about "us" and "we", talking about "us Jamaicans are all around" or "we Trinians love to party".

Improvement of one's circumstances, opportunities, and social mobility can all be found in the United States. At least if one is willing to work for it, and this was described as a very West Indian attitude, a certain work ethic. Since they made the decision to come here they are more motivated to actually succeed, and if they fail, to try again and keep trying. Maybe it's also more of an immigrant approach to life in the US some said. This is not to say that West Indians do not fail, but more that they don't give up and are willing to take on jobs many Americans look down on, if need be to do so. Some thought this might be a reason for the tension between West Indians and African Americans they sometimes experienced or had heard about, being blamed to take African Americans' jobs. The West Indian immigrants I spoke with all seemed to be quite aware of what made them different from Americans, both white and black Americans. They are proud of their backgrounds and how they've been raised, their values and culture. And there seemed to be little intention to become more Americanized. One aspect that clearly seems to demonstrate this were their accents, something also pointed out by Waters (1999).

With the exception of one Jamaican woman who had a very neutral accent, everyone said that maybe Americans might at first think they're just another black American, however "... it speaks for itself once you open your mouth". Having lived in the United States for sometimes over 40 years hasn't caused much of a change in accent and manner of speaking for many of the immigrants. Many are aware of talking differently in different contexts. As Brian explained:

*"If I run into a West Indian person, my accent immediately changes. I don't even recognize it, it's just that... if I'm speaking to an American my accent will change, because there is certain ways we speak as Caribbean people, we understand each other. But if you speak to an American that way, they think we speak a different language. So immediately you have*

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<sup>19</sup> The masquerade tradition of the Trinidad Carnival.



*to make that change in your head in order to communicate. You have to, you know, ok I'm speaking to an American, so I have to make sure they understand what I'm saying so you switch into this accent. But when you meet another West Indian then you default to your dialect you know."*

And this turned out to be the case for many of the West Indian immigrants I spoke with. When surrounded by persons from the same country or other West Indians, they speak with a heavier accent or in their local dialect. In interactions with other people they sometimes adapt a more neutral accent, most of the time unconsciously. "9 to 5, Monday through Friday ... there are often times in business environments in American where they tend to see an accent as being less intelligent. So under those circumstances then the accent is left at home," I was told by George. The West Indians tend to switch between different ways of communicating, yet even then most say you can still hear they're not Americans.

When talking about identity many pointed out it matters to them that others know about their background. It's often not necessary to say so because of the accent. Most see no reason to try to sound more American. With the accent they're "something different, not just another black man". And many feel it makes a difference in interactions with Americans, being seen as a foreign black person instead of an African American. Like Thomas said he wanted to be differentiated from Americans to avoid negative stereotyping, several people thought the accent was a kind of advantage and often resulted in a more positive relation with Americans. "And there is a certain level of respect that you gain when people know you're from another country, because people are intrigued" said John from Trinidad. Waters (1999) also described how the accent can be an important identity marker to emphasize their being different, as being not (too much) Americanized seems to pay off more than being Americanized. Being black, one would not become just another American, but an African American. And this can be seen as a "stigma identity" as Verkuyten (2005) points out when describing social identities, due to the many associated (negative) stereotypes. Besides Americans being intrigued by people from abroad and having a positive image of the Caribbean, some added that Americans appear to be more comfortable with foreign blacks than American born blacks, and that this probably had to do with the different histories. This comfort factor was also noted by Waters (1999) and Model (2008), which causes white Americans to get along easier with foreign born black people. And this brings me to the notion of West Indians as a model minority.

### Being a black immigrant model minority

In Chapter 1 I explained the model minority theory and here I'll pay attention to how this is experienced by the West Indians themselves. Most weren't familiar with the actual term 'model minority' as such but didn't need much explanation, recognizing and often agreeing with the idea of West Indians being very successful, or at least more successful compared to African Americans. Franklin said he thought it was a myth, with African Americans being more successful only not being as visible in American society as West Indians. Several West Indians added that they knew there were also black Americans doing well in society, but that they agreed that they were faring better. Some thought it to be more an immigrant thing and not exclusive to West Indians, echoing Model's (2008) finding that it's not a black but an immigrant success story. Having made the decision to come to the US, often coming from having nothing or very little, they were more motivated and focused to make use of the opportunities to be found there, whereas some thought that Americans grow up having everything and take things more for granted. A Jamaican said "we rather work than live of the system". One advantage mentioned by a few which West Indians might have over other immigrants is already speaking the language, and being close to America they might have a better understanding of what they'll find. This closeness to the US might also help in the sense that many Americans are familiar with the Caribbean and often have a positive image, which, like the accent, eases interactions. Ann thought the educational system reinforced the idea, and saw possible dangers underlying this model minority concept:

*Kids end up testing higher, go to college, more likely to get a degree, they end up doing better. And then as opposed to African Americans it seems as if West Indians are doing better. I don't know, might be something there. I think the model minority concept is a little dangerous. I would hate to think that it gets to a point where whenever there is a African American concern the finger is pointed to West Indians and saying they're doing ok so what are you worried about. We have a different experience and it's part of the equation. ... growing up in a country that's predominantly black and not having to deal with kind of like these racial issues from childhood onwards, I'm sure it has an effect on how you perform. And your confidence level going into certain environments.*

This awareness of having a different experiencing growing up, seeing black people in all kinds of positions in society, being a majority and color not being a barrier to achieve things, was mentioned by many others. Here one clearly recognizes the different experiences with race described by several authors, such as Baronov & Yelvington (2003), Vickerman (2001) and Waters

(1999). One man described it as people from the West Indies not having an inferiority complex, as they are not used to being told they can't do something because of the color of their skin.

*“Often I hear the Americans talk about, especially the black Americans, talk about feeling inferior, or they were told they were unequal, whatever it was, and Jamaicans, in nature don't think like that. I'm like, you say that, you must be crazy right, I don't care how ridiculous a Jamaican, or unaccomplished a Jamaican is, that person is a big ego, and you know, of course I'm equal to you, what are you talking about I'm not equal. I've always had that attitude, and every Jamaican I know, as you meet them I think you'll sense that too, it's the same around the world.”*

This was mentioned by others as well. Another major reason was their upbringing back home, and education. Growing up in a country where values as respect, hard work, and an awareness of the importance of education are instilled on a young age helps with achieving what you set out to achieve. This too was pointed out regularly as a big difference with the American way of life, where kids are seen as being less respectful and not learning as much in school as they do in the West Indies. Ann thought that American children do not have the same idea about education, do not believe in the real value of it and that it will help them improve their lives. Several persons told me they always knew from an early age that a good education would help them get ahead in life. Parents on the islands, no matter how busy with work or other things, would make sure their children got their education and would value it.

A few added that the model minority status is possibly wearing off, for example as a consequence of family reunification and it being easier to come to the United States nowadays, which brings in less skilled and educated people as well, as described by Model (2008). Yet at this point the majority agreed on the high success rate of West Indians compared to African Americans. According to some this was the cause of tensions between the two groups, having a different history and legacy. To me it seems that where Model described the model minority status as caused by positive selectivity and not culture or history, the immigrants themselves point to all three aspects as causing their level of success. Education, work ethic, language, cultural and historical baggage, attitude and so on are seen as not only helping to migrate, but also to improve their lives once arrived. Some of the differences related to the model minority status were mentioned again when talking about another major theme when living in the US as a black person, race.

### Dealing with racism in the US

Not being seen as African Americans mattered to quite a few of the immigrants I spoke with. For some it had to do with negative stereotypes, such as being lazy, dumb, uneducated and not hard

working, the “stigma identity” pointed out by Verkuyten (2005). This goes against their ideas of what being West Indian entails, such as working hard and having a good education. Some said they wanted people to know they were not African American simply because that’s not what they are, regardless of stereotypes, negative or positive. The following example from Carol illustrates this attitude:

*“I’m proud to say I’m a Jamaican, even if the person I’m talking to has only been exposed to negative, some negative reputation. For example, when I decided to put the flag on my car, a friend of mine who’s also Jamaican but lived in Florida way longer than me, she said why you putting that on your car. I said what do you mean? She said, and I guess she was referring to when she lived in Florida, the only people who had flags for license plates were drug dealers and gunmen, you know, gangsters. And I said so what, I’m not living there and even if I lived there I wouldn’t care. This is my add, this is my 5 minutes of fame right here. I’m a law abiding Jamaican living in American and I’m proud of who I am.”*

Another reason mentioned to make clear they were foreign blacks was the tendency of Americans (both black and white) to approach West Indians with a different, more open attitude than they do with African Americans. Some said the exotic, positive image of the Caribbean had to do with this, of sun, music, beaches, parties and friendly, easygoing people. Others pointed to the different history and background, causing West Indians to be seen as less confronting or threatening. “I mean it’s not true, but they see every African American as being from the ghetto, but that’s just a perception instead of it being the reality. There are very successful African American people” Richard explained to me. And then there are people who are simply interested in someone not from the United States. The increase in tourism was seen as a possible explanation as well, with people having been to more places, they become more interested and open minded. Here one sees the importance of “others” as described by several authors, like Eriksen (2002), Larrain (2000) and Waters (1999), with the views of Americans influencing how the West Indians both view and present themselves, responding to the existing images in American society. Verkuyten’s (2005) notion that social identities are not fixed and people can try to challenge and change others’ perceptions can also be recognized here.

As described before, for most of them it wasn’t difficult to make clear to others they’re not Americans, with the accent speaking for them. Some told me they experience racism all the time since they’re in the US, most of the time covert or subtle. The response of Peter was quite typical, “I’m sure it exists, I haven’t really, maybe I didn’t notice it when it happened, but I don’t really waste time with that. If people don’t like me that’s fine, I don’t let it bother me”. Many persons said they didn’t notice it, or weren’t aware of it at the time that it happened, but like Brian put it, “it’s America so I won’t say it doesn’t happen”. They are aware of the fact that in the US skin color is a big deal, as

pointed out by Smedley (1998), and that if you look black, people will group you with all other black people regardless of background. This stands for most of the West Indians in stark contrast with the environment they grew up in, where black people are the majority and racism is hardly an issue. Only one man from Guyana thought that Guyanese people might be more suspicious of whites, because of their colonial history and whites still having many of the higher positions. Classism was more a problem in the Caribbean according to some, with people expecting others to “know their place”, but that is not the same as racism. Ann described how she’d never encountered racism on an institutional level;

*“but on a social level, with just silly stereotypes and little things like that I think I have experienced it, but it’s not enough to stop me from doing what I have to do, prevent me from making strides or prevent me from having a good and happy life. ... It just seems ridiculous to me that people can tell me that I can’t accomplish what I want simply because of the color of my skin, it’s not something I accept because it’s not something I was used to that’s not how I was raised. Especially in the earlier years when your personality is formed and look around and see all those things really affects you. Growing up in predominantly black country I didn’t have to deal with that and that made it better for me”.*

And this seems to be representative for most immigrants I talked to. They know it’s there, and maybe some look for it more than others, some notice it more often than others, but none of them really see it as a problem or obstacle to live their life the way they intend to and accomplish their goals. According to Vincent, “... it’s coming from fear and not knowing. That’s why I love to educate people. When people become educated, it takes away some of the ignorance”. When they do encounter and notice it, many of them will speak up or address it if the situation allows it, which can be linked again to the agency aspect of social identity Verkuyten (2005) described. A Trinidadian doctor gave a nice example of how it’s different in America, and how race and class are linked by some people as described by Eriksen (2002):

*“For instance when I read an ad of someone who wanted to do some gardening. He came to my house, I answered the door, he says I’m looking for Dr. Anthony, I said yes what can I do for you, he says can you call the doctor for me, I say well what can I do for you, he says if I wanted to talk you I would talk to you. So I went in back, put on a white coat and I came back out. And he blushed and... it happens.”*

Coming to the United States, the pervasiveness and importance of race was a shock for most, not expected and as mentioned before, often not even noticed at first. Yet coming from the West

Indies with a different attitude and approach to life, they deal with it in their own way or just leave it be, and don't let it stop them. "You can't let it define you... You just understand that it happens". And differentiating themselves from African Americans is one way of dealing with the racism of US society. The accent, as described above, is seen by some as quite useful in this, as well as presenting a more foreign identity, as also found by Hintzen (2001). One man said he'd never experienced racism, because of his accent. People recognize he's not American and therefore see him as less threatening. And the different attitude might help as well, as Helen explained:

*"So I think I just have that kind of don't mess with me kind of attitude. So for the most part, you know... a manner of life I guess. I know it's there, I'm sensitive to it, I'm usually watching for it, but in terms of it really impacting or stopping me from doing anything, no."*

#### It's all about the food and music...

Before moving on to social relations and the West Indian community, I want to take a short look at the importance of the food and music from their home country, which seems to be important both on an individual and on a community level. When asked about food and music, most said it was very important to them. Several people stated they couldn't live without it, and that they would most definitely miss it if they could not eat the dishes and hear the songs they grew up with, as was the case for Sarah:

*"Very, the food oh definitely, the food, oh god I couldn't live without Jamaican music, I just couldn't ... The old school Jamaican stuff, it's like... let me see if I can explain it this way. Your body needs certain nourishment, music to me is part of that nourishment. And Jamaican music, I must have that nourishment, and so it is very important".*

And one man said one couldn't be Jamaican without the food and music from Jamaica. Another Jamaican woman explained it wasn't so much important day to day, but it did matter a great deal during holidays. "If I went home [to New York] for Christmas or Thanksgiving and there'd be no Jamaican food, it would be like a major crisis. ... It's really a big part of how we celebrate". For her and many others, it wasn't so much eating West Indian on a daily basis that was important, but knowing that it is there, that you can get it if you want it, if one is craving for a dish they grew up with. Some cook Jamaican or Trinidadian a few times a week or a month, others even less, but they all love their food. Karen actually learned to cook here because she wanted to eat certain things, but in Jamaica she'd always had others around who did the cooking.

For some food comes first place, for others music, and almost all say it's both a big part of

the culture. As Vincent said, “Trinis love their soca. Just like Jamaicans love their reggae, we love our soca”. Some of the Trinidadian men I spoke with were steel drum players, with three of them making their living out of it. For them music came first place. But not only because it was how they earned their money, but like Brian told me:

*“... your community is about the food, what you eat, it’s about your music, music I would say is number one. That is more than anything what brings Caribbean people together ... And the music is really what brings us together. When the music brings us together then we have the food, but we get together for the music first, and then we share everything else ... Absolutely, the music is the glue. It is. As spread out as we are here, we can get together around music.”*

Some told me about the importance of having their children know the different dishes, the tastes and smells and the sound of their parents’ homeland. The food and music are part of where they come from, of who they are, and also something that sets them apart from other countries. Music and food are also connected to social events and functions where they meet others and can connect and relate to people with whom they share a background. As in many cultures, food and music are important identity markers, present in everyday life and often easy to be recognized.

One thing that was mentioned quite often, was that it was a lot harder to get certain ingredients for dishes here in the Bay area than in a place such as New York. The presence of Asian immigrants helped according to several people with finding the necessary ingredients in their stores, but they would like there to be more West Indian stores or restaurants. William even started a restaurant 18 years ago because he saw there was the need for it. Unfortunately, it does no longer exist. But most of them understand it’s difficult to start a business to cater to West Indians, because there are so few West Indians in the Bay area, and there are not enough of them to keep a business running if one does not also cater to other groups. And this brings us to the West Indians’ social contacts and community.

### 3. West Indian immigrants in the Bay area: Functional community or a mere presence?

*“I wish we could attract every last Jamaican and West Indian in the area. I heard of people that have been members of the community longer than me that, you know way back when, we had a lot more people. Some people are still around but they’re just not part of it anymore. So I would love to see everybody back in, everybody, young and old, we don’t discriminate.” (Carol, 46)*

In the theoretical framework I described some of the concepts central to community, such as geographic context, relations between members and “others” as well as the involvement and perceptions of both those in the community and those outside of it. In the previous chapter one could see how important background and cultural markers are. Now it’s time for a closer examination of how this translates to the concepts mentioned above. First location is shortly described, and from there I move on to the social aspect, the question if there is an community, the level of organization and finally the experiences and perceptions of the West Indians themselves.

#### The issue of location

Location is an important aspect in two different ways; one, the area where the West Indian immigrants live, in this case the San Francisco Bay area; and two, as locations to socialize with other West Indians. The problem with the first according to many is that there are not enough West Indians in the area and that those few are spread out over a very large area, making it more difficult to get together and get people involved. Yet at the same time it is very important for many West Indians to be able to meet people with the same background and stay in touch with each other. Phone and email make this easier these days, however it is not the same as seeing one another face to face. The other side of location is actual places to meet, such as restaurants or clubs. There used to be more places one could go knowing there would be other West Indians, but these have declined in number in the past few years. As William said, there’s a lack of common locations, “not for lack of trying, people did try and there may be some trying, but it’s a tough business in Northern California, because we’re so spread out. Location, location, location”. This makes it also harder to organized events or activities, or to get in touch with others when one is new to the area. Like Vincent told me,



*“before we used to have what we called the Embassy, in San Francisco.... a friend of mine from Tobago had a barbershop and everybody used to say, if you want to meet anybody, go to the Embassy, go to that barbershop. ... Now the barbershop is missing.”*

There are a few restaurants in places like Palo Alto, and there are two clubs with West Indian events or nights and many people were familiar with a Jamaican store in Oakland. These few however were pretty much the best and for many only known locations. The lack of customers to keep a business profitable was seen as the main problem. Many pointed to how different things were in New York, where you could find plenty of West Indian stores or places to go for a quick bite to eat. Yet this was not seen as a reason to leave the Bay area, even though some did miss it at times.

### Social contacts in the Bay area

In the previous chapter food and music were already mentioned as important links to the immigrants' home countries. Another important part of their sense of connection for many of them are their contacts with others from the same country or other West Indians. There was a lot of variety in the number of others from the same country they knew, with a few Jamaicans who are or used to be very involved with the Jamaican Association saying they knew most of the other Jamaicans in the Bay Area, from a few hundred to about a thousand. Most West Indians knew about 50 people who migrated from the same place, with only a few saying they knew less than 10, not having been in this area that long yet or having lost contacts over the years. Many added that they see most of these contacts only once or a few times a year, on the bigger events, and that they only have a smaller group of family and friends with whom they have regular contact and see on a more frequent basis. The number of other West Indians they knew was usually smaller than the number of persons with whom they shared a nationality, for most ranging from 20 to 50. Again, those who were or still are more actively involved tended to have more contacts. Only one Jamaican woman, who just moved to the Bay area very recently, didn't know any other West Indians but thought that might happen with time.

These contacts are for the majority of the immigrants very important and they would miss the presence of people with whom they share a common background and experience. Carol even told me she would want to be somewhere else if there would be no Jamaicans or West Indians around. “It are essential contacts, especially with those from the same area or school, you share people you both know. ... The unspoken stuff, a connection and understanding”. According to her, without Jamaicans there is no one who “really gets it”. This was also repeated by Joanne, “there is no need to explain”, and Richard told me that without other Trinidadians he'd feel “like a fish in the ocean, where you're the only fish in the ocean. Nobody else looks like you, talks like you”. The aspect

of a shared understanding was repeated by many as being very important to them, and also what helped them feeling at home or comfortable in the Bay area. As Thomas described it, “So it’s back to what I’m saying where I don’t really feel at home, but they don’t feel like they’re at home either, so it helps us feel that we’re not alone. We’re in the same boat, in a big ocean on a small boat”. Here one can clearly see what Cohen (1985) described about people having a sense they share something with their group they do not share with others.

For Thomas, as for a few other persons, these contacts were not as important as for most West Indians, more average or just nice to have. And some said it was more important when they just arrived here. Helen said;

*“...when I moved to a new city I’d be in the yellow pages trying to find the association, look up people with my last name, call them on the phone. Make the connection and I’d become involved in whatever association, I mean that was my MO [method of operation – JB]. Now that I’m older and have kids, and I’m busy...”*

There were more people like her, who told me that getting older they’ve become less involved, now having less time or energy, or having developed other interests and priorities. However, they as well seem to appreciate the shared understanding with other West Indians. As Helen also told me, “it seems you can’t live without them and you can’t live with them”. For one Trinidadian man it was not very important, except for social events, “it’s nice to know I have Trinidadians or West Indians around here, come time to party, we can party the way we’re accustomed to party ... it’s what you’re familiar with”.

Some said the contacts with those from their own country and other West Indians are equally important, and some said knowing people from their own country is more important. Sarah described it as:

*“It’s not exactly the same, although other West Indians you do know when they’re there. When I run into another Jamaican it’s like I’m home. With a West Indian it’s a guest. I’ve invited a guest into my environment, with a Jamaican it’s family, there’s a difference.”*

According to some, mostly Jamaicans, it’s only those from the same country that truly get it, while others believe it’s the same with all West Indians. Carol, who said these contacts were very important to her, told me “these people are your family, not blood, but they are your family ... because they are not strangers, even if you’ve never met them before...”, but did add that Jamaicans came first. And someone else said her Jamaican friends were her fundamental friends. Several West Indians told me they feel connected to other West Indians even if they’ve never met each other before, or with people from the same country. “When you come here and meet another West Indian

you're like oh you're from home" Chris said. This sense of connection tends not to be confined to the Bay area, but to be a more worldwide sense of belonging, as Thomas said:

*"So once you go somewhere and you don't know anybody... you start looking around, see if you see other Jamaicans, that's your first linkage. I don't care where in the world you go, that's kinda how it is, if you go to China you're like ok... you see a Jamaican flag somewhere or a rasta flag and you find yourself migrating over there to check it out, to see what's happening."*

All this can be easily connected to Verkuyten (2005) pointing out how people look for a sense of belonging to a certain group. But also that there can be varying degrees of identifying with a certain group, as shown by some seeing all West Indians as equal, while others prefer for example Jamaicans.

#### *A West Indian community or only a presence in the area?*

Looking at the importance of contacts with other West Indians, one would think there is a community where they come together, to experience the much sought after understanding and familiarity. Yet at the same time many only know a few dozen other West Indians. This points to the biggest obstacle in the Bay area for a West Indian community: the limited number of West Indian immigrants mentioned earlier. They are definitely not a highly visible presence, especially compared to other groups such as the Mexicans or Asians. A small majority of the people I spoke with told me that they believe there is a West Indian community, with the rest mostly thinking the opposite, that there is no West Indian community. One person didn't know yet as she hadn't been here long enough.

Within the group that said yes, there is a West Indian community here, there was still some considerable variation as to how they described this community, and how important this was to them. This is said by Cohen (1985) to be normal for most communities, with people sharing the symbols but giving different meanings to them according to their own experiences and interests. Descriptions ranged from "yes, there is a very strong Caribbean community, we support each other" and "it's pretty active", to "yes, but small and not really together", "...but not like in New York" and "not very active... it's more event based now". This last notion, of the community being centered around events, was mentioned by most people. As Martin put it, "it's an event driven community... when something happens they surface". Many mentioned as I described above that nowadays there is a lack of physical locations to just go to and hang out together, like there used to be. Especially those immigrants that have been here since the 60s and 70s think there is less togetherness now, and agree that this has to do with the absence of a central meeting place. An additional issue is the

lack of numbers and being spread out over a large area. And a few people were not sure if there was really a West Indian community, or more country based factions. Those that seemed most convinced there is a real community were those who've been here the longest and can be seen as foundational members. They have seen the community develop over time and often contributed themselves to this process. There appears to be a smaller core group made up of these key members. They began activities such as the Caribbean Carnival event Karijama in Oakland, cricket and soccer teams, and felt part of a tight community of West Indians. Over the years they have maintained these connections as part of their own personal networks.

All in all, for this group there is a community, one way or another, and most of them think it's important to have one. For Sarah the community provides "a place somewhere you can go to reconnect with your own people. You can talk, act silly, because they know you more than anyone else". It provides them with a cultural foundation and sense of belonging to a larger group within the American society. Brian told me he thinks;

*"we have a unique experience, every culture does. And your culture is where you maintain your sanity, and I think not to have that is really stressful. I think your culture is where you default to, to release the stresses of this dominant culture."*

And Martin said: "I want to be at events, to see the people you know. They have the same background and you know what to look for, you can read the situation". Many said that it's at the events like the annual JAANC picnic, or the dances, that they see friends and stay in touch with people they don't see the rest of the year. In this way the community provides for them an opportunity to maintain their contacts and connections. The fact that the events on which the community is based are not always as frequent or often as some would like, does not diminish its role for many of its members. As Cohen (1985) wrote, a community can be best described as existing in people's minds. William thought a bigger or more active community might be "more helpful. I mean culturally you want to identify with some of the things you're accustomed to, even if it's just once a month". For several persons the presence of a community used to be more important when they arrived, like in the case of Eric, "when I arrived it was important, now I'm not that involved anymore... I think West Indians should be connected, it keeps the culture going and avoids Americanization". Yet even if it's not as important anymore as it used, they still believe it's good to have a community, for their children and the younger generation, to learn about their background and roots.

Then there is the group that does not believe there is such a thing as a West Indian community in the Bay area. Where for those who believe there is a community the events are proof of this, for others

the fact that it's only events is reason to say there is no community. One Guyanese man, Franklin, described the situation like this:

*“Well there never really was a community. ... There were gatherings of West Indians, around particular things. And West Indian support for other West Indians. And then there was what you'd call the entertainment and restaurant circuit... which served as gathering places. So rather than saying there's a West Indian community, there were West Indian gatherings... And out of those gatherings persons would develop friendships and affinities that would lead to smaller gatherings... and this would be part of their own particular personal networks.”*

The most often mentioned reason why there is no community, is that there are simply not enough immigrants to form a real cohesive, noticeable and active community at this time. And those that are present are too spread out over a fairly large area to be a real community which is able to make itself count, be heard and provide services to their own members. One man said there had been attempts in the past, and that he thought the failure of these attempts had to do with leadership. Some thought that there were separate communities, of Jamaicans and Trinidadians and so on, but no general West Indian community bringing them all together. The Jamaicans were often seen as a group which has a good community going on, as John from Trinidad said:

*“Over the years JAANC, the Jamaicans, have done a phenomenal job in maintaining their sense of community versus other cultures... The Trinidadian community has its ups and downs, and we are in touch, but we are less active than in the 90s or even 80s.”*

With the exception of one man saying he didn't need a community, everyone would like there to be one, as they too thought it to be important, for mostly the same reasons as mentioned by those who believe there is a community. They would like to be part of the community and most would also want to be actively involved in it. When asked how she imagined a West Indian community, Mary told me “I want it to be not some political movement but more about our own cultures and bring that here... have fun”. Ann also pointed out that “it's a way of looking out for each other. Because cultural things are so important to us we have to be there to assist whenever anything threatens that... with a bigger community there are more people to support that”. The importance of meeting others and staying in touch with friends was also mentioned by some, and how it would help with maintaining their social identity and connection with their roots, also for their children. One man said it would “provide a stable base, and help to feel more at home”. A few told me that there used to be a community back in the day, but that things changed. These changes will be further described below, but first a closer look at the Jamaican Association is in place.

### *An organized community? The Jamaican American Association of Northern California*

The Jamaican American Association of Northern California (JAANC) deserves some extra attention, playing a pretty central role in the West Indian community. The Association is a charitable non-profit organization founded in 1975. They describe their mission on their Facebook page as

*“to promote the national culture of Jamaica in Northern California and apply the collective energy, strength and resources of the community towards social and economic advancement in Jamaica. We are a unified body of people of common heritage working towards a more prosperous outcome for communities in Northern California and back home in Jamaica”.*

This sounds very Jamaica-centric, however the CEO of the association and several others I spoke with told me they’re not exclusive to Jamaicans but open to people from the entire Caribbean and those interested in the region and its people as well. One way the association tries to achieve this goal is through the organization of events such as picnics, meet ‘n greets or dances. The annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic was known by almost all West Indian I talked to and many of them intended to go there this year, as well as the Jamaican Independence Dance in August. But they also award scholarships to high school students in Jamaica and college or university students in the US. They sent regular mailings to their 700plus subscribers, spreading word about upcoming events and news.

JAANC events were seen by many as providing opportunities to get in touch with others, socialize and feel the connection with people from “back home”, as described earlier. Some were an official member, others said they were not a member but did try to support and attend events when possible. Early August there were about 50 paid members<sup>20</sup>, mostly Jamaicans or decedents of Jamaicans. As the CEO put it “unfortunately, we have a large populace interested in what we are doing but a miniscule amount of people willing to pay dues”. Many of the older generation told me they used to be more active but had become less involved in recent times, having contributed their share and thinking it’s time for the younger ones to pick up what they began.

As other attempts to start organizations by the Trinidadians and Guyanese have not survived the test of time, JAANC is the only formal organization present in the area. As one Trinidadian noted, “they [the Jamaicans] have done a really good job on maintaining that, they have people dedicated to making sure that Jamaican culture and everything is maintained throughout.” The reason this is not the case for Trinidadians according to him is the fact that they are too spread out. Jamaicans are the biggest group of West Indian immigrants, not only in the Bay area but worldwide. There was also

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<sup>20</sup> Membership is renewed annually. The highest number of paid members they’ve had was about 125.

a meet up group on meetup.com, called the West Indian Bay Area Professionals (WIBAP), however this group was shut down as of July 16<sup>th</sup> as no one stepped up to take over the role of organizer. I attended a meeting of WIBAP at the end of February, and there were several people present who were glad with this initiative as they hadn't been able to find many other West Indians in the area. At the time the organizer mentioned she considered closing the group, as it took too much time and effort to do it by herself. Two people suggested they'd become assistant organizers. Apparently this did not work out, as the group came to an end in July 2010, leaving JAANC once again as the only organization.

It is interesting to note that almost all Jamaicans said they believe there is a West Indian community and I suspect this has to do with JAANC. Being involved in the association makes it easier to experience a sense of togetherness and know about events that are happening and what is going on in the community. But JAANC is not only important to Jamaicans, other West Indians also recognized it's central role. According to Franklin from Guyana "the Jamaicans are just there to organize the West Indian community, the formal organization, they provide that". And Carol thought "somehow for all of us who are involved [JAANC] is the glue that keeps it together". She told me that for her, the association is the community. And there were several other Jamaican immigrants who doubted if there'd be a community at all without the association. As Martin who is actively involved with the association said, "without JAANC I'm not sure what would make the people here a community".

The association appears to be going through somewhat difficult times, with some of its members having different ideas about the direction things should be heading. A few mentioned the need for a new approach, to build a better framework and infrastructure, to get professionals involved and attract more donors and revenue. Another major point for is the issue of involving the younger generation, just like it's an issue for the community more in general. As Frances said, "I hope the younger generation will be involved. I don't want the association to dissipate, it's too important. It's like a home base". George is trying to change some things in the association, aiming for a change of leadership and priorities, and to get the new generation involved as well, because right now

*"...we're giving them nothing to be involved in. As far as I'm concerned it's an old folks organization. If you want them to be involved, you have to give them something to be involved in. ... With the activities there is nothing for them, so how do you expect it to move forward? You have to include them in the conversation, you have to get their leadership in and then you'll get them in".*

A change of leadership would probably also be welcomed by the CEO, as she told me "it was like I was the association, and I didn't like that. I wanted it to be the people's association, I wanted it to

move because of everybody moving it, not just me". However she also recognizes this won't be easy, for mostly the same reasons George mentioned,

*"the second generation... we didn't integrate them into the association, the community, so that's kind of an issue now really. Because we have an organization that is getting older and we don't have the young people coming up behind us to step up, so what do you do? ... they don't know anything about it and now they're getting on with their lives".*

She wasn't sure at this point if JAANC would even make it another 5 years, "because it comes down to leadership, and if I step down tomorrow, the question is who is gonna step up...". At the JAANC meet 'n greet event I attended the issues of participation and financial contributions were brought up by several people. On one hand, if there is not enough participation the association cannot organize as many events as members would like. Without those events, people tend to feel less inclined to contribute financially, because what do they get in return? But on the other hand, without those contributions it also becomes harder to organize events, which is already difficult because there are only a few people willing to step up and make things happen. The changes taking place in the community at large are also affecting the association.

#### *Changes in the West Indian community*

Regardless of whether or not they thought there was a West Indian community at the moment, many seemed to agree that things have changed. A few told me they weren't that involved anymore these days and didn't really know if things had changed, but I heard more than once that there used to be more activity at the time they arrived. In the past there was more going on, and people were more involved according to most immigrants. "We don't have the facilities and the events that used to bring us together" said Brian. Many of the older people I interviewed were themselves less active these days, often saying they were getting older now and had different priorities or interests. They mentioned this quite often as a reason why they thought there was a decline in participation, people getting older, moving on with their lives and having their families and career. Or wanting to be closer to their family on the East coast or in the Caribbean and therefore moving in that direction. As Chris put it:

*"[There used to be] a lot more activities. That's dying out, going away now. The Caribbean community is thinning out, so... the people who were really involved in organizing they're no longer here. Nobody is taking over. Those who used to do that kind of stuff, they're getting old now".*



Yet at the same time there were a few persons who were of the same age group who told me they still liked to be active, teaching others about their culture and staying involved. Another reason for the decline according to many was the high cost of living in the Bay area. Some moved away from the Bay to other places in California, stretching the community even further, and others moved to different states altogether, Atlanta and Florida being the more popular destinations. This moving due to high costs of living here is not something of recent years, because people already started to move away some 10 years ago, a long time before the current economic crisis. A closer look at the impact of this crisis will follow in the next chapter.

Some people described additional changes to those described above. The Trinidadians told me there used to be a Trinidadian Association, but this no longer existed or was “on hold” at the moment. And Brian thought “some of the new people are not really connected to the old group... we definitely lost a connection”. One man said the context had changed, “the environment that used to attract West Indians here... bring new blood so to speak into the community, that’s no longer here, people are not coming here”. Some thought the Bay area was still a very attractive location for many West Indians. I found some disagreement on whether there is more unity now or if there is increasing separation between people from the different countries. Frances, who’s been in the Bay area for 27 years, told me the community was “first more island based, but now it’s more united”. Sarah however, also from Jamaica and in the Bay area for almost the same time, 26 years, said;

*“I’d like if people would do things together again like in the old days when I came here, it didn’t matter where you’re from, people were dancing, reggae and soca music. I know people’s lives have changed and they have jobs and businesses and things change and there seems to be a separation going on. It was nicer, different. There seemed to be more unity, the individuals, very good leaders in the community then that for whatever reason were able to get us together.”*

Both said they’ve been quite involved in the community but are now less active due to personal circumstances. A few men told me that the cricket team these days consisted of more Indian and Pakistani players, as younger West Indians don’t seem to be interested anymore. This might have to do with what one Trinidadian man said, that the younger people assimilate a lot faster, that it might be easier for them to go along with the American society. And a woman had noticed that everyone used to bring their children to events, but that there were hardly young people present these days. She thought this had to do with the fact they’re teenagers now with different interests, and hopes they’ll turn back with time. More people mentioned the (lack of) involvement of the newer, younger generation. This brings me to the future of the West Indians in the Bay area.

### Future of the WI community

Involvement of the new generation and their children and new immigrants taking over what the foundational or first immigrants have created seemed quite important for many of the West Indians, as it was a central theme when talking about the future of the West Indians in the Bay area. They believe it to be important for their children to have a cultural foundation and place to get in touch with their roots and background. It seems the following statement from Carol describes how many think about the importance of this:

*“I notice we don’t have as many young people as we used to. I don’t feel too happy about it because if we don’t have young people now, in 25 years we won’t have too many people left. That’s where the new blood is coming from. So I’m hoping that in 10 years the kids who are off doing their own thing now will remember and come back, with their friends. But only time is gonna tell if that’s really gonna happen or not... I think when they become young adults and realize how unique they are their roots will mean more.”*

Or as Martin said, “kids want to be associated with their ancestry but are not actively involved. Without the kids we need new migrants. Otherwise we have a problem in 10 to 20 years”. Many think it will be a challenge to get the younger West Indians involved, but are aware of the necessity to succeed in this as more immigrants get older or move away.

One thing that was often mentioned as a cause for the lack of participating by the new generation and younger immigrants, is that the community itself has not done enough to involve them, to incorporate them in the community. As George said concerning the new arrivals,

*“you have to give them something to be involved in, you have to make it socially relevant to them. And one of the ways to do that is having them in leadership positions, so that they’re thinking of things that will be appropriate to their community”.*

The limits of the community mentioned before, such as the small size, being so spread out and few locations do not help efforts to increase participation by both young and old. Growing up in a time where internet makes it easy to communicate around the world might also decrease the need for a community. Another threat some noticed for the future of the community was increasing Americanization and assimilation, leading to a diluted culture and a lack of interest. Hip hop was mentioned several times as a negative influence on West Indian music, but also seen as almost unavoidable with the reach of television and internet and American culture. Frances thought there’s “a trend to assimilate at the cost of culture. I believe in sharing without leaving something behind”.

But she also added that “it just happens”. Some pointed out that it might be less important for their children as they identify more as Americans;

*“because first of all things exist because there is a need, and younger people don’t see it as a need. They’re into the music, dancing and that kind of thing, but the old time cultural stuff, I don’t think so. Some don’t even know what it is, they weren’t raised that way here in America”.*

This is also linked to parenting, which is also a cause for the limited participation of the younger West Indians according to some. While many think that parents try to instill in their children the values they were brought up with in their home country, some also see limitations in how successful they can be at this. One Trinidadian was very positive and thought many children grow up with things like the music, food and traditions like Carnival and therefore it’s almost unavoidable that they want to know more about it and feel a connection. Some think both parents working negatively influences the way a child is raised, saying they become less mannered and not as educated as they would have been if they’d been born in the West Indies. Most point however to living in America having unavoidable consequences, as Brian said, “it’s growing up in America, they adapt to the local culture”. This brings Etzioni’s (1996) point to mind that people are part of a larger surrounding social environment and not just one community or group. Living in the US does not stop them though from trying to make sure their children are exposed to the food and music and culture from home, learn about their roots and to get them involved in the community and its events and activities. All in all most try to be optimistic about the future, like John:

*“We may not see it right now, the kids may not want to grab it today, but you don’t know when it is their interest level may be there. And you want to ensure that you maintain it simply because you want it to be there when they become interested in it”.*

William thought “it would be helpful if they had another venue or maybe two. Then that would be the magnet that will draw them and then of course it will go to the next level”. And Chris told me when I asked if he believed the West Indian community could get stronger, “this is America. Anything is possible in America”. However, the current economic crisis could be an obstacle to improving the community, and this is what I’ll look at in the next chapter.

## 4. “It’s not all that bad”: Consequences of the economic crisis for the West Indians.

*“You came here to succeed, so you wouldn’t want to set yourself to fall. So you would be very cautious to make sure you live within your means, manage yourself well, that kind of thing, so you don’t end up on the street.” (Helen, 56)*

As described earlier, success and achievement (Hintzen 2001) and their status as a model minority (Model 2008) seem to be quite important to West Indians and their identity, and through this also to their community. Employment and income, house ownership, and the ability to maintain their status in society can be impacted by thorough changes in the economy, such as those taking place since 2008. Therefore this chapter will describe the effects of the crisis on the West Indian immigrants in the Bay area.

### The economic crisis and its impact

When asked how the economic crisis affected them personally, people often first told me they weren’t affected personally, only to add something along the lines of “well, not really” or “not as bad as many others”. In the end there seemed to be three different categories, with six people saying that yes, they were noticeably personally affected; eight people saying no, they were not; and six who thought they were not really or only a little affected by the crisis. Most of the West Indians I spoke with hadn’t lost their jobs and felt quite secure in their jobs at the moment. A few persons were already retired since before the crisis, or hadn’t been working for reasons that weren’t related to the crisis, such as disability or other personal circumstances. One man who was sent with early retirement had been able to get by on his financial reserves, but those were starting to run low and now he was working on finding a new source of income. As he age might be an issue in finding a new job, he’d decided to start a business of his own and see how that would go. Sarah has her own business in promotional materials and told me she had had to downsize her company and work longer hours but so far she managed to keep things up without any outside help. She said;

*“it goes back to being an entrepreneur. You have to adjust to survive as an business owner. You may have to compromise, put off something you wanted to do, you have to*

*maybe sell your house, there are things you have to do because life is still there and goes on."*

Another woman's husband got laid off only a few months before I interviewed her, and as this had happened a year before as well they'd already ran out of their savings. So she was now trying to find a job because government support such as food stamps alone was not sufficient. Her husband had started to work from a home office in the mean time, but at the time of the interview she told me the family was hurting and times were difficult.

Also interesting were the cases of two men who both make a living playing steel drums. Each had a different experience with how the crisis affected their line of work. Brian told me he had noticed a decline in shows and according to him the music business was a good indicator of the economic situation, "when you're in an economic crisis, the last thing you think about is hiring music... So when you find people spending money to party, then the economy must be good". However, he'd already been thinking for a while about getting more into teaching and selling steel drum materials online:

*"The teaching stuff is, well it's kinda coincidental because I wanted to do it, but when I was active gigging I didn't want to slow down in that, but now that the gigs have slowed down I can do that which I wanted to do anyway ... In a way it eased me into that. It's not all bad, no not at all."*

And the steel drum market turned out to be one of the few that continued to grow despite the crisis, so teaching and online sales sufficed to complement the smaller number of performances. So for him the crisis actually provided an opportunity. At the same time, Richard told me he had a different experience being a musician in these times:

*I haven't seen it [a decline], I was kinda worried about it, but regardless of what, people still need music, are still looking for music. Regardless of the financial situation they need to be happy. So I haven't really seen it, I think I still have the same work volume that I had before the crisis."*

He did add later on though that he thought it probably affects others in the same line of business and that marketing and the following base you have can make a difference.

And then there was one man who said himself "I think I win the battle of who has lost the most. I think I win the prize". The housing market was the worst place to be in with this crisis, and that was exactly where he happened to be making a living:

*"I had company that built and remodeled houses... and obviously since we dealt in housing, and housing crashed, we lost millions of dollars. So essentially I went from being able to do whatever I wanted to do whenever I wanted to ... to being broke. I had to start from scratch again, start the rebuilding process, all over again. So I lost 15 houses, 10 employees as obviously the company shut down [in 2007] and a few million dollars."*

He'd had a hard a time for while, especially since it was not because of something he'd done wrong. "I think that was the most difficult part of it, dealing with the fact you did everything according to the rules and it didn't work out". Yet at the same time he was aware that he'd come a long way, "I'm from a slum in Kingston where we didn't always have food, and I'm in America where I can talk about losing millions of dollars". Even when hit this hard by the crisis, one sees the attitude mentioned so often before, to know where one comes from and to keep trying and look at the bright side.

### Adjustments and changes

The majority told me they didn't really feel like they had had to make any big changes in their lives or that the crisis had serious consequences for them or for others in their environment. The most mentioned adjustment was keeping a closer to eye on where the money goes to and thinking twice before spending anything. Some also try to save more now, in case the situation gets worse in the future, to prepare for what might lie ahead of them. A few people thought that as West Indians are often in professional positions they would be doing ok, with mostly those relying on manual skills having a harder time. As Franklin put it, "unless one is in a secure professional position, then it will affect you". Yet at the same time there were those who knew of people with one or even several degrees losing their job and now struggling to get by. The health care sector was a few times pointed out as a secure area of employment were quite some West Indians were employed. Sarah also thought those with their own businesses and those with an office job might have different experiences with this crisis:

*"The economic situation, as a business owner yes, for me the last 2 or 3 years have been a real challenge. I don't know for someone who works at a company if they're experiencing the same thing, unless you get less hours or are laid off you won't face much of a change of their day to day life and financial situation."*

There seemed to be an overall sense that as long as people didn't lose their jobs they would be doing fine. The way Ann described her experience appears to be the case for many West Indians:

*"We, me and my husband, and my mother and sister, we've been very fortunate. Nobody lost any jobs, not my direct family, no foreclosures or any of the big things. But of course,*

*we've cut back a lot and trying to hold on to our money and save because we don't know if someone will lose a job or something. So it's kind of the fear that it could happen is how we've been affected versus it actually happening. A lot of insecurity."*

This sense of insecurity and not knowing what the future might bring was mentioned more often. Still, the majority of immigrants said their house might be down in value but they still are the same, do what they do and like what they like and that won't change because of some crisis. It didn't make for anyone a difference in their sense of feeling at home or not, in how they felt about living in the US or the way they identified themselves. Maybe they spent a little less on ingredients for a dish from back home, but they still love the food just as much. They might go to less shows, but they still love their music. "I'm not rich but I did not live above my means so I don't feel like I have to make that big a shift" said Mary, and others agreed that living within their means kept them from being in trouble now. Or as Vincent told me, "I mean if it is that it isn't coming in then I cut back on some things that are not necessary... And if it gets so bad I can go back to a tin can with a string".

When asked if they knew other West Indians who had been affected by the crisis, many told me they thought most would be doing just fine, as they saw businesses were still open, children were still dressed nicely and people still went out and did things as usual. Some knew of a few individuals who had moved away as life in the area had become too expensive. Others had heard of persons having a hard time after losing their job. A few thought it might affect other West Indians more in an indirect manner, their children being those who are more directly faced with the effects of the crisis. Like Anthony put it, "most Trinidadians I know are reasonably independent, they're professionals, have their own practices, but their kids have jobs and they are the ones losing their jobs, so they're affected indirectly". And Karen agreed with this, "most of us have been here a long time and we're solid in our jobs so to speak. I think maybe it's the younger ones who'd be affected". But the majority hadn't heard of other West Indians having problems due to the crisis as they "haven't really been in touch" or "haven't spoken to anyone about their financial situation". This last point was also mentioned by John, "no I don't know of anyone personally, because sometimes you tend to keep that internal to yourself". George also thought this might be the case, with Jamaica having a bit of a "machismo culture" where you don't go telling others about your problems.

#### *Doing what is needed: dealing with the crisis*

With the exception of a few persons, the large majority tended to agree that they probably do deal with this situation differently than others in America and that this has to do with their background in one way or another. The different attitude ascribed to West Indians as described earlier was seen by some as providing them with an advantage, whereas others did agree on having a different attitude

but didn't see this as really advantageous. They said they were affected just the same as everyone else. Still, they could imagine that they might look at it differently, approach it more positively, as West Indians tend to do according to most of them. "You just know things will get better" Frances said, and Ann thought told me that "if I were to lose my job and after being completely freaked out I can get myself back together". Or like Richard, who thought;

*"the average Trinidadian probably wouldn't be bothered by it as much as an American, the situation is what it is, you just cope with it. You don't dwell on things or go over things you cannot change. It's a kind of mentality, it's all about the mentality. That might be an advantage, that we don't worry about it as much. ... Because as a people and how we are, we take it more easy. I know it's bad, but it's not that bad."*

This approach might also be linked to their background in a different way. Coming from the Caribbean, from third world countries, was mentioned by quite a few as a reason why they didn't really experience this as that much of a crisis. Not everyone came from poor economic circumstances, but for those who did it was something they were aware of. "The economic conditions we came from, having been there, it's not such a crisis", Brian said, and Mary told me it helps "knowing you're able to exist on little without being miserable". Or as Anthony put it, "I can do without stuff, I have stuff but if I had to I know how to live with adversity". And also those who themselves were more affected by this crisis said that coming from a place where they had less or sometimes even close to nothing made it easier for them to get through times like this. Some have seen a lot worse circumstances than this back home when growing up. According to George,

*"being Jamaican definitely affects how I get off my ass and go back to work. Because I remember from being in Jamaica, we didn't have a welfare system, so you had the choice, you get your ass to work, or you die from hunger. ... a lot of us come from nothing, economically. So this becomes more of a blip".*

As pointed out before, the reason for many to move to America was to improve their lives, coming from a place where they had a lot less financially and materially. Some have experienced not only economic but also political and natural crises. A few added this approach might be more an immigrant thing in general, having come here and survived making them confident they can do it again if necessary. Americans are seen as being more used to this way of life, and therefore might experience more of a shock. "Most of them [Americans] are born into comfort, whereas I was born into poverty", Anthony said. So even as they might be affected in the same way, they look at it from a different perspective. They've done it before and now they tend to have a better foundation which they've built up throughout the years.



Having this better foundation can also be linked to their background, as quite some West Indians pointed out that one big difference they noted between themselves and Americans was their ability to save, the way they handle their money and do not live above their means. Carol described how Americans tend to buy things before they can fully pay them. And she saw how many Americans try to keep up with others in a material way. She told me that's not how she was brought up;

*"it does go back to the whole save your money to buy what you want thing. That's how I was raised, I think that's how a lot of us were raised. Whether we all stuck with it or not I really don't know, but I don't think there are too many of us trying to keep up with the Joneses you know. ... You have to save... we saw our parents do it and if we were paying close enough attention we would be too."*

The idea of being prepared for a rainy day came by quite often, "not putting all your eggs in one basket". And again education was brought up several times, as people thought that professionals were in a better position, or that it might be easier to find new employment. Other things they mentioned were their willingness to work and not giving up. As William summed it up:

*"I think because of being more prepared academically and skill wise they're able to withstand the shock. Not to say it doesn't affect them, but they're able to overcome it, they might even come out of it faster because of their upbringing, not having certain things, working very hard to achieve some of the basic things in life. So if you came here to America, you have to work very hard, and when you work hard for something you try to hold on to it, you tend to make use of it much better... preparation you know, I preach to my kids, education is key to all of this."*

Resilience and bouncing back were also seen as West Indian characteristics that might help in dealing with the current situation, as well as inventiveness and resourcefulness. Vincent told me that "if we don't have it, we problem solve. That's how I grew up, we ain't crying for something we didn't get, we make things. We are very good with our hands, thinking, inventions. ... People know how to adjust". The man who had lost his company and millions of dollars, seems to be a perfect example of this "bounce back" attitude, as he started his business again at the beginning of 2010 and seemed to be quite confident it would all work out. Martin added West Indians are flexible, it's a "hustle mentality, to find something whatever it takes".

The idea of the crisis actually offering an opportunity was mentioned as well. One man noticed for example an increase in his work as a veterinary surgeon, with many people not being able to afford the more expensive places. Someone else knew of others who were using the extra time being unemployed to further educate themselves. They thought this was probably a West Indian

type of attitude, to even see opportunities in times like these. Sarah said “you have to remember that Jamaicans and Caribbean people are here for the opportunities, so if it means they’ll have to get up and go to another state they’ll do it”. All in all it seems that being West Indian does make a difference not so much in how they’re affected, but in how they deal with the economic crisis and the way they experience it. As Mary said, “in times of any kind of crisis your background definitely becomes obvious. That is where we reach back to”.

#### Effects on social activities and the community

Most people saw the crisis as having consequences on an individual, personal level and not so much directly on a community level. For themselves, on a personal level, nothing had changed for most of them when it came to their social contacts, still visiting with friends and family as before, staying in touch by phone and internet and going back to their home country as they’re used to. It was mostly on a more general level that people didn’t go anymore as often to shows or restaurants or events as before the crisis manifested itself. A few persons mentioned they maybe saw some people less frequently as they themselves or those others had less time than before, or if they mostly met at social events. They mostly thought there might be some indirect consequences for the community or larger West Indian presence as people have less money to spend, try to save more and have to set different priorities, “being busy hustling and bustling” according to Joanne. A few thought the crisis only affected individuals and had no effects on a more general level at all.

As described before, the West Indian immigrants tend to come together around social events. According to many people these are often high on the list of things that are not necessary and so will be attended less or not at all in order to save money. Therefore the most noticed change that people thought might have to do with the crisis was a further decline in both the number of activities and events taking place and the number of people attending and participating. A *further* decline, because most thought the crisis was not the principal cause of this, but only reinforced or worsened the process already taking place as described earlier. “[The level of activity] was already affected by not having the central location, that was already a given. This [the economic crisis] didn’t help it” William explained. And Carol pointed out the problem of involving the younger generation probably had nothing to do with the economic situation, “because this problem occurred way before the economic downturn happened”. A few said they noticed there being less organized and less people attending. Richard told me that “since the economy went down here you started seeing less and less activities happening in the community”. Others said they could imagine this happening, but couldn’t say for sure as they hadn’t been that involved recently or had been going less themselves. Some thought the crisis would not cause much of a change, like Chris, “I don’t think so. I think they will still have their activities. At least they’ll try to have it”. According to Anthony it might affect the

level of activities, “but some of those Caribbean people, they’re still going, nothing can stop them from going to a party. Even if they’re unemployed, they’ll find a way, nothing stopping them”.

Even though several people said they’d like there to be more of a support or solidarity system in the community for times like these, most of them thought this was not the case at the moment. George thought that the crisis was a missed opportunity for the Jamaican Association to become more relevant and meaningful in people’s lives. Most West Indians appear to agree to with Brian, who said;

*“we get together around music , not around economic issues, not at all. I think that is one of the fallacies about the idea of the Caribbean community. You’d think there is a community looking out for each other, trying to... not really, I think we just... we get together to party. But there is no economic consciousness. There isn’t even a network of Caribbean professionals”.*

As it is now, most have their own smaller personal network of family and friends (often also West Indians) they know they can rely on if necessary. Most hadn’t done this yet, but could imagine this might be needed if things got worse. And a few persons also told me having family back home provided a kind of safety net, knowing that if all goes wrong they can always return there, the exit option pointed out by Rogers (2001). Only a few people thought there was something like a support system to be found, but even then it seemed to be more on an individual level, as Eric told me, “West Indians in general will try to help individuals. We’re all like family since we came here”. This seemed to be somewhat limited to the smaller core group of those who arrived here several decades ago and still are in touch with each others.

A few people mentioned the Carnival and that it might be affected because there would probably be less funding available, with sponsorship declining, the organization behind the Carnival having less to spend and governmental cutbacks. This would make it harder to participate and to have people like costumers and bands coming over from the Caribbean as in previous years. John thought there would probably be less financial resources, but at the same time he believed “West Indians and people are that much into it that they’re very resourceful, so I won’t be surprised if there’s no drop off”. Some also saw the same problem for JAANC, with less donations coming in as people have less money to spend and also attend less events which in turn also affects the association’s financial situation. It also influences their ability to help those who come asking for help, and become more relevant as some would like to see.

As far as the future is concerned, most thought they’d be able to get through and things would get back to normal in a few years from now. They didn’t appear to be too concerned about their own personal situation, except those who were more seriously affected by the crisis. The

problems that seem to be more of a concern to them, as described in the previous chapter, are the future of the community and the involvement of other West Indians. This crisis might make things worse, but once it's over the problems won't be gone. Joanne thought that the crisis might close the class gap as it is a humbling experience, and bring people closer together. And Sarah said;

*"I think we're just going through a phase and I think it will be good for me and a lot of people. Because I think it brings us back to the old days back home in Jamaica, where you have to what we call turn your hand and make fashion, meaning work with the little you have and be happy with it."*

Despite West Indians supposedly being optimists and many hoping for the best, some were also aware of reality maybe having different results than what they would like to see. Brian's view seemed to be shared by quite some other immigrants;

*"unless there is some big revival of the community, by the younger generations, I don't see it changing for the better. ... And as people like myself, as we get older, there will be less and less reasons to meet, just diffusing to the larger culture. Because none of the things that brought us together, that gave us our identity, are active anymore. No Carnival, that's dying, the clubs are gone, fewer parties. If it comes back it won't be at the same level."*

Even though they themselves did not seem to worry too much about the consequences of the crisis for them or their community, one can think of several possibilities. And even though it's mostly guessing, I think it's useful to take a quick look at those. Success and achievement appear to be an important part of their lives, though not so much in a material way as more in their attitude and way of life from back home. As a few West Indians pointed out, during this crisis they rely on that type of attitude, fall back on the values they grew up with. It's easy to imagine this reinforcing their West Indian identity and maybe making this even more important and a bigger part of their lives. This might remain so after the crisis, possibly having rediscovered aspects of this identity one wasn't aware of before. The same line of reasoning can lead to even less identification with America than is currently the case. They notice a difference in attitude and dealing with this crisis compared with Americans, which might increase their awareness of being different in general, which in turn can also strengthen their orientations on their country of origin and community. This would also serve to support their status as a model minority, as they'd also appear to be more successful in dealing with this situation.

Another possible longer term effect might be towards the opposite. If the effect of the

crisis on the activities and participation in the community is severe enough and the community does not recover, it might weaken seriously or even dissolve. With this the function of grounding and providing a link to home and one's culture becomes threatened. The crisis, combined with the older generation moving away or becoming less involved due to their age and the younger generation becoming more Americanized, could prove to be more problematic than expected by most. The process of Americanization of the younger generation can possibly be going even faster due to the crisis, as there are less and less West Indian resources to look to, with a lack of locations and a decline in events. At the same time, seeing how their parents deal with it and rely on their roots in doing so can reinforce or trigger an interest in and appreciation of their background as they see how it can be a positive, valuable asset. What is sure though, is that many West Indian immigrants in the Bay area are concerned with the continued existence of their community and the presence of others with whom they share a common understanding, familiarity and background. If this would disappear, due to the crisis or any other reason, most would consider this to be a great loss.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapters we've come to a closer understanding of the West Indian immigrants in the Bay area and their experiences living in the US. One thing that has become clear is the importance of their background, coming from the West Indies. This is demonstrated by visits back there, staying in touch with family and friends there and following the news. Music and food play an important role as well, providing another link to what for many is still their only real home. This maybe does not qualify them as transmigrants as defined by Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc (1995), but keeping that connection matters a great deal to them. When asked how they identify themselves, most answered with a firm "Jamaican" or "Trinidadian", with some even adding "definitely not American". It is not so much that they oppose US society, as more that they experience they're different. This was also described by Model (2008) and Fog Olwig (2003), that not identifying as American not necessarily implies they maintain oppositional identities.

Most feel at home or at least very comfortable living in the US, making use of what the land of opportunity has to offer. This can be by further educating themselves, working on a career or providing their family with a better life and future. Life in the US seems to be appreciated, but at the same time it cannot replace where they're from. It's not just because that's where they're born, but it is in their attitude, way of life and dealing with things. These are not seen as American, but described as being very West Indian and important to who they are. I did not so much see the notions of success and achievement described by Hintzen (2001) in material ways but more as part of their life through how they approach things, their attitude. Having made the move to the US they are often highly motivated to achieve the goals they came for, to be successful, which seems to reinforce the notion of West Indians as a model minority as described by Model (2008).

Many West Indians also want these differences to be recognized by others, both in order not to be mistaken for African Americans, but also simply because it is who they are and living in a different place won't change that. The continued presence of the accents of most of the West Indians is one thing that supports this. Not wanting to be mistaken for African Americans also makes sense living in the US as a person with black skin who came to the US in order to achieve certain goals. American society is still a highly racist society, though mostly in more subtle ways than in the past. For most West Indians this is very different from their experiences growing up in the Caribbean. This is another reason why they often describe their background as being important, for it helps them to deal with America's racism and not let it keep them from their goals. This is in accordance with Waters' (1999) observation that it's better not to become Americanized, as one would be 'just another black person' and end up being subjected to the persistent racism. Presenting their

background helps them maintain a distance from this aspect of society, through the use of an identity as foreigner instead of American, something also noted by Hintzen (2001).

The role their background plays in their lives is also demonstrated through the importance of social relations with other West Indian immigrants. The degree of importance varied, with some having friends from all groups in society and others strongly preferring social relations with people from the same country. Yet despite these variations, almost all seemed to be aware of the shared understanding, the common experiences and familiarity they couldn't find with others. And this was something many liked to experience from time to time, as it provides another way to stay in touch with one's roots. One of the main ways to stay in touch and meet people was through events taking place in the area. Most mentioned were events organized by JAANC, such as their annual picnic or dance. Shows or concerts were also seen as opportunities to see one another again. The general opinion seemed to be that there were not enough of these opportunities though. But this is hard to make happen according to many because of the limited number of West Indians in the Bay area and those few being spread out over a large area.

For some this was reason to say that there is no West Indian community, for there are not enough of them to get really organized and active. They think are mostly personal networks of people who stay in touch. Many of them would like there to be a community though, for it does provide opportunities to get in touch with others and one's culture. Others believed there was a West Indian community and also felt part of it. This reminds one of Cohen (1985) pointing out that a community can be best described as existing "in the mind of the beholders". Many of them were concerned however with the future of the community, as there seemed to be a decline in activity and participation. A few persons said they knew of some of the persons who used to be very involved moving away or spending more time on other things, like their family or career. Others said people were simply getting older, and thinking it was time for others to take over. This was agreed upon by several of the older immigrants, who said they used to be more active back in the day but now had other priorities.

However, there appear to be problems with getting the younger generation and new arrivals involved in the activities and community, and this makes it more difficult to get them to take over. A few thought their children would pick it up, as they showed an interest in the food and music. But many showed concern about the level being actively involved. They said the community used to be tighter back in the day, with more events taking place. Too much Americanization of the new generation born and raised in the US is seen as a threat to the future of the community. And these processes seem to be reinforced by the economic crisis.

With the onset of the crisis in 2008 not that much changed for most West Indians, on an individual level. With the exception of a few who were more severely affected, most said they'd only

had to cut back a little or think twice before spending their money. Several West Indians said they didn't even think this was that much of a crisis, having seen a lot worse where they came from. Many thought they dealt with this crisis differently than Americans, and that this has a lot to do with their background, where they come from and how they've been brought up. Saving was seen as a value learned back home which was very useful in these times, and something they did not see happening much in US society. Their positive attitude and resilient nature proved also to be useful now, knowing that after bad times better times will come. And since many came from having a lot less, and managed to build a better life for themselves and their families, they know they can do it again. On a personal level things seem to be not that bad for the majority. And even those who were more seriously affected showed the same kind of attitude and approach to the situation.

What was a bigger concern for most was how this might affect the process already taking place in the community, of decreasing participation and activity. As people lose their jobs or try to save to prepare for a rainy day, they spend less on unnecessary things, such as shows, restaurants or activities like those organized by JAANC. Or they might have less time because they need to work more or need to spend more time on other priorities in order to manage. Therefore the crisis was not so much seen as causing problems in the community, but as possibly worsening the issues already present. Most didn't really think there was a support mechanism present in the community for situations like this crisis, and that is was more about having a good time together and socializing. At the same time there also didn't appear to be that much need of more solidarity on a community level, as most said to rely on their personal networks if the need would arise.

Yet despite these problems surrounding their community, many of the immigrants remained positive and had hope things would become better again. Some pointed out that the children might come to appreciate their roots more as they become older, and might become involved after all. Others thought that as the economic crisis comes to an end, things would go back to how they were before and the level of activity would increase again. The problem of continuity of the community however would still be there, and most were aware that only time would tell what the new generation would do, and that a lot depends on that.

All in all, when looking at the central question of the consequences of the crisis for the West Indian immigrants, their identity and community, it seems it's mostly the community that is affected. Their identity as foreigners, outside of the US racial structure, but included in US society through their level of success, seems to remain intact. I can imagine it might even be reinforced as they fall back on values and the attitude from "back home", but according to what my informants told me nothing had changed concerning their identity. The same values and attitude can be thought of as keeping the image of the West Indian immigrants as a model minority intact, as they help them in dealing with the crisis. This might make them appear more successful, even though they say they're



affected like the rest of America. It is mostly the community that seems to be affected by this crisis, as existing problems are reinforced and might even get worse in the long run, if the level of activities and participation keeps declining and the younger generation remains uninvolved.

Finally, there are two additional points of relevance for worth mentioning in relation to my research. The first is that theories about immigration often mention the importance of economic dimensions. The current situation makes it possible to take a closer look at the connection between economic changes and identification processes. It would be interesting if other groups of immigrants and their identity constructions also would be studied at this time. The second point is that thorough economic changes on a nation wide level can influence immigration policies, and anti-immigrant sentiments can rise in times of growing insecurities. Research about immigrant's identity strategies and how they situate themselves in the US society can generate better understanding, help to improve policies and possibly avoid growing tensions between different groups.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1:

Table 1. Immigration to the United States from the Caribbean, 1961-1984.

Year	English-Speaking Caribbean	Total Caribbean	English-Speaking as % of Total Caribbean
1961-1970	142,345	470,213	30.3
1971-1980	331,365	741,126	44.7
1981-1984	134,638	213,896	62.9

Source: Henke 2001; Table 2.1, p.30

Table 2. Immigrants admitted from selected English-speaking Caribbean countries.

	1990	1993	1996
Anguilla	41	23	36
Antigua & Barbuda	1,319	554	406
Bahamas	1,378	686	768
Barbados	1,745	1,184	1,043
Dominica	963	683	797
Grenada	1,294	827	787
Jamaica	25,013	17,241	19,089
St. Kitts & Nevis	896	544	357
St. Lucia	833	634	583
St. Vincent	973	657	606
Trinidad & Tobago	6,740	6,577	7,344
Guyana	11,362	8,384	9,489
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,557</b>	<b>37,994</b>	<b>41,304</b>

Source: Henke 2001; Table 2.3, p.33

Table 3. New York City's share of legal resident admissions from selected Caribbean countries, 1990-1994.

<b>Origin</b>	<b>US Admissions 1990-1994</b>	<b>New York City 1990-1994</b>	<b>New York City/US (%)</b>
Antigua	3,874	1,201	31.0
Bahamas	4,356	187	4.3
Barbados	5,480	3,101	56.6
Belize	9,071	1,159	12.8
Cuba	61,178	1,008	1.6
Dominica	3,944	748	19.0
Dominican Republic	222,178	110,140	49.6
Grenada	4,543	2,575	56.7
Guyana	48,138	30,764	63.9
Haiti	102,380	14,957	14.6
Jamaica	99,346	32,918	33.1
St. Kitts & Nevis	3,435	641	18.7
St. Lucia	3,336	895	26.8
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	3,649	2,057	56.4
Trinidad & Tobago	35,024	15,878	45.3
Other Caribbean	3,794	1,159	16.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>613,726</b>	<b>219,388</b>	<b>35.7</b>

Source: Conway 2003; Table 12.2, p.349

Table 4. Persons obtaining legal permanent resident status by country of origin.

<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>San Francisco / Oakland / Fremont</b>	<b>San Jose / Sunnyvale / Santa Clara</b>
Anguilla	21	-	-	-
Antigua-Barbuda	437	6	D	-
Bahamas	751	11	5	D
Barbados	603	16	4	-
Belize	1041	372	6	-
Dominica	484	7	D	-
Grenada	748	17	D	3
Guyana	6670	71	9	5
Jamaica	21783	324	46	9
Saint Kitts-Nevis	310	D	-	-
Saint Lucia	1027	16	D	-
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	591	14	-	D
Trinidad & Tobago	6256	113	15	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>40722</b>	<b>967</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>23</b>

D = data withheld to limit disclosure

Source: "Persons obtaining legal permanency resident status by state or territory of residence and region and country of birth: Fiscal year 2009" & "Persons obtaining legal permanency resident status by leading core-based statistical areas (CBSAs) of residence and region and country of birth: Fiscal year 2009", Yearbook of Immigrant statistics 2009; [www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/LPR09.htm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/LPR09.htm)

Appendix 2:

Map of the Caribbean Region (source: www.witiger.com)

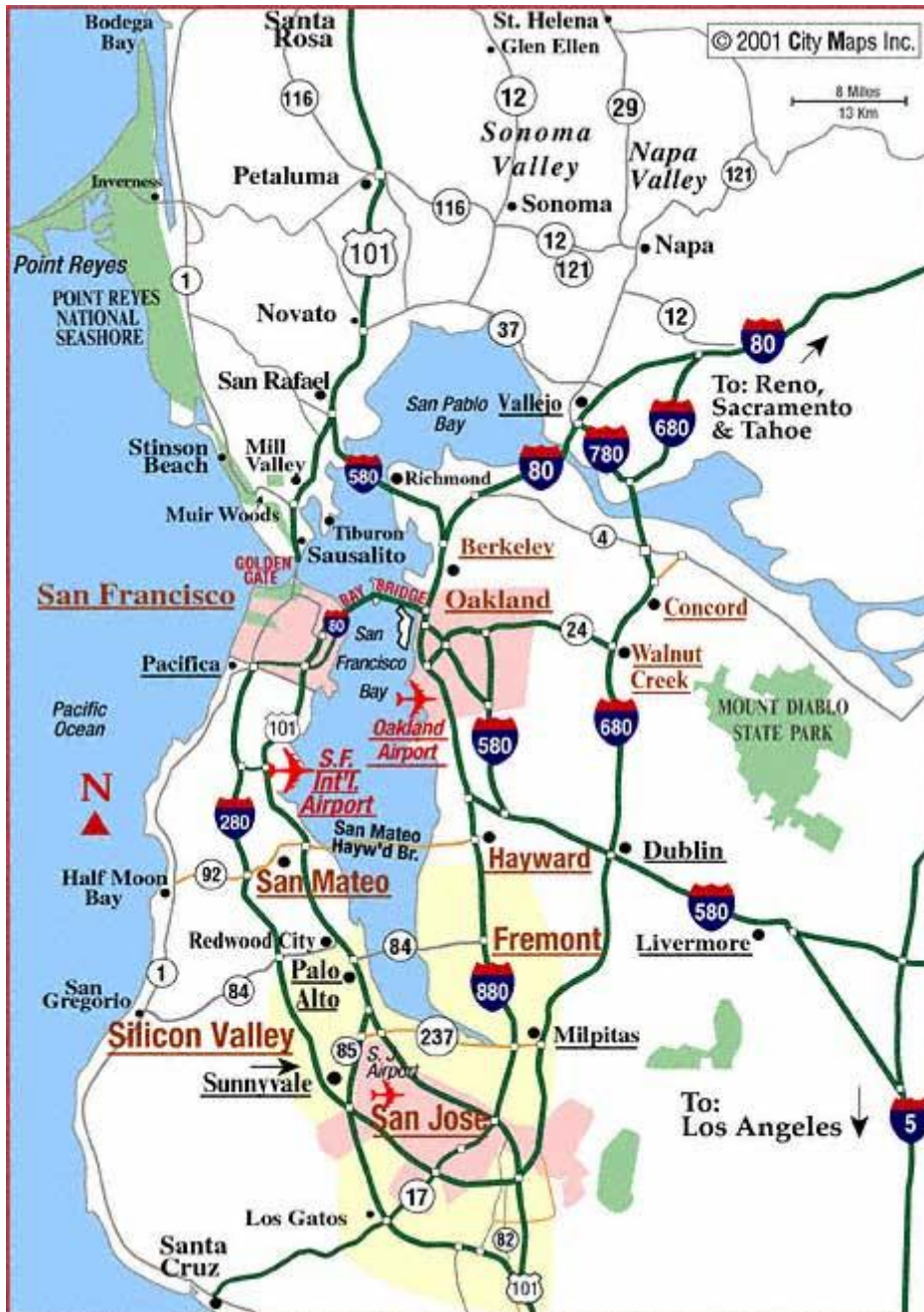


The independent English speaking islands, referred to as the West Indies, are:

Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago (Henke 2001).

Appendix 3:

The San Francisco Bay Area (source: <http://www.accessmaps.com/show/map/us/ca/bayarea>)





*Appendix 4:*

Overview of the West Indian immigrants I interviewed:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years in the United States</b>
Brian	St. Lucia	60	43
Thomas	Jamaica	56	43
Helen	Jamaica	56	41
Franklin	Guyana	63	37
John	Trinidad & Tobago	48	28
George	Jamaica	47	29
Vincent	Trinidad & Tobago	67	44
Sarah	Jamaica	48	26
Ann	Jamaica	32	19
Karen	Jamaica	63	43
Peter	Jamaica	?	33
Anthony	Trinidad & Tobago	74	51
William	Guyana	55	36
Richard	Trinidad & Tobago	42	24
Chris	Trinidad & Tobago	62	16
Carol	Jamaica	46	26
Mary	Guyana	63	43
Eric	Trinidad & Tobago	63	42
Martin	Jamaica	59	41
Frances	Jamaica	51	27
Joanne	Jamaica	36	24

*Appendix 5:*

Based on [www.city-data.com/housing](http://www.city-data.com/housing), first ancestry reported (there was no definition of “West Indian” to be found, tables were based on people’s own answers, yet it still gives some idea). Interesting to note that East Bay cities (with warmer, sunnier weather) count larger numbers of West Indians than on the peninsula:

San Francisco:

- West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 1381
- Jamaican – 599
- West Indian – 193
- Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 146
- British West Indian – 100
- Belizean – 88
- Bahamian – 22
- Barbadian – 22
- Other West Indian – 18

San Jose:

- West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 818
- Jamaican – 426
- Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 75
- West Indian – 39
- Belizean – 29
- British West Indian – 9
- Other West Indian – 8

Oakland:

- West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 1473
- Jamaican – 703
- Belizean – 221
- Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 151
- West Indian – 108
- Barbadian – 61
- British West Indian – 37
- Other West Indian – 9

Hayward:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 312

Jamaican – 160

Guyanese – 41

Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 29

Barbadian – 11

Belizean – 11

Richmond:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 266

Jamaican – 146

Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 30

Belizean – 27

British West Indian – 26

West Indian – 14

Guyanese – 10

Barbadian – 9

Berkeley:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 241

Jamaican – 114

Barbadian – 32

Belizean – 18

West Indian – 18

Guyanese – 14

Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 7

Fremont:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 207

Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 58

Jamaican – 56

Guyanese – 39

West Indian – 7

Palo Alto<sup>21</sup>:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 22

Jamaican – 9

West Indian – 8

San Mateo:

West Indian (excluding Hispanic) – 39

West Indian – 20

Guyanese – 12

Jamaican – 7

Trinidadian & Tobagonian – 5

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly enough the location of 3 West Indian/Jamaican restaurants.

## Appendix 6:

Here I present of some the survey results.

I handed out paper copies (in a pre-addressed and stamped envelope) and I sent it to participants by email. Unfortunately, and not for lack of interested and enthusiastic persons, only 18 people returned a fully completed survey, and there is a certain amount of overlap with the interviews as I also conducted interviews with several of them. Therefore the survey is far from representative and I chose not to include the results in the thesis itself. Due to some difficulties and problems with how some questions were answered, not all answers could be used.

16 of the 18 participants were Jamaican, one was St. Lucian and one Trinidadian.

The participants were born between 1941 and 1978.

Ten were male, eight female.

Ten persons would fill in "black" if asked about their race, and seven would choose "other", either writing down "Jamaican", "Caribbean" or "West Indian". One persons would write "multiracial".

When asked how much the current economic crisis had affected them, four answered "not at all", two "a little", three "somewhat", five "a lot" and two answered "very much".

The number of time the following effects were checked:

3 - Job loss	1 - House loss
4 - Limited career opportunities	4 - Difficulty finding employment
8 - Income decline	3 - Increasing debts
2 - Problems paying rent/mortgage	1 - Problems paying bills (such as phone, electric...)

Possibly it has to do with what those I interviewed said about saving for a rainy day and not living above one's means that limit problems with paying rent/mortgage/bills.

They arrived between 1959 and 2000, with 14 being 21 or younger at the time of arriving in the US. Seven arrived in the US alone, the rest all came with other family members.

Two people didn't have US citizenship but intended to apply, one person had no intention to apply, and the rest all were US citizens.

Only five persons moved directly to the Bay area.

Six people first went to New York, two to Florida, and the rest to various other places in the US.

Six persons came to the Bay area because of work. Four people said moving to the Bay area had to do with their partner. Three people wrote down education as reason to come to the Bay area, and two mentioned opportunities/a better life.

14 of them went back to their country of origin less than once a year, some going about every two to four years, others every ten or even 15 years. One person went once a year, and three went two or three times a year.

17 of the 18 participants went back to visit friends and family, and one person only in case of funerals or weddings and such. For nine of those 17 it is also a vacation, and two also combine it with business purposes.

When asked to rate how likely it is that they will return to their country of origin, four persons said it was not likely. Two said it was unlikely, nine were neutral on the question of return, and two said it was likely. None said it was very likely.

Everyone knew people from the same country of origin living in the Bay area. The number of people they knew varied a lot though, ranging from two to “160+” or “tons of people”. The people they know are mostly said to be “acquaintances”, followed by friends and family.

With the exception of one person did everyone also know of other West Indians in the Bay area. Here the numbers were usually smaller than those they know from their own country, ranging from two to “100+”. Here it was also mostly “acquaintances” and friends.

They tended to have contact with people from their own country more frequently than other West Indians, some being in touch on a daily basis, but mostly monthly or weekly. Other West Indians they were in touch with monthly or yearly.

The context where they most often met both others from the same country as other West Indians were organized social events at someone else’s home or at their own home, followed by public events such as Carnival or festivals. When going out was also mentioned by almost half of the participants. Most persons tended to check slightly more situations where they saw others from the same country than other West Indians.

11 persons believed there is a West Indian community in the Bay area, seven said there is not. Four of the people who said yes mentioned JAANC, and two people added it’s still small or disjointed. Five of the 11 who said there is a community did not feel part of it (yet), and four of them would like to be part.

For one person contact with people still in their country of origin was not important at all, and for one person it was unimportant. Three people were neutral, two said it was important and for ten of the participants it was very important.

Contact with people from their country of origin living in the Bay area seemed to be slightly less important, probably because back home is mostly family and friends, and as described earlier, in the Bay area people know more acquaintances. For one person it was not important at all, for three unimportant and three people were neutral on this as well. For three it was important, and seven

said it was very important to them.

Contact with other West Indians in the Bay area was almost as important as people from the same country. Again for one person it was not important at all, for three unimportant. Five people said to be neutral, to three it was important and five people said it was very important.

Being part of a West Indian community in the Bay area was not important at all to two persons, unimportant to two and five said they were neutral about it. To two it was important and to the remaining six it was very important to be part of that community.

Nine persons thought it was very advantageous to have a West Indian background and one person thought it to be somewhat advantageous. Six people thought it to be neutral, and one person said it was somewhat disadvantageous.

Those who said it was (very) advantageous mentioned many of the same reasons I heard during the interviews, being hard working, well educated, being “more adept in dealing with racism”, through their background.

Ten people were familiar with the idea of West Indians as a model minority, eight had not heard of it until now.

Only four people did not recognize themselves in the idea of being a model minority, the other 14 did.

Two people strongly disagreed with this idea of West Indians being a model minority, and six said to be neutral. Three people agreed with it, and seven strongly agreed with this idea. Some pointed to their different background and work ethic, or said they had never seen “poverty stricken West Indians”. Someone else said Americans of color don’t fully understand the opportunities available to them. One person pointed to self selection, having had the opportunity, education and ambition.

Nine persons said they hardly ever experienced racism, and nine said they experienced it sometimes. Nobody checked the options “never”, “often” or “constantly”.

Racism was most often experienced in public places, checked by nine persons. At work from colleagues was experienced by six people. Both racism at institutions like banks and offices and racism at work by customers or clients were checked five times.