

Tell All the Others Our Story¹

I know some people who just don't want to say that they're Haitians because it is associated with bad things. I think like learning about all these [Haitian linguistic and cultural practices], will give people this confidence in saying I am Haitian. That's who I am.

9th grader Geraldine, 2016

Exclusion has no place in twenty-first century America. Yet, the voices of Haitian youth in the New York City public school system convey otherwise. Comments from youngsters such as the high schooler Geraldine, cited above, reflect various issues confronting these children. Accounts of the Haitian students highlighted in this document were collected from a series of focus groups and ethnographic interviews conducted in 2016, as part of a research project on Haitian linguistic and cultural practices. The project was designed to assess whether Haitian practices such as *Rara*² and *vèvè*³, among others, held any meanings for Haitian children. The participants were youth members of *Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project*, a Brooklyn-based organization that works with Haitian newcomers attending high school.

¹ In December 2016, I conducted a series of focus groups and ethnographic interviews with ten Haitian adolescents attending the New York City public schools. The sessions were on Haitian linguistic and cultural practices, and held on the site of *Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project*, a Brooklyn-based organization that works with Haitian newcomers in high school. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of the youth, their names have been changed.

² "Rara is a popular Haitian linguistic cultural musical performative practice. Rara is music, singing and dancing to drums and *banbou*—an instrument made with pieces of the stem of the bamboo plant—among other Haitian instruments" (Cerat, 2017).

³ "Vèvè is a complex Haitian sign system or a set of diagrams. In the Haitian Vodou practice, the diagrams serve to connect the spirit world with its human community of adherents. Vèvè is sometimes inscribed on personal objects (i.e., handkerchiefs, scarves, doorsteps, swords, and the like) and serves the same function as a talisman that protects the person wearing it against danger" (Cerat, 2017).

Thus Spoke the Children

Close examination of the language used by the youngsters to speak of the Haitian linguistic and cultural practices along with their schooling experiences in the New York City public schools illustrates *identity crisis* (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), and *academic disengagement* due to curricula that do not include or validate their Haitian experience (Plaisir, 2010; Ginwright, 2010; Madhere, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Buttaro, et al., 2010). The language is symptomatic of their fears, apprehensions and hopes. To ignore them is to fail “to recognize what is happening and think very seriously about the alarming consequences for all of us if we do nothing” (Orfield et al., 2012, Foreword, xxiii), as educational researcher Gary Orfield and coauthors caution in a 2012 report on the state of segregation⁴ in U.S. schools. To put it differently, the words of these Haitian children matter.

In addition to the long open secret that the nation’s school systems—including New York—are still struggling with desegregation, the achievement gap for minority students remains equally persistent. Performance assessment data on English Language Learners (ELLs) in the New York City public school system—the largest in the nation—which comprises a large swath of Haitian Creole-speaking students, are extremely concerning. While ELL performance data are not disaggregated for specific

⁴ Segregation was the implementation of the “separate but equal” laws, following the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The “separate but equal” laws—also referred to as the Jim Crow laws—mandated the separation of Blacks and Whites in all areas of American society. These laws would not change until 1954 when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) challenged them in court, decrying the poor conditions in which Black children were educated. With *The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, the U.S. Supreme Court annulled the laws of Plessy, and instructed the integration of Blacks in all areas. Education became the first site to be impacted by *Brown*.

languages, no language community can celebrate these numbers. For academic years 2018 and 2019, only nine percent of ELLs from grades 3 to 8 tested proficient on the English Language Arts exam. In math, 16 percent were proficient in 2018, and 17 percent in 2019. High school graduation rate for ELLs rose slightly in 2019 to 41 percent compared to 34.7 percent the previous year. By all accounts, these are dismal numbers. They reflect the structural issues in the system.

By shedding light on the words of the Haitian youngsters, we hope to gain understanding of the various factors that have influenced and formed the context in which they find it difficult to affirm their Haitian identity, and to identify what can help them develop, “this confidence in saying I am Haitian. That’s who I am”, as Geraldine states. Specifically, their language may: open a window to understanding what creates the conditions in which they “just don’t want to say that they’re Haitians”; provide insights about their teaching and learning experiences inside the New York City public school system; and suggest interventions which can improve their educational outcomes and better prepare them to become proud and contributing citizens in the society.

As More People Dream—A Brief History of Haiti and Haitian Immigration to the United States from 1956 to 2016

To grasp the meaning and potency of the language used by the Haitian youngsters to describe their experiences in the New York City public school system, an overview of the history of Haiti⁵ and Haitian immigration to the United States from approximately 1956 to 2016 proves indispensable. For the source of these

⁵ Haiti is the first independent nation in the Western Hemisphere created by former slaves. In 1804, following their anti-slavery struggle and revolutionary war against colonial France, the Haitians establish their new free country. Today, Haiti shares the second largest island in the Caribbean with The Dominican Republic.

youngsters' language or words is informed by historical experiences (Pierre-Louis, 2011; Diederich, 2011; Stepick, 1998; Laguerre, 1984) from both contexts.

Unquestionably, sociopolitical tempests in Haiti between approximately 1956 and 2016 tossed a great number of Haitians—young and old—to the shores of its most prosperous neighbor. Nearly half a million people⁶ left Haiti to migrate to the United States, settling primarily in cities like Boston, Chicago, Miami and New York (2017 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics; American Community Survey, 2009). Numerous scholars contend that the catalyst for most of the people who left Haiti in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s was the ascendance to power of Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier in 1957 (Pierre-Louis, 2011; Fouron, 2010; Bellegarde-Smith, 2004; Dupuy, 1997; Laguerre, 1984).

Without a doubt, that first major wave was attributed to various internal factors created by Duvalier and buttressed by external forces. Along with the rise of the repressive Duvalier dictatorship, which limited nearly all liberties⁷ (i.e., freedom of speech, freedom of the press, right to assemble, etc.), came the further spiraling-down of Haiti's economy⁸, accompanied by internal corruption such as misappropriation of the state revenues, plundering of international aids and loans, and the “head in the sand” attitude of the international community on human rights

⁶ Those are only the numbers for individuals who obtained permanent residency. The number of undocumented people is not factored in.

⁷ Religious freedom was never threatened under the Duvaliers.

⁸ The Haitian economy began to deteriorate immediately after the country's independence in 1804. “...Haiti was viewed as an insult to most whites who believed in the natural inferiority of blacks. Consequently, to preserve the status quo, Western imperialist powers quarantined Haiti within the international community as if it were a plague” (Fouron, 2010, 30). Moreover, the 150,000 million francs indemnity imposed by France on Haiti in order to recognize its independence further destroyed the economy of the new nation—once known as the most profitable colony in the Antilles (Dubois, 2012).

abuses in the country (Deiderich, 2011; Lemoine, 1996; Abbott, 1988). Combined, these factors indeed contributed to the flight of countless intellectuals, trained professionals, young and old, whoever could afford a way out (Berotte Joseph, 2010; Dupuy, 1997; Laguerre, 1984).

When the younger despot Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier replaced his father after his death in 1971, the external migration or flight from the homeland towards other shores and skies multiplied⁹. The surge from 1970 to the mid-1980s saw lots of people desperately seeking any and all means to leave the *unlivable* Haiti. Records from the U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics show that about 175,000 Haitians obtained lawful permanent residency in the United States alone¹⁰ (2017 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics). Besides applying for all types of foreign visas (i.e., student, visitor, seasonal worker, contract laborer, etc.) with various countries, thousands more would chance it on the open sea in poorly constructed and overcrowded boats with hopes of reaching the Florida coasts, or, some other Caribbean islands along the way where they believed they would fare better than in Haiti. The desperation observed with many in this wave of migration brings to mind the title of the 2003 debut album of the African-American Rapper **50 Cent**: “Get Rich or Die Tryin’”. Any story on the Haitian “fleet” of unseaworthy vessels on the treacherous Windward Passage and North Atlantic

⁹ Duvalier loyalists like army general Jacques Gracia kept the authoritarian system in place. The Duvalierists continued to govern with impunity. Many more people were made to disappear, and countless others killed (Abbott, 1998; Lemoine, 1996; Heintz & Heintz, 1978).

¹⁰ Many Haitians entered the United States on visitors’ visa, while others sought refuge in neighboring Dominican Republic, surrounding Caribbean island nations, French-speaking Montréal in Canada, and a few West African countries.

Ocean could have been titled: *Leave Alive or Die Trying*. Many did survive. But several boats capsized, and countless died during the perilous journey.

Haitians who fled Baby Doc 1980s' Haiti aboard a *kanntè*—the name for the makeshift vessels on which they sailed—and reached the Florida shore or intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard were thrown in U.S. detention centers on the continental United States and U.S. outposts like Puerto Rico (Guskin & Wilson, 2017; Stepick, 1998; Laguerre, 1984). Billed “economic migrants” rather than political refugees like the Cubans¹¹, the U.S. government would drag its feet on the fate of the Haitians as they waited in detention for U.S. courts, immigration policymakers and implementers to explore how to handle their cases: to be admitted in as political asylum seekers or be repatriated to Haiti (Guskin & Wilson, 2017; Paik, 2010; Goldstein, 2005; Stepick, 1982; Laguerre, 1984).

Of the facilities used to incarcerate the Haitians in the 80s, the Krome Detention Center in Florida would receive the most visibility. Involvement of U.S. leaders such as the African-American Reverend Jesse Jackson decrying the racist and inhumane treatment of the Haitian detainees at Krome, including pressures from Haitian community leaders and human rights advocates, drew enormous attention to their plight. Conscious of their conditions, the detainees themselves did not remain entirely apathetic. Laguerre (1984:12) notes: “During the Christmas season of 1981, the detainees at Krome staged a hunger strike [... while]

¹¹ Guskin and Wilson (2017) notes: “Some 800,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States between 1960 and 1980. [...] But they were able to come because the U.S. government actively encouraged Cubans to immigrate. From 1959 to 1961, about 125,000 Cubans arrived in the United States. The U.S. Coast Guard did nothing to stop them from entering the country (Guskin & Wilson, 2017, p. 52-53).

sympathetic demonstrators, including representatives of the NAACP and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations” demonstrated outside to denounce their unfair treatment. Such public actions brought greater light to the incarceration of Haitians who were escaping the brutal dictatorship of Baby Doc. Out of that era, the Krome Center came to symbolize the unjust and racist treatment of Haitians seeking safe haven, at the hands of the United States.

It was also in that same period monikers like “Haitian boat people” and “Haitian refugees” were born. The two terms were used by U.S. Immigration policymakers, national and international media, as well as by advocates to discuss the situation of the Haitian detainees. However, the two expressions would later acquire derogatory connotations, and used as insults against Haitian immigrants.

They think that just because we are black, we're inferior and they're superior. I can say that we're not inferior. Just because our pigmentation is different from them doesn't mean we are different from them. Because we work hard as much as them: to feed our families, to have a better life, [and] to go to school. Sometimes people are mistreating us and don't know how it feels. But we still keep going because we know we have to do better. But it hurts a lot when they discriminate against you because of the color of your skin. The way they treat you different as if you are not a human being.

11th grader Mireille, 2016

Deteriorating conditions in Haiti following the departure of Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier¹² in 1986, along with the situation with the detainees in U.S.

centers like Krome greatly preoccupied Haitian immigrants in the United States. Yet, U.S. Haitian immigrants also face additional local challenges. The 1988 release of the horror movie “The Serpent and the Rainbow”, loosely-based on the investigation of the American ethno-botanist Wade Davis on the *zonbi*¹³ phenomenon in Haiti turned Vodou¹⁴, the African-based belief system of Haitians, into a zombie-making culture. Already misunderstood, people completely unfamiliar with the Haitian cultural tradition would equate the practice to devil worship and black magic. Vodou *lwa* (spirits) were characterized as bad and maleficent. As a result, Haitian Vodou and its practitioners would be further demonized, and ridiculed.

Then came the tumultuous 1990s. Following the bloody coup d’état in September 1991 against the popular priest turned president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide¹⁵, nearly the same migratory escape routes and scenes of the 80s were replayed. While Aristide was whisked off into exile, some of the urban poor and

¹² On 7 February 1986, Haitians of all ages in Brooklyn, New York, filled Eastern Parkway to celebrate the departure of Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier, and the end of the Duvalierist dictatorship. The father and son tyrants ruled Haiti with an iron hand from 1957 to 1986.

¹³ In Haiti, many people believe that there exists an herbal and animal potion that, if given to someone, can turn them into a will-less and speechless person.

¹⁴ “Haitian Vodou is a compendium of a deliberate amalgam of Dahomean traditions, those of the Kongo basin and surrounding ethnic nations in both West and Central Africa. But the origins of Vodou lie in Dahomey (present-day Benin), either because that population provided a critical mass to that of colonial Saint Domingue over a historical period of time or because Dahomean tradition offered a theological sophistication found throughout that region of Africa in Yoruba, Dogon, Dagara peoples and others” (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel, 2006: Introduction).

¹⁵ Jean Bertrand Aristide was a young priest who came to prominence in the early 1980s for his anti-Duvalier sermons. Using his church pulpit, he criticized the dictatorship for its human rights abuses, exploitation as well as neglect of the Haitian people. His pointed sermons delivered in Haitian Creole in one of the poorest parishes of Port-au-Prince gained him huge popularity. Four years after the fall of Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier, Aristide would run for, and win the Haitian presidency in a landslide to become the first democratically elected president of Haiti in modern history. Both of his presidential mandates were cut short by coup d’états. In 1991, a year into his first term, he was deposed by the Haitian military, but returned with the assistance of the United States three years later to complete his term. He ran and again won the presidency for a second time in 2001. Three years into that second term he was ousted again. Aristide has since returned to Haiti to live as a private citizen. He teaches at the university he helped to establish in Tabarre, a suburb of Port-au-Prince.

peasants that elected him were being tortured and killed by the putschist Haitian military and other anti-Aristide factions. This prompted many of his supporters to begin to flee for their lives aboard fishing boats or anything that could float.

Six months after the overthrow of Aristide, more than 15,000 Haitians¹⁶ were intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard and encamped at the U.S. Naval Base on Guantánamo¹⁷ Bay in Cuba (Goldstein, 2005). Like Krome in the 1980s, Guantánamo is etched in Haitian memory as the 1990s U.S. concentration camp for the thousands of Haitians seeking refuge from the political violence that engulfed Haiti. The historical layers of the Guantánamo U.S. Naval Base also include the court battle between the U.S. government and Yale students and professor Harold Koh¹⁸—on behalf of the 1990s’ Haitian detainees, including some 120 who had tested positive for HIV. Koh and his students challenged the U.S. government in court on the detainment of the Haitians, as well as the legality and constitutionality of denying political asylum to individuals with “well-founded fear of persecution” on the basis of their illnesses, and won (Goldstein, 2005; Paik, 2010).

Early into the twenty-first century, catastrophes upon catastrophes descended on Haiti¹⁹. January 12, 2010, only eleven days after Haitians celebrated

¹⁶ In December 1992, I took a leave of absence from my position as a parent counselor with the Day Care Council of New York to serve as a Creole language specialist with the U.S. Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service to interpret for Haitian asylum seekers encamped on Guantánamo. On that first trip, I spent two and half months on the Guantánamo U.S. Naval Base.

¹⁷ Guantánamo is located in the southeast of Cuba. It also serves as the site for the U.S. Naval Base with the same name. The “forty-five square mile windswept stretch of hills [were] taken by U.S. forces in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. American control of the land around the bay was formalized in 1903” (Goldstein, 2005, 19).

¹⁸ Koh’s co-teacher at the Yale Loweinstein Law Clinic was Michael Ratner, a human rights lawyer. With lawyers Ira Kurzban and Cheryl Little of the Haitian Centers in Miami, the legal team launched the historic court battle.

the 206th anniversary of their anti-slavery Revolution and 1804 Independence, the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the feeble nation²⁰. More than a quarter of a million people died in the earthquake, and millions instantly became homeless (Schuller, 2012; Dubois, 2012). In the blink of an eye that January afternoon, Haiti's capital city of Port-au-Prince lay in ruins, and became a mass grave for thousands of its inhabitants²¹. Léogâne, a western town situated some 16 miles from Port-au-Prince, was the epicenter of the earthquake. It suffered a massive loss of human lives and home damage as significant as the capital city. However, media attention overcrowded the densely populated Port-au-Prince, which also housed all government offices, eclipsing the destruction of the smaller town.

Six years later, in October 2016, Hurricane Matthew served another devastating blow to the poorly prepared Haiti, already suffering from little to no infrastructure. The category 4 Cyclone would cause some 800 deaths and the displacement and homelessness of thousands more²².

The consistent man-made and natural disasters in those six decades—1956 to 2016—further incapacitated and impoverished Haiti²³. Clearly, these human and

¹⁹ To limit the length of the historical timeframe, I am footnoting here that Aristide eventually returned from exile to finish his first term. He ran again five years later, was reelected and took office in February 2001. He suffered a second coup d'état in 2004, and was sent back in exile. In 2011, he returned to Haiti, and currently lives in the country as a private citizen.

²⁰ Haiti is indeed the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. However, it needs to be noted that the former French colony of Saint Domingue was considered "the most profitable bit of land in the world" for its colonial ruler France (Dubois, 2012:4). Economic isolation of Haiti following its independence by many European countries and the United States contributed to impoverishing Haiti. Thus, there's an important history for the pauperization of Haiti that should never be ignored.

²¹ Myriam Merlet, Magalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan, three feminist leaders whose advocacy work on behalf of Haitian women and girls was helping to transform Haiti into a more equitable space, perished in the quake (Chancy, 2012)

²² The devastated south is still reeling to recover.

environmental tragedies hugely contributed in making Haiti the difficult place it has been for Haitians, forcing **many**—young and old—to leave the country for other lands like the United States where the possibility of living a safe and dignified life seems attainable.

This undated popular Haitian Rara²⁴ and folkloric song below suddenly acquires deeper meanings. It captures the reality for Haitians in a collective voice, and amplifies the people’s endless cry as they search for a better life:

M rele woy lamizè pa dous o
Anmwe yyy wo
(Mezanmi lamizè pa dous tande)
M rele woy lamizè pa dous o
Anmwe yyy wo
M rele woy lamizè pa dous o
Anmwe yyy wo, m pral chache lavi a on lòt kote woy!

[I am screaming that misery is not sweet
Help
(My friends, misery is not sweet)
I am screaming that misery is not sweet
Help
I am screaming that misery is not sweet
Help, I am going to look for life some place else]

²³ Haiti was a former colony of Spain and France, and contributed in creating the wealth of these two colonial countries. While it is difficult to avoid the line, “the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere”, it is important to remind readers that Haiti was, and is still a rich land. However, the continuous exploitation of the former colonials and neo-colonials further contribute to the underdevelopment of the Haitian nation.

²⁴ “Rara is a popular Haitian linguistic cultural musical performative practice. Rara is music, singing and dancing to drums and *banbou* (an instrument made with pieces of the stem of the bamboo plant), among other Haitian instruments” (Cerat, 2017).

This cry for help and search for life in other lands—particularly in the United States—does not mean that Haitians are ever welcome with open arms. In effect, Haitian immigrants in the United States are frequently subjected to racist narratives, policies and actions, both officially and unofficially, giving credence to Geraldine’s words that being Haitian “is associated with bad things.”

One recent public illustration occurred in December of 2017, when it was widely reported in the U.S. media that President Donald J. Trump used derogatory terms to speak of Haiti and its immigrants at a White House meeting with policymakers²⁵. Well known for his vulgarity, the 45th president is alleged to have referred to Haiti as one of the nations he considers to be “s--- hole countries”, and to have said: “All Haitians have AIDS”. That a couple of officials present felt obliged to expose the president indicates the uneasiness, and/or how racist and vile his comments were. Let’s note here that U.S. officials making racist statements about Haiti and Haitians did not begin with Mr. Trump. The 45th president is only the latest²⁶.

The Tragedy of Haitian Youth Going Undercover

²⁵ See the New York Daily New article by Denis Slattery on December 23, 2017; The New York Times December 23, 2017 by Michael D. Shear and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, CNN Eli Watkins penned December 24, 2017, or the Washington Post Op-Ed by Haitian-American journalist Joel Dreyfuss, published on December 28, 2017. The meeting included discussion on the fate of individuals with Temporary Protective Status (TPS), an immigration category granted to people whose countries are ravaged by wars and/or natural disasters, including Haiti.

²⁶ Haitian immigrants in the United States who were following the news about civil unrests in Haiti at the time of the departure of Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier in February 1986, can recall Jeane D. Kirkpatrick—a political scientist and U.S. diplomat in the Ronald Reagan Administration—referring to Haiti as “a basket case” on national television. And, that was neither the first time a high-ranking U.S. official was known to use racist and derogatory language to describe Haiti or its people.

In the 1990s, many Haitian youngsters in the New York area referred to some of their Haitian peers as HU, an abbreviation that meant *Haitian Undercover*²⁷. What circulated was these youth kept their Haitian ethnic identity *undercover* to prevent ostracization from non-Haitian peers. This moniker surfaced on the heels of the 1990 announcement by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. institution with the role of safeguarding the nation's blood supply, of a policy²⁸ that banned Haitians from donating blood because they were identified as a carrier group for HIV and AIDS (Lindskoog, 2018; Goldstein, 2005; Stepick, 1998).

The FDA policy broadcast felt as earth shattering for Haitians around the world as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti would be received twenty years later. There was shock, confusion and embarrassment. In the days that followed the FDA public statement, U.S. Haitian immigrants held endless community meetings and had heated debates on the scientific soundness of the policy. But ultimately, every Haitian recognized the *racism* behind the policy.

On 20 April 1990, Haitian immigrants in New York from all walks of life²⁹ held one of the largest public demonstrations in the country to call out the racist

²⁷ From 1998 to 2001, and from 2003 to 2010, I worked as a Resource Specialist for the now defunct Haitian Bilingual Education Technical Assistance Center (HABETAC), housed at the City College of New York of the City University of New York. Haitian students attending the college often visited the office, and employees of the HABETAC supported and attended activities held by the Haitian Students Association (HASA) club on campus. It was during those years that I learned from the Haitian students attending the college, the acronym HU for Haitian Undercover. The HABETAC deliverables also entailed working with New York City High Schools that had Bilingual Haitian Creole programs. I also later heard the term used by some Haitian high school students in the New York City public schools.

²⁸ See New York Times March 14, 1990 article by Bruce Lambert.

²⁹ On 20 April 1990, thousands of Haitian men, women and children, including their allies walked across the Brooklyn Bridge to decry and denounce the racist policy of the FDA and CDC in one of the most historic and largest demonstrations in New York and/or the United States. The public pressure forced the FDA and CDC to cave in, offering a public apology, and to rescind the policy. But the damage was done; the dark and tainted historical moment as well as the shame remained.

policy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the nation's leading health institution that had previously classified Haitians as a high-risk group for AIDS, and the FDA. While pressures from the Haitian community and their allies forced these institutions to rescind the policy, the hurt to Haitian pride could not be undone. The repeal of the publically announced policy by the FDA and the CDC would be too little to repair the damage. In the end, the HIV/AIDS ordeal left all Haitians feeling indignant, humiliated and ashamed, and became a catalyst for some Haitian youth in New York to begin to hide their Haitian identity in the 1990s.

In *Storming The Court*, Goldstein (2005) explains why the 1992 court filing by Yale Law students and professor Harold Koh on behalf of the Haitian detainees on Guantánamo, including some 120 diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, initially omitted the HIV cases³⁰. He writes:

Haitian boat people were hardly a popular group. Haitians with AIDS would be the most unsympathetic plaintiffs imaginable. The stereotypes and fear surrounding HIV remained extreme at the time... Haitians in America faced particularly harsh prejudice relating to HIV. Years earlier, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had branded them as a high-risk group for the disease. [...Haitians] found themselves under especially vicious attack. Some watched their businesses fail; others were evicted from their apartments; Haitian children were beaten in school. Graffiti in

³⁰ The United States ban on HIV foreigners was introduced in 1987 under the Administration of President Ronald Reagan, and lasted for over 20 years. It affected tourists and foreigners seeking visas to enter the United States.

Brooklyn proclaimed: “Haitians = Niggers with AIDS.” Challenging the HIV rule before a judge... was risky...” (Pp. 56-58, emphasis in original)

The strategy of staying *undercover* by Haitian youngsters in New York was not a new phenomenon. Both young and old Haitians have had, at times, to hide their identity to escape discrimination.

Stepick’s (1998) *Pride against Prejudice: Haitians in the United States* documents the poignant story of a young Haitian man in Miami named Phede Eugene, who committed suicide (Stepick, 1998). Stepick relates that the Haitian immigrant high schooler went to great lengths to “cover up” his Haitian identity. Phede refused to speak Haitian Creole, the native language of all or most Haitians (Zéphir, 2010; Dejan, 2006; Degraff, 2005) in public, “Americanizing his name” to Fred to avoid the stigmatization and discrimination hanging over the heads of Haitians in Miami, and in places like New York City. A good student, a member of his church choral, Phede—known by his peers as Fred—also had a job. However, Phede or Fred became so distraught when his sister spoke Haitian Creole with him in front of his African-American girlfriend, and therefore “outed” him as being Haitian that a few days later, “he bought a .22 caliber revolver for \$50, drove to an empty lot near his home, and killed himself with a bullet to his chest” (Stepick, 1998, 1).

And the Saga Played On

The years following the HIV/AIDS 1990 policy debacle by the CDC and the FDA showed a more significant number of Haitian youngsters in New York

pretending to be other nationalities and hiding their Haitian identity for their “social survival” (Stepick, 1998). This rise in the 1990s of New York Haitian youngsters in college and high school *concealing* or *disguising* their identities was clearly a means to cope with vicious attacks (Goldstein, 2005) directed at the community in the midst of the HIV/AIDS pandemonium. Here Haitians, one ethnic group, were singled-out and publically labeled as a carrier agent for one of the world’s most fatal and stigmatized diseases. Research on HIV was still considerably in its early stages, and the disease was not yet fully understood. Everyone was afraid (Shilts, 1987). Many people became particularly afraid of Haitians, worried that any casual contact with Haitians could give them HIV/AIDS. The whole experience made it an awfully difficult time for all Haitians—inside and outside of Haiti—and particularly the youth.

The research on adolescents and young adults indicates that it is between the ages of 14 and 19 that a sense of self is developed (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Crocetti et al, 2014; Berzonsky, 2003, 1989). As a result, adolescents and young adults frequently struggle with issues of identity, can become increasingly influenced by peers, and perceive social connections such as making friends and being popular as important. How else could Haitian youth cope with and/or handle being perceived by their peers as a carrier agent for the deadly AIDS virus? While problematic and alarming—recall the case of Phede—the approach taken by these New York Haitian youngsters can be framed as a survival strategy³¹ or “social

³¹ One fairly known example is how many in the U.S. German community altered and/or anglicized the spelling of their surnames to weather anti-German sentiment as xenophobia against them increased during World War II.

survival” (Stepick, 1998).

To conceal their Haitian ethnic identity, some New York youth refused to speak Haitian Creole in public, changed their speech patterns, changed their names, and appropriated other mannerisms, all to try to pass as other than Haitian (Stepick, 1998). Recall 9th grader Geraldine who observed, “I know some people who just don’t want to say that they’re Haitians because it is associated with bad things.” That said, the Haitian youth that engage in this *identity concealing* or *identity disguising* practice use the tactics to disassociate themselves with the “bad things” associated with being Haitian (Geraldine, 2016).

Let’s note that the phenomenon of *identity concealing* or *identity disguising* is not unique to Haitians. Groups that are “othered” or considered as “other” in certain contexts have/had, at times, needed to hide their identities to deflect prejudices and biases. For example, many in the U.S. German community altered and/or anglicized the spelling of their surnames, among other strategies, to *cover* their ethnic identity as anti-German sentiment and xenophobia against them increased during the two world wars (Fouka, 2019; Michaelis, 2017; Weiland, 2010). It helped to cope with the situation, as well as to blend in with the larger white population

The strategy employed by Haitian youth is used to escape alienating, shaming, racist and xenophobic policies such as the state sanctioned HIV/AIDS 1990 policy by the CDC and the FDA, and public narratives like the street graffiti in Brooklyn that read: ““Haitians = Niggers with AIDS”” (Goldstein, 2005, p. 56),

coming from the larger community. This stratagem was also used to blend in with the larger black population³² (Stepick, 1998), and evade the Haitian AIDS stigma.

It is clear that even today, the false assertion that all Haitians are carriers of AIDS persists (Goldstein, 2005), and seemingly weighs on policy decisions regarding U.S. Haitian immigrants when one considers President Trump’s remarks at that cabinet meeting. His utterances exemplified the high-level sources for some of the discriminatory narratives and racist policy practices that Haitian immigrants can be subjected to at times in this country, and which cause some Haitian young adults to feel that they must disguise or hide their *Haitianness*, or, “just don’t want to say that they’re Haitians because it is associated with bad things” as Geraldine underscores. While hiding their Haitian identity can be viewed as a survival strategy, it has serious implications. Phede’s case provides a sobering illustration about the worst possible outcome. We must consider the potential psycho-emotional and social issues and fears with which some Haitian young adults must live should their ethnic identity be revealed or uncovered? What must schools be doing to help these young people develop a healthy sense of self, and to become well-adjusted citizens?

Haitian Youth in New York City Public Schools Speaking Up/Speaking Out

³² The scope of this document limits a thorough discussion on being black in America, which carries its own weight. In fact, the Haitian youth that participated in the focus groups and ethnographic interviews brought up the *Black Lives Matter* movement. They identify with it, and recognize that they are part of the U.S. black community—albeit indistinguishable from other black peers—and are viewed and victimized by the police in the same way as all other black persons in the country. Recall the Brooklyn graffiti “Haitians = Niggers with AIDS” cited by Brandt Goldstein (2005) in *Storming the Court*.

In *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*, the educational scholar Jim Cummins (2001) pointedly remarks:

Schools reflect the values and attitudes of the broader society that supports them and so it is hardly surprising that in the United States students from African-American, Latino/Latina, and Native American communities have experienced extensive devaluation of their cultures and languages [and histories] within the school context. In some cases, students perceive their identity is endangered by this process of devaluation and consequently drop out of school in order to preserve their sense of self. (p. 3)

Students of Haitian ancestry that enter the New York City public schools are already burdened by enduring stereotypes propagated throughout the society such as—boat people, HIV/AIDS carrier, Vodou practitioner and/or zombie-making people, and so on—which force them to engage in the *identity concealing/identity disguising* strategy. Yet, they also expressed facing other challenges in schools that can further “endanger” their identity and/or damage their sense of self. That is, the exclusion or absence of educational program in schools that validate the youth’s Haitian Creole language and culture introduces an additional layer of complexity.

Some Haitians don't want to speak [Haitian] Creole at school. I know the value at home. I tried to speak [Haitian] Creole with a friend. He said speak English. I asked why? He said because we're in public. I was like. I was so confused. I am like, what about the other kids that speak their language? He was... I was... Why can't we speak our language? Then he was looking like he was embarrassed. Then I leave it alone, cause—yeah...

9th grader Geraldine, 2016

That Haitian students in the New York City public schools feel “embarrassed” to speak their Haitian Creole language in school in year 2016, as Geraldine recounts, points to the continuing endangerment to these children’s identity, as well as exposes the failure of schools to support them. Moreover, this identity crisis is connected to, and forms part of the causes for the serious and ongoing educational *crises* observed with these children. That is, academic disengagement, poor quality work, academic underperformance, *environmental alienation*, dropout, and so on. In other words, the schooling experiences of Haitian children in the New York City public school system add to their sense of alienation in the society. This should alarm all of us.

There’s a certain way the society looks at you. I want to change that. I want to know why they keep this part of my culture away from us. Why do they keep it away? And the things they’re teaching you, teaching me... They have nothing related to my culture. They teach us about slavery. Really? But they never teach us about the whole history of slavery. And then it’s like they’re putting this thing into our mind that, ok, slavery happened. But they expect us to forget what happened. And I can’t forget what happened. Even though I did not participate. Even though I did not suffer from it. But I still suffer now because I have been affected by racism. People have been racist to me.

12th grader Monique, 2016

One Haitian youth pointedly stated, “I don’t even want to be there.” The youngsters described the school environment as a place that made them feel embarrassed about who they are, their practices, and having to hide their Haitian identity for fear of *alienation and stigmatization*. This is a direct reflection of what is occurring in the larger

society when national media outlets report that the President of the United States himself engages in derogatory “Haitian name calling”.

In effect, Haitian youngsters are far from being alone, when they can echo other prominent voices like the African-American writer and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates (a former student of the Baltimore public schools), who in his 2005 memoir *Between the World and Me* offers a scathing critique about the ways in which the Baltimore public school system treats/treated its Black students. Coates writes: “If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left... I suffered at the hands of both, but I resent the schools more...I sensed the schools were hiding something, drugging us with false morality... Schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them” (25-27). Statements from the Haitian students and Coates illustrate what children from oppressed communities continuously experience in the public schools. And institutions, like schools, unquestionably mirror society, as Cummins (2001) cautions. But why do the public schools continue to be such alienating spaces for Black children in twenty-first century America?

Schools should teach drums. Haitian drumming. In the time of slavery the slaves especially utilized the drums to have their own celebrations. When the masters gave them some free time, they would dance, though the masters mistreated them. Although they would be beaten while they worked, they'd beat the drums to express how they felt. Even though they were enduring great misery, even though the masters were beating them, they had no food, but they still felt grateful and thankful that they were still alive and they danced.

9th grader Caroline, 2016

According to research findings such as those in 2012 and 2014 conducted by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Civil Rights Project, schools in the United States have remained unchanged despite the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (heretofore *Brown*) legal case, which annulled the “separate but equal” and mandated the integration of the nation’s schools. One of the UCLA Civil Rights Project reports published in 2014 to mark the 60th anniversary of *Brown*, and to gauge and evaluate the impact of *Brown* on schools in the nation, claimed that: “New York has the most segregated schools” in the nation (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). Negligent educational practices, as per researchers like Orfield and Kucsera and recounted by the Haitian youngsters, are occurring and persisting in our schools despite laws on the books such as *Brown*.

In addition to *Brown*, there were myriad additional legal measures that followed to ensure that minority children—like the Haitian students—were receiving a quality education that would account for their cultural and linguistic needs. Namely, the U.S. Congress 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in its former and present iteration, the 1968 Bilingual Education Act (BEA), including the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* and the *Aspira v. Board of Education of New York*—were all enacted or stipulated to remedy the poor educational conditions for Black and Brown children, to redress inequities, and to provide these children with an education that includes and responds to their academic needs using or inclusive of the language and culture they bring with them to schools. Had these laws and mandates—ratified to ensure the academic, linguistic and cultural needs of minority children—not ignored, Haitian students particularly those who enter the New York City public school system not yet

having learned the English language—would not have to fear speaking their Haitian Creole language, in and out of school.

On the contrary, Haitian children in the New York city public school system should have the opportunity to enter educational settings or Bilingual Education Programs where they receive: content area instruction in both their Haitian native language and English, Native Language Arts, and English as a Second Language as instructed by the U.S. Supreme court in the *1974 Lau Decree*, and directed by the *1975 Aspira Consent Decree* in New York. These legal agreements were to further strengthen and support the 1954 *Brown* and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, to ensure educational equity, and to attend to the educational achievement of Black and Brown children in our schools (Anyon, 2005; García, 2009; Buttaro et al, 2010).

For the New York City public school system where the majority of its more than 1 million students hail from communities of color and “72.8 percent” are economically disadvantaged and “13.2 percent” are categorized as English Language Learners to only have **one** Bilingual Haitian program at the high school level, located at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn, and **two** programs at the elementary and middle school levels: P.S. 189K The Bilingual Center (K-8), and P.S. 276K—to serve Haitian children—is concerning. How is the system meeting the needs of or appropriately serving the more than 3,000 Haitian children³³ identified as newcomers or students who require Bilingual Education services?

³³ (Source: Division of English Language Learners and Student Support/English Language Learner Demographics Report for the 2016-2017 School Year. Retrieved, July 2019)

It is rather alarming that there are only **three** public schools in the New York City Department of Education with Bilingual Education programs for Haitian students. The absence of such programs—including Bilingual Haitian Creole teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, and so on, contributes to Haitian youngsters fearing speaking their native language on school grounds. The exclusion of the Haitian Creole language in the education of Haitian Creole-speaking students reinforces negative attitudes about the Creole language in society in general, and signals to these youngsters and the larger population that Haitian Creole has no value.

A 2019 research study conducted by *Flanbwayan*, which assists Haitian immigrant youth families to negotiate the bureaucracy of the New York City school system in enrolling their children, found there are no structures in place to:

Provide [these] young people the information that they need to make choices about which schools to attend [...] information that is crucial to their understanding of the New York City high school system or the types of schools and programs available to them. Without such information young people and their families cannot ask informed questions about their options, advocate for themselves, or make meaningful decisions.” (11)

The dysfunctions of the system are such that the *Flanbwayan* report claimed having found Haitian Creole-speaking students who had been “placed in a Spanish Bilingual program despite the fact that they do not speak Spanish” (3). Proper identification and placement of Haitian students, among other issues, have long been a problem with the system (*Flanbwayan* 2019; 2001; Cerat, 2011, Joseph, 2010). In the late 1990s, Haitian

parents and advocates initiated a lawsuit alleging that the then New York City Board of Education (currently the New York City Department of Education) and the New York State Education Department of educational neglect of Haitian students, demanding that “the rights of Haitian national origin school children who speak Haitian Creole and have limited English proficiency to receive appropriate special education and bilingual services” to meet their academic, linguistic and cultural needs (1996 New York City Civil Court deposition by the Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy, META, Inc.).

Such systemic malpractices, misplacement and misidentification of Haitian students, the lack of Bilingual Haitian Creole programs to meet the academic, linguistic and cultural needs of Haitian youngsters violate their “linguistic human rights” (Skuttnab-Kangas, 2006). Rights which should be and must be afforded to *all* students regardless of race, creed, gender, sexual identification, language, culture, among others, and which ought to be respected and upheld. Such rights ensure that *all* students, including Haitian youngsters, receive an education that: validates and affirms their identities and enables them to be successful learners, living dignified lives, as they become productive members of society.

The school system’s reluctance to serve multilingual and multicultural students is rooted in a calcified American racism borne out of the legacy of slavery and ensuing segregationist/separatist laws that followed the abolition of slavery in the nation. As such, the education of minority students, like the Haitians in the New York City public school system, remains under siege.

These ongoing and unfair practices and/or malpractices are occurring in twenty-first century America, and despite warning by countless education scholars and advocates who have argued for years that the educational *crises* (i.e., academic underperformance, academic disengagement, poor quality academic work, drop out, etc.) observed with minority children are fueled by structural dysfunctions or systemic injustices built into the school system, and manifested through its failure or resistance to acknowledge and validate the language, culture and history of Black children (Plaisir, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Ginwright, 2010; Buttaro, et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2008; *Flanbwayan*, 2011; 2019).

In addition to the absence of programs in the language of Haitian youngsters, the youth complained of finding versions and contents of history presented in school as biased, and therefore, *do not trust* the materials or their teachers.

I think it's important that they do [integrate Haitian linguistic and cultural practices in instructional activities]. Cause they tend to leave things out. Like recently, my dad was telling me about that, how slavery ended in Haiti, and that there were Haitian soldiers that helped America when they were trying to become free. And I never knew that. Cause they never say that in history books. So I was surprised. So they are leaving things out that they shouldn't. Because that's important in a way.

11th grader Mireille, 2016

All they tell us is that we were slaves and Abraham Lincoln liberated the slaves. That's not the whole story. It makes me think that what they are teaching in school is not the whole story. There is a different side to the story. I would change the way history is taught.

The Haitian youth repeatedly returned to the idea that something is missing in their schooling experience. They connect the absence of their language, culture and history in instructional events to the presence of curricula that are biased and Euro-centric, and do not provide “the whole story” or only one side of the story.

In his memoir or cautionary tale to his son about being black in America, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2005) makes a comparable argument on the curriculum offered to him as a young Black student in the Baltimore public school:

The world had no time for black boys and girls. How could the schools? Algebra, Biology, and English were not subjects so much as opportunities to better discipline the body, to practice writing between the lines, copying directions legibly, memorizing theorems extracted from the world they were created to represent. All of it felt distant to me... I was a curious boy, but the schools were not concerned with curiosity... I loved a few of my teachers. But I cannot say that I truly believed any of them. (25-26)

Similarly, the Haitian youth expressed that the exclusion of their history, language and culture as part of their schooling/instructional experiences erode their *confidence* and *pride* in their identities as students of color. The youngsters voiced that the system engages in practices that undermine their ways of knowing and doing, their historical experiences, which thereby, discourages academic engagement and limits their achievement.

I don't really like school. They don't teach you anything. I don't even want to be there.

10th grader Carlo, 2016

In their own words, the Haitian youth speaking up and speaking out throughout this document join scholars like Delpit (1995), Ladson-Billings and Tate (2009), and Shawn A. Ginwright (2010), among others, who have long been calling for a pedagogy that makes relevant the culture, language and history of Black children. Ginwright (2010) offers a compelling argument about what schools can do to educate, nurture, and engage minority students like the Haitians. He contends:

African culture and philosophy is simply too valuable to discount... [W]e should continue to challenge, push and develop African-centered scholarship and practice in ways that allow us to confront this crisis of black youth today. An emancipatory vision for black youth means that being rooted in African culture is a starting point for identity development, but not the end point. Our understanding of culture and identity development must be viewed as a pathway to justice and freedom. First, this requires an acknowledgment that African cultural identity is perhaps the most effective weapon to fight white supremacy. For black youth who internalize negative images of black people without knowing why, culture is a powerful vehicle to uncover their hidden shame of being black. (153-154)

Thus understood, it clearly does not suffice for schools, teachers and textbooks to simply present students with one version of history, or, as the Haitian youngster Monique

eloquently said: “All they tell us is that we were slaves and Abraham Lincoln liberated the slaves. That’s not the whole story...” By not teaching all the versions and sides of history, schools robbed Black students and *all* students of accurate historical knowledge (Loewen, 2007). School systems, leaders and teachers have a responsibility in creating educational settings that can help minority children to liberate themselves of the “shame of being black” (Ginwright, 2010), and thereby encourage Haitian students to affirm rather than to *conceal and disguise* their Haitian ethnic identity.

In *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (1995), Delpit argues:

If we plan to survive as a species on this planet we must certainly create multicultural curricula that educate our children to the different perspectives of our diverse population. In part, the problems we see exhibited in school by African-American children and children of other oppressed minorities can be traced to this lack of a curriculum in which they can find represented the intellectual achievements of people who look like themselves... Our children of color need to see the brilliance of their legacy, too. (177)

The Haitian youngsters’ voices highlighted in this document made comments that are consistent with the views of educational scholars like Delpit, Ginwright, and others, about missed opportunities by schools to engage *all* children with a multicultural curriculum. The Haitian children thirst for curricula that offer and include perspectives and experiences beyond a Eurocentric and Western-centered epistemology. In excluding

Haitian epistemology, Haitian language, culture and history, schools fail to help these children build on their ways of knowing and experiences, and develop pride in their Haitian identity or as descendants of Africans.

In addition to the emancipation of the American slaves in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln, Black children should learn versions of history that illustrate the resistance of their African ancestors to the brutal and inhumane system of slavery, as many of the Haitian youth point out. For instance, American slaves like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner who resisted the system and sought opportunities to liberate their fellow slaves ought to be featured as heroes in American history, not simply appear as footnotes in texts. The history of slavery and slave resistance in America must also be part of the larger American story, part of the American democratic project that involves *all* citizens.

History lessons could cover the Haitian anti-slavery Revolution and 1804 Independence when African slaves and their descendants on colonial French Saint Domingue (present day Haiti) overturned the system of slavery. This victory for human rights achieved by the slaves over their masters represents a significant milestone in the Trans-Atlantic history of slavery in the New World. It embodies humanistic ideals such as *the equality of all* and “the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” that are foundational to American democracy. The Haitian accomplishment inspired many oppressed communities throughout the Western Hemisphere to advocate for freedom from the South American liberator Simón Bolívar³⁴ to the Black American

³⁴ The Venezuelan Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios Ponte-Andrade y Blanco (24 July 1783-17 December 1830), known as Simón Bolívar or El Libertador, went to Haiti in 1815, following an assassination attempt on his life. The Haitian leader Alexandre Petion supplied him with soldiers and military ammunitions to support his fight to liberate Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Panama from colonial Spain.

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

Exposure to the Haitian slaves' historical triumph over human bondage, coupled with core values like democracy and equality at the foundation of America can serve to deepen students' understanding of human rights. All learners can draw inspirations from the visions and accomplishments of great Americans like Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass or the Haitian liberator Jean-Jacques Dessalines. All these leaders believed in the common humanity of *all*—children, women, and men—and the rights of all people to live free and in a world where they are respected and protected.

In 2018, New York State Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte³⁵—an American of Haitian-descent—spearheaded the initiative to name part of Rogers Avenue in Brooklyn Jean-Jacques Dessalines Boulevard as a way of honoring the Haitian founding father that envisioned a world without slavery. Bichotte's endeavor was likely rooted in stories heard about the freedom fighter from her Haitian immigrant parents and/or during her schooling days at P.S. 189K-The Bilingual Center where students are exposed to Haitian language, culture and history through the bilingual program created to serve Haitian children and their families. Moreover, to realize the street naming project, Bichotte brought together various factions of the New York Haitian community along with their allies, thereby, exemplifying the power of collective work, the power of unity, some of the values that guided the Haitian liberator in that fight for freedom. Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines runs through the heart of the Haitian community in the borough of

³⁵ In 2015, Rodneyse Bichotte became Assemblyperson for the 42nd Assembly District in New York. She was the first Haitian-American woman from New York City to be elected to the State Legislature.

Brooklyn. It helps validate the history and presence of the New York Haitian immigrant community, as well as acknowledges the community's contributions to the development of New York City³⁶.

When school systems from New York City and around the nation embrace diversity and inclusion as corner stones of the educational experience, they will teach Black, Brown and White children “the whole story”, as 12th grader Monique hopes, by including the history of enslaved Africans in Saint Domingue who liberated themselves and created Haiti, the first black and independent nation. Specifically, they will empower Black and Brown children, and in fact, really offer these children a transformative education. It will be an education that will equip these learners with the critical and creative thinking tools to take actions to change their condition, community, and society for the better.

The 1804 Haitian Independence was, and remains one of the most compelling counter-arguments to the false narrative of African inferiority, used to justify the enslavement of more than 11 million Africans from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century in the New World (Gates, 2011; Dubois, 2004; Buck-Morss, 2009). Teaching about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade history as well as the success of the Haitian slaves' Revolution to minority students changes the perception of slaves as passive victims to slaves as change agents. What child, if taught critical analysis skills, would not or cannot

³⁶ Haitians have a long history and presence in this country. Historical records show that some 800 Haitians served as volunteer soldiers in colonial America' war for independence at the Battle of Savannah in 1779. Pierre Toussaint, a Haitian slave who accompanied his master, a plantation owner named Bérard, fleeing the Haitian Revolution came to New York City in 1787" (Laguerre, 1984; Cerat, 2011) and became well known hairdresser in the city. Pierre donated a lot to charity, including funds that went toward building the Saint Patrick Cathedral. Today, there are many Haitians working in all fields in the city from education, health care to politics. Jacques Jiha is serving as the current New York City Commissioner of Finance. Patrick Gaspard, the current president of the Open Society Foundations also had an illustrious career in government. Judge Dweynie Paul became the first Haitian-American woman to be elected a Civil Court judge in New York City.

appreciate the significance and magnitude of this momentous history of humanity realized by the Haitian slaves? What Black child will not be inspired or gain a sense of pride in learning about the accomplishment of these African ancestors in the New World?

And the things they're teaching you, teaching me... They have nothing related to other cultures. They teach us about slavery, really, but they never teach us about the whole history of slavery. And then, it's like they're putting this thing in our mind that, ok, slavery happened. But they expect us to forget what happened. And I can't forget what happened...

12th grader Monique, 2016

The Haitian youth envision school environments where their history, language and culture would serve as foundational elements and building blocks to their learning. They yearn for school programming that includes Haitian musical traditions and instruments, Haitian proverbs, folktales and modern literature, Haitian vèvè diagrams, cultural items that help them to develop the confidence to say: "I am Haitian. That's who I am."

When I have a problem to solve, I always think of a weird and crazy way to do it, to solve it. All of them [vèvè diagrams] would be useful. This one would be very great with graphs. Like math for example, teaching someone how to label plot, create a heart, label plot. They can give you two coordinates and just tell you to plot it down and find it. This one really actually looks like a graph line! And you can actually use it to figure out the coordinates of these small shapes, axes. They are very complicated stuff.

9th grader Caroline, 2016

Caroline, cited above, and some other youngsters comment on how useful *vèvè* diagrams would be in teaching mathematics. Linda, quoted below, shares that her knowledge and use of Haitian proverbs with her family contributed to the development of her English writing skills. Her experience serves to exemplify what schools and/or programs that incorporate and include Haitian cultural practices could accomplish for Haitian learners. Bilingual educators have long understood that students are capable of transferring skills learned from one language to another.

The African-based cultural traditions found in Haitian practices were recreated in the context of slavery. Drum rhythms and dances, memories and souvenirs of African philosophy (i.e., proverbs, stories, ways of relating to the universe and one another, ways of being and knowing, etc.) from the minds of the captives/enslaved became significant elements for the reconstruction of their being/existence, and ultimately tools for resistance and survival. For Haitian youngsters and all Black children, these practices matter. They matter for their academic, social, and emotional adjustment and success.

My parents use a lot of [Haitian Creole] proverbs. The language itself is so great and different. The use of metaphors is extremely there. I remember when my mom came she was forcing me to eat vegetables. And I don't want to eat, and she was "ou ka fòse bourik janbe rivyè, men ou pa ka fòse l bwè dlo [You can force a donkey to cross the river, but you cannot force it to drink water]. It [Haitian Creole] shapes like the use of figurative terms. That is why it was easier for me to learn to use figurative terms in my writing, because of the consistent way of using metaphors like that.

10th grader Linda, 2016

The Remedies or Recommendations

There are actions educational policymakers and leaders in school systems around the nation can take to ensure the education of Haitian youngsters—including other minority students—is no longer under siege, and to give them “this confidence in saying I am Haitian. That’s who I am” as Geraldine pleads. It begins with a moral commitment to ensuring that these children—living in the world’s wealthiest nation and positioned as the leader in human rights—receive a transformative education. That is, an education in which their language, culture and history become integral components of their instructional experiences. Schools have a responsibility to design and implement programs to address the stigmatization, alienation, resentment and shame that these youngsters experience and carry from existing in environments where they see their language, culture and history marginalized and devalued. Schools must be spaces that help these youngsters affirm their identities and become well-adjusted individuals prepared and ready to be in the society.

To achieve this demands adherence to existing laws such as *Brown*, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (in its former or present iteration), the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, and legal measures such as the 1974 *Lau* and the 1975 *Aspira* consent decrees which exist to redress inequities, to remedy the poor conditions in which minority children like the Haitians were and are being educated and to provide these youngsters with an education that can respond to their academic, linguistic and cultural needs.

To remedy the inequities that Haitian children face in public schools, it is imperative to:

1. Create, sustain and maintain programs at all levels (elementary, middle and high schools) that leverage the academic, social, linguistic and cultural strengths of Haitian students and their families;
2. Provide courses in Haitian Creole language and history, music and art, and courses on the Middle Passage/Trans-Atlantic slave experience at all levels;
3. Monitor programs to ensure effective implementation of policies and mandates, as well as adequate staffing;
4. Assure equal access to all education programs, including gifted programs for Haitian Creole-speaking youngsters; and all other instructional and support services;
5. Provide appropriate and sufficient textbooks (English and Haitian Creole), as well as additional instructional materials, or, the development of such to support these children's learning;
6. Hire qualified Haitian staff for all programming and services, including bilingual Haitian Creole teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, and other support staff who are linguistically and culturally competent;
7. Work collaboratively with Institutions of Higher Education that prepare educators to create/institute courses that expose teacher candidates to Haitian linguistic and cultural practices (*Vodou, Rara, Vèvè*, etc.), the Haitian Creole language, as well as to the African diasporan experience (i.e., slavery and colonization; the histories, languages, and cultures of African diasporans, the impact of race and racism on black and brown youngsters in society, etc.);
8. Support educational research study initiatives that specifically focus on the Haitian student population;
9. Support the work of community organizations such as the *Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Center*, and other entities that advocate for, and provide services that support the education of Haitian students and their families.

Conclusion

Being poor in a rich country can lead to ill-placed shame, pervasive despair, and anger.

Jean Anyon, 2005

This chapter was structured to highlight the voices of a group of Haitian youngsters attending the New York City public schools. The youth's reflections on the exclusion of Haitian linguistic and cultural practices as part of their schooling proved illuminating. Their language reveals their fears and apprehensions, as well as their hopes for schools that value and include their Haitian experiences. In other words, these children are envisioning a school system where diversity, equity and inclusion become norms.

Haitian families and community advocates have long pleaded with the New York City Department of Education (formerly the Board of Education of the City of New York) and the New York State Education Department to provide Haitian children with linguistically and culturally relevant educational programs and services³⁷. The refusal of the system to do so maintains the crippling inequality started with the horrors of slavery, sustained by the unjust and separatist laws of segregation, and the continuing disregard of *Brown* and other national and local legal mandates. Resistance by the New York City public school system in the twenty-first century to provide Haitian children with an

³⁷ In 1996, the New York Haitian community with the assistance of the Boston-based Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy (META) initiated a court case against the then Board of Education of the City of New York (currently the New York City Department of Education) and the New York State Education Department, alleging educational neglect of Haitian children.

education that includes their language, culture and history keeps these children's education and identity under siege. Such practice prolongs their academic disengagement and underperformance, maintains their societal exclusion, and potentially relegates them to a life of poverty. Yet, America can do better. Let's hope that America listens to the stories of *all* its children.

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