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Brothers under Skin: African and African-American Relation in the Bronx

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Introduction:

This project is inspired by my experience as a child of two African immigrant

parents from Kinshasa, Congo. I was raised in a household where Congolese values were

held to a very high standard, and I was told that these types of values should be

incorporated into my daily life as a child, a young adult and later an adult. Despite living

in the United States and living in an English speaking society, I never had conversations

with my parents in English and was greatly encouraged to talk my parents in their native

language of Swahili or Lingala (Congolese dialect). As the only individual in immediate

family who adequately spoke English, I served as my parents' bridge into the American

culture and way of life. When watching shows on American television, my parents would

ask me what the individuals on television were saying or question me about the plot and

storyline to a movie that we were altogether watching. On to more serious concerns, I

would also become to be useful when I became a translator or somewhat an immigration

lawyer for my parents. They would file for various documents in their quest to obtain

permanent citizenship and would ask me to write a letter to Immigration Naturalization

Services offices in Washington D.C in order to describe their situations as political

refugees in the United States and the reason why they cannot return to their native country due to the array of difficult political and social situations. However, I would not serve as a bridge and interpreter when it came to my academic life. Suddenly, my English skills were not sufficient enough when it came to explaining to them how much homework I had to get done or explaining the letter American grading system to them. Instead, they relied more on the administrators of the school when it came to their child's academic endeavors.

My experience as a child of African immigrants allowed me to create a sort of dual identity. One identity was created in the home, and the other identity arose in public and social spaces such as the school or other places where my interactions would occur with non-African individuals. Those non-African individuals were composed of the majority of my friends, my teachers and my neighbors. My home identity was mostly defined by my parents and their enforcement of standard of values upon me. That standard of values that stems from the African tradition of family which included the ultimate respect for parents, and also a standard of values that is also shaped by a patriarchal society where the male figure or the father of the house makes the ultimate the decision when presented with different scenarios concerning the household and the well-being of very individual in the household. For example, I was invited to a birthday party by one of my American friends during a weekend. My mother knew my friend and my friends' parents through a series of a limited amount of interactions; however, she deferred to my father when I asked permission to attend my friend's birthday party.

My interest for writing this research thesis lies along my interactions that I have personally had with African-American students in addition to observing the interactions

of American-born and newly immigrated African students into the United States. Unlike other non black American minority groups, the African immigration population is not at high substantial level where those populations could create their own communities and afford to be secluded from the rest of the population. Therefore, the integration of the African immigrants into mainstream culture and society becomes very instrumental in terms of obtaining a profession just like the citizens of the United States. Another interesting aspect of African immigration is the establishment of some African businesses that forced a creation of interactions between Africans and African-Americans. For example, hair braiding salons owned by African immigrants attract African-American women even African-American men who want to get their hair braided. The clientele usually at these hair salons consist of black customers; in my area, the majority of black customers happened to be African-Americans. Other social encounters between African immigrants and African-Americans can be found within the school system. In my high school, there were a significant amount of African student who were born in the United States and those who came over to the United States with their parents at a relatively young age. The dynamics between these two segments of the African population in regards to their interactions with African-Americans were very interesting. Of course, the African students who had been born in the United States had been "Americanized" and were very much in touch with the African-American students at the high school and developed a high level of comfort or camaraderie around African-American students; however, African students who had immigrated to the United States did not gravitate as much toward the African-American students. There was not any tension between the two groups but one could observe a sense of cultural divide.

This cultural divide also manifested itself with my experience at Fordham University. However, the majority of the African population was international students or was not born in the United States but the borough of the Bronx became their permanent resident while living in the United States. At Fordham University, the cultural divide inside the Fordham campus gates was also a reflection of the dynamics of the relationship between the African immigrant population and African-Americans. The Bronx is densely populated with Ghanaian immigrants. Over ninety percent of Ghanaian immigrants arrive and establish themselves in New York City. The Bronx is the county in the United States with the highest population of Ghanaians. With an ever growing African immigrant population, the introduction of a new black population into area of New York City where the majority of the population consists of African-Americans and Hispanics definitely makes for interesting interactions for a population who has somewhat immersed itself into the American mainstream and created their won identity and culture as black Americans. Whereas, a new wave of black individuals who have retained their culture and identity from their continent of origin have not yet assimilated into American society. This thesis paper will explore the relationships and interactions between African immigrants and African-Americans in New York City.

Chapter 1:

The United States of America is perceived as the land of opportunities where groups of people from all over the globe come to get their taste of the American dream. With the wave of immigrants from Latin American countries such as Mexico and some Central American nations, other types of immigrants from across the Atlantic Ocean are arriving in the United States in relatively large numbers and have become instrumental to

the economic well-being of various urban centers throughout the country. The influx of

African immigrants serves as the second time this phenomenon has happened since the

exportation of unwilling Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, more

Africans have landed on American annually than any other peak years during the slave

trade, and the calculated number is around the range of fifty thousand immigrants[1]. The

state of New York attracts the highest amount of African immigrants in the United States.

Nigeria and Ghana are among two of the twenty countries that produce the most amount

of immigrants into New York Cities[2]. Many of those African immigrants are mainly

concentrated within cities in the United States. These cities include: Chicago, Atlanta,

New York City, Washington D.C, Boston, Los Angeles, Houston and a few immigrants

from eastern African countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea in states such as Maine and

Oregon[3].

The earliest arrivals of African immigrants into the United States could be traced

back into the 1960s. However, the majority of African immigrants arrived in New York

City since the early 1980s[4]. Some of the factors that were central to the cause for African

immigration into the United States included unemployment in addition to the civil strife

including civil wars and political unrest in their native countries[5]. Most African countries

before the 1960s had been under colonial rule for a great portion of their existence, and

independent movements that arose around the sixties revealed some of optimism and

[1] Roberts, Sam. "More Africans enter U.S than in Days of Slavery". *New York Times*. 21 February 2005.
[2] Roberts, Sam. "More Africans enter U.S than in Days of Slavery". *New York Times*. 21 February 2005.
[3] Roberts, Sam. "More Africans enter U.S than in Days of Slavery". *New York Times*. 21 February 2005.
[4] Grove, Thomas. "Brother Against Brother." *The Bronx Beat*. 01 November 2004.
[5] Grove, Thomas. "Brother Against Brother." *The Bronx Beat*. 01 November 2004.

hope that citizens had for their country with this newfound independence, freedom and self-determination. Many western and central African nations gained their independence from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s. Independence brought forth ideas and plans for better economic conditions, education, healthcare and other extremely important social programs that would promote the uplifting and development of any citizen of the country. However after the independence movements that were frequent throughout the continent in the mid-1960s, totalitarian regimes were the product of a post-independence in many African countries. These regimes were only concerned on filling their own pockets and exploit the national wealth or resources. Leaders of these regimes would completely neglect the economic situations that an average hard working citizen found himself or herself in. They provided their children with a great education bys sending them to some of the great European institutions in France, Belgium, United Kingdom and other countries. In addition, the construction of lavish homes, purchasing of luxury cars or constant trips to foreign countries would pre occupy these leaders' consciousness instead of the deteriorating education system, health crisis or lack of employment that were devastating many communities throughout their country. The combination of all these factors and problems heavily contributed to their migration to the United States, and assimilation into a new and different society proved to outweigh opposite factors that would have motivated these immigrants to remain in their native countries to endure the continuing hardships of life in their native land. As a result, one can sense that African immigrants are not any different from any other immigrant groups throughout American history. However, the dynamic lies in that fact this immigrant group is the second wave of African immigrant groups who have set foot on American soil hundreds of years after

the first Africans were brought in America as enslaved individuals. Some correlations could be made about the arrival of Africans in the 16th century in the Americas and recent African immigrants who arrived in the United States as far as the early as the 1960s. Like African-Americans, African immigrants could be perceived as a group of people who are also bound and restricted. They are not bound and restricted as war captives but some of the federal government's actions in their native countries have limited their ability to grow economically, socially and have restricted their ability to fully develop of human beings. Ironically, the United States serves as a safe haven away from the detrimental conditions of the immigrants 'native countries whereas America became a place that would totally de-humanize and severely deprive African-Americans their rights and opportunities that were available to white Americans.

When African immigrants arrive to the United States, they have to assimilate to American culture or way of life like other immigrant groups. Most of these immigrants have to adapt to the life of a middle-class or lower-middle class family in the United States. There is a language barrier that African immigrants from non-English speaking countries in the United States have to overcome once they arrive in the United States. Other adjustments such as adaptations to the social life and interactions with other ethnic or racial groups that are already incorporated into the American culture also become important. But the common theme among these immigrants is to accomplish what they came to the United States. Employment is the one of the instrumental and motivating factors. African immigrants began to find any sort of employment that would permit them to send some of their income back to their native countries in order to alleviate the difficult situations in which other family members and friends encounter. The sort of

employment can range from a variety of common professions. In New York City, these professions include taxi drivers, hair stylist at hair braiding salons, security workers at a local clothing store to regular street vendors of various items such as clothing, books and others. All these professions serve as means to make the meager amount money that they might obtain; however, this meager amount of money by American standards might represent a significant difference for individuals in their native countries that might live on only a few dollars for a single day.

In addition to employment, education becomes one of the major motivations for African immigrants to make the trip across the Atlantic to the United States. The education that was not at their disposal in their native countries now becomes available to them once they have touched down on American soil. A testament to the relentless pursuit of education on the part of African immigrants manifests itself by becoming to the most highly educated immigrant groups in addition to outperforming native-born whites and black Americans[6]. According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education in 1997, 24.6 percent of all adult white Americans and 13.3 percent of all black Americans held a bachelor's degree but since 48.9 percent of African immigrants had a college degree; the probability of African immigrants to possess a college degree was three times higher than native born African-Americans[7]. In addition, African immigrants were more likely to possess a graduate or Ph.D degree compared to any immigrant groups in the United States including immigrants from both Asia and Europe[8]. From these statistics, one can

[6] *African immigrants in the United States are the Nation's Most Highly Educated Group.* Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. No. 26. pp. 60-61.
[7] *African immigrants in the United States are the Nation's Most Highly Educated Group.* Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. No. 26. pp. 60-61.
[8] *African immigrants in the United States are the Nation's Most Highly Educated Group.* Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. No. 26. pp. 60-61.

conclude that the value of education is such a critical element to the African immigrant experience, and the United States provides the opportunities for the fulfillment of their dreams of obtaining an education in foreign land whereas their native countries did not possess the opportunities and resources for them to accomplish that dream. One can conclude the combination of both employment and education are very powerful and driving factors for the immigration ambition into the United States. However, other factors such as civil and political unrest in one's native and homeland could also play an instrumental role in the migration of Africans into the United States.

In the Midwest region of the United States, a surge of African immigrants who fled the genocide in Darfur, Sudan have settled in different small towns[9]. Approximately 300 people from Darfur have settled in the city of Fort Wayne; many of these immigrants have escaped the militant Janjaweed regime that is mainly responsible for the ethnic cleansing and genocide in the native country of these immigrants[10]. The reasons that attract these immigrants to a relatively rural region such as Fort Wayne and other small towns are a comfort level and the idea of a community. They have settled in small towns for a slower pace agricultural type of lifestyle that is familiar from their native countries[11]. In addition, Nourain Bashir, a forty-one year old Darfuri, states that "'Cities like New York are not attractive for our beginners, too busy; this community welcomed us cheerfully and respectfully. They understand our people." This phenomenon highlights some of the reasons and motivational factors that drive African immigrants to the United

[9] Saulny, Susan. *After Darfur, Many Refugees Are Starting Life Anew in the Midwest.* New York Times. 2 Apr. 2007.

[10] Saulny, Susan. *After Darfur, Many Refugees Are Starting Life Anew in the Midwest.* New York Times. 2 Apr. 2007.

[11] Saulny, Susan. *After Darfur, Many Refugees Are Starting Life Anew in the Midwest.* New York Times. 2 Apr. 2007

States in search for a stable and resourceful environment that would permit them to reach their full potential.

Despite the connections and somewhat obligations to their families and friends in their native countries, some African immigrants have established themselves in the United States and have established permanent residency in cities such as New York and other cities throughout the country.

Chapter 2:

After arriving to metropolitan cities such as New York City, African immigrants have to assimilate into their social environments and perhaps adjust to a new lifestyle that they are very unfamiliar with. Social interactions with different ethnic groups become very critical and instrumental as far as adjusting to a new society. In New York City, African immigrants already encounter different groups such as African-Americans, Puerto Ricans and other groups. They have not been exposed to these different groups; therefore, the have to create social interactions since they will be living in the same neighborhoods, and their children will most likely attend the same schools along with African-American children as well as Hispanic children. New relationships are developing due to the dynamics of the environment. However, cultural differences could create conflicts between African immigrant groups and the African-American communities already established.

One of the most noticeable and popular African immigrant groups in New York City is Ghanaian. The majority of Ghanaian immigrants who arrive in the United States reside in New York City. The Bronx is the neighborhood or county that has the highest

population of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States. Ghanaian immigrants have established a lot of businesses in the Bronx such as restaurants, grocery stores with Ghanaian products, hair salons and others. Besides establishing their own businesses, African immigrants have become an instrumental part of the workforce in various clothing stores and shops in Fordham Road in the Bronx[12]. African immigrant workers can be found in clothing stores working by checking bags or coats In some sections of the Bronx, African businesses have flourished as a result of the increase immigration population and have displaced some of the West Indian population from countries such as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica[13]. Just south of the Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center, small populations from Western African countries such as Gambia, Guinea and Ivory Coast are now occupying an area for the past decade that was formerly populated by Jamaican and Dominican immigrants. Aside from the flourishing businesses that have been created around the area, the presence of Western Africans could be felt with the appearance of a mosque in which Muslim Gambians worship and direct their prayers toward Mecca five times a day[14]. In the afternoons, the mosque is occupied by school children who are studying the Koran in Arabic[15]. At this section mostly occupied by Guineans, Ivorians and Gambians, one can find one can find the basic businesses that are instrumental to the community including a barbershop and an auto repair place owned by Africans.

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[12] Grove, Thomas. "Brother Against Brother". The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[13] Kugle, Seth. *Little Africa Flourishes, Fufu Flour and All.* New York Times. New York, N.Y; pg. 14.8

[14] Kugle, Seth. *Little Africa Flourishes, Fufu Flour and All.* New York Times. New York, N.Y; pg. 14.8

[15] Kugle, Seth. *Little Africa Flourishes, Fufu Flour and All.* New York Times. New York, N.Y; pg. 14.8

Despite the establishment of these different and successful businesses, the African immigration population still has to be able to assimilate within the existing community. However there still exists a divide and underlying segregation between Africans and African-Americans, they might engage in doing business together but they are still not living together in some areas of the Bronx and New York City. For example, a significant amount of Africans (mostly Ghanaians) are living in Morris Heights in the Bronx[16]. In addition to the African restaurants are flourishing in the section of Morris Heights, there are store stands in the Brooklyn section of Bedford-Stuyvesant that sell music, newspapers and food from other western African countries such as Senegal and Nigeria[17]. The strong presence of an African community could also be found in Harlem. Around the area of 125th Street, one can notice numerous amounts of African clothing stores, and some African artifacts are sold. One of the owners of the clothing stores expressed a certain element of awe when he first saw me with my mother. Here I was an African young man dressed in urban clothing along with a woman who was dressed traditional Congolese clothing. The store owner initially thought that I was roaming around the store by myself and did not notice any type of resemblance with my mother. I told the owner that I was with my mother and sparked a conversation about our country of origin; he then proceeded in asking me questions in Lingala. He also implicitly commented on my choice of clothing and told me to remember who I was and where I came from. This type of cultural difference plays an instrumental role within living spaces between Africans

[16] Goffe, Leslie. Africans in America: An Economic and Cultural Divide Keep Some Continental Africans and African-Americans From Deep Alliances. Emerge. Rosslyn: Feb. 2000. Vol. 11, Issue 4; pg. 84.
[17] Goffe, Leslie. Africans in America: An Economic and Cultural Divide Keep Some Continental Africans and African-Americans From Deep Alliances. Emerge. Rosslyn: Feb. 2000. Vol. 11, Issue 4; pg. 84.

and African-Americans. Not too far from 125th Street, " Little Senegal" arises with African shops and markets all over the place[18]. Massama Seka, who resides in the Bronx but often spends his days in Harlem, states that this portion of West Harlem reminds him of his native country where everything can be found in those local shops, markets and cuisines that could be found in the streets of Dakar now are located in 116th street between Frederick Douglass Blvd and St. Nicholas Avenue[19]. These types of shops and local stores serve as an extension of the community they have left in their native countries. Serigne Gueye, a Senegalese man who lives in 8th avenue, notices the cultural division between the African immigrants who live in West Harlem and African-Americans who mostly reside in Central Harlem states "it's a different mentality" and "the African community, the culture, behavior-it's just different"[20].

Many Senegalese immigrants entered specifically New York City during the mid-1980s when its colonizer country France tightened their migration policies in order to halt a surging West African immigrant population in France[21]. Like other western African immigrants, many Senegalese have created their own communities within neighborhoods inhabited by African-Americans. This phenomenon has even led some African-Americans to believe that the establishment of these local African communities could cause separate and alienate some African-Americans. Stephanie Tarleton, an African-

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[18] Herpich, Nate. A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street. Amsterdam News. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Issue. 42. pg. 1
[19] Herpich, Nate. A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street. Amsterdam News. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Issue. 42. pg. 1
[20] Herpich, Nate. A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street. Amsterdam News. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Issue. 42. pg. 1

[21] Herpich, Nate. A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street. Amsterdam News. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Issue. 42. pg. 1

American woman who works in West Harlem, concludes the changes in her neighborhood due to arrival of African immigrants have been negative because Africans do not display the effort of assimilating into the existing African-American communities[22]. Tarleton cites the language as one of the major issues since Senegalese immigrants do not speak English; therefore, the communication between Senegalese and African-Americans causing further separation between the two groups[23].

This type of cultural divide is also manifested in the borough of the Bronx. The Bronx has experienced a large influx of an African immigrant population during the past decade. As previously mentioned, a large Ghanaian population resides in the Morris Heights section of the Bronx. The case of Ghanaian immigrant Paul Bambil is not too different from the experiences of other African immigrants who arrive to the United States. Bambil has established himself in a foreign country by working as cab driver for King's Castle Car in the northwestern section of the Bronx[24]. While driving on of 196th Street and Grand Concourse, he attended to an African-American man who began his conversation with the drive with "They are all African niggers"[25]. Due to his light-skinned skin complexion, Bambil does not look in accordance to the stereotypical perception of what an individual from Sub-Saharan African is supposed to look like. Instead, his appearance might deceive people's ideas of the aesthetics of race and

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[22]Herpich, Nate. *A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street*. <u>Amsterdam News</u>. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Iss. 42. pg. 1

[23]Herpich, Nate. *A clash of culture played out on Harlem's 116th Street*. <u>Amsterdam News</u>. 14 Oct 2004-20 Oct 2004. Vol.95, Iss. 42. pg. 1

[24]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. <u>The Bronx Beat</u>. 01 November 2004.
[25]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. <u>The Bronx Beat</u>. 01 November 2004.

ethnicity; he could have been perceived as light-skinned African man or Hispanic considering the population demographics of the Bronx. Bambil's passenger continues his conversation when he later states "They sold our ancestors into slavery. They think they're hard workers, but they are economic slaves"[26]. This interaction alone reveals some of the perhaps friction that African-Americans and African immigrants face; however, this phenomenon is not a vis-a-vis, it usually involves conversations among the two groups' different social circles but in rare occasions dos this tension surpasses the surface of closed communities and spill over into face to face confrontations or dialogues.

The reference of the African-American toward the hard-working ethic of African immigrants exudes some type of jealousy that himself or perhaps some other African-Americans have regarding the labeling of African immigrants as hard working individuals. He states that Africans "think" except that they do not have the time to "think" or worry about their image in the perception of others. They do not have the luxury to worry about the perception of others; instead, they work tirelessly and relentlessly because of the dire economic situations that they find themselves in both their foreign and native country. Some observants such as the African-American passenger in Bambil's taxi might consider African immigrants as economic slaves but one has to realize that fair labor conditions and rights do not serve as a preoccupation to individuals who come from places where they could make approximately ten dollars a month or eat on one dollar during each day. These feelings of animosity and differences between African-Americans and African immigrants are relatively a new phenomenon. During the 1960s, the surfacing of African immigrants across American cities created some type of

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[26] Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

harmony in their relationships with African-Americans because it re-established the relationship of African-Americans to Africa[27]. It was almost a feeling of long slot kinship amongst the two groups. However, the economic competition has grown between the two groups especially with the establishment of flourishing African businesses in New York City neighborhoods such as the Bronx and Harlem[28]. After the period of the 1960s, the majority of Africans entered New York City after the 1980 as a result of the policies applied by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on some African countries[29]. These policies reduced public spending by two-thirds in some African countries in order to fulfill their duty of "to reduce poverty and promote economic growth"; whereas, 25 percent of public workers found themselves on the list of unemployment and the lack of professions soon became the norm across many countries in the continent[30]. In addition to the lack of jobs, the political an social conflicts such as wars including civil wars in all parts from Eastern, Central and Western parts of the continent served as major motivators for the transatlantic voyage of many citizens of the affected countries to the United States.

Another area of the Bronx where the African presence could be felt is Fordham Road. Fordham Road serves as the third-largest retail in New York City according to the New York Planning Commission[31]. The abundance of clothing stores such as Dr. Jay's, Jimmy Jazz and other lucrative stores in the area has attracted the great volume of

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[27]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.
[28]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.
[29]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[30]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[31]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

African labor. Che Villafane, a local Hispanic resident of the Fordham Road area, has noticed the increase of African workers in 99 cent stores and clothing retail stores[32]. In addition, Villafane also states that he has seen African security workers in stores such as V.I.M or at the baggage checkpoint in the front of stores[33]. Chad, a store manager on Fordham, mentions that the majority of his employees are West Africans, and African-Americans do not like to work in his store; those African-American workers who he has once hired do not work as hard as African immigrants[34]. Again, the perception of a strong immigrant work ethic resurfaces when referring to Africans in the employment sector. This dynamic of work ethic and taking "lowly" jobs is composed of a complex element. Some jobs cannot be offered to American citizens as they would be readily offered to an immigrant population because citizenship in the United States might carry a stamp of superiority compared to immigrants. Additional factors such as desperate situations of immigrants who are trying to assimilate into the mainstream economic platform. A lot of those Africans perhaps necessarily do no obtain an advanced formal education; therefore, entrance into the workforce becomes necessary for their financial survival in a city with such a high standard of living. In a summary, African immigrants are able to do jobs that American citizens such as African-Americans will never attempt to perform. Conclusively, the perception of African immigrants as "economic slaves" could be a valid one but one has to come to the realization that they do not possess many options with the addition of the difficult transition in assimilating into a totally new and different

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[32]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[33]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[34]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

society. Kay Brown, a Bronx Ghanaian businessman, remembers when an African-American man insulted him when he scornfully said "Why don't you go back to the jungle?", and Brown concluded that the reasons behind these types of tension are definitely rooted in the competition for low-jobs in addition to the high unemployment rate of fifty-six percent for African-Americans around Fordham section of the Bronx[35].

Along with the scene of African workers as clothing store clerks, a younger generation of African immigrants are concentrated into the business the latest bootlegged hip-hop mixtapes, albums and even that have just recently theaters. Eighteen year old Diallo Jalow from the western African nation of Guinea reflects on the troubles that he faces when he is selling all these mixtapes, unreleased movies or music albums because he technically is violating copyright infringement laws[36]. He says "Rappers send niggers around here" referring to African-Americans and also states that his cousin was shot and killed by an African-American man because he also was selling CDs. The presence of African immigrants has stirred some tension among non African-Americans in Fordham Road. Oscar Pabellon, a Puerto Rican man, who sells incense and street novels on Fordham Road believes that the cultural divide and tension that exists between African immigrants and African-Americans are fueled by the American media's presentation of minorities in general[37]. However, he is very critical of the jobs that Africans are performing and stresses that their professions are illegal because they clearly are violating the copyright infringement laws; however, individuals like Oscar Pabellon fail to understand the urgency of situations that these African immigrants find themselves in as

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[35] Grove, Thomas. *Brother Against Brother*. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.
[36] Grove, Thomas. *Brother Against Brother*. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.
[37] Grove, Thomas. *Brother Against Brother*. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

far as providing for their families overseas in addition to the majority of these immigrants

who do not have an advanced education or even find themselves in difficult dilemmas

with immigration services because Immigration Naturalization Services does not

automatically grant any immigrant who has come from a war-torn country with asylum as

a refugee. The process to attain the status of permanent resident or anything that

resembles it often becomes problematic. According to Pabellon, the images of African-

Americans and Hispanic as criminals already places a stigma on these two groups;

therefore, African immigrants already have developed a pre-conceived notion of an

African-American in the United States. However, I doubt that those immigrants who

come to the United States are so filled with the images of African-Americans as criminals

that they could come to a conclusion to a judgment about African-Americans. One could

even doubt the access and availability of American media in their native countries except

perhaps the entertainment elements of American culture.

However, the relationships in the Bronx between Africans and African-Americans

are not all sour and frictional. Audrey Welch, an older African-American woman who

attends a local Baptist church, thinks that the emerging of African stores and shops in

certain parts of the Bronx brings to the surface her African heritage[38]. She is a regular

customer at various African art works such as plates and masks from the local African

vendors[39]. Despite the few signs of harmony among these two communities, tensions and

personal perceptions among these communities still prevail in daily interactions between

African immigrants and African-Americans. Paul Bambil states that tensions between

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[38]Grove, Thomas. *Brother Against Brother*. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

[39]Grove, Thomas.*Brother Against Brother*. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.

these two groups have driven him sometimes to avoid picking up an African-American passenger due to fear of violence and hostility[40].

Aside from the economic circumstances cited as perhaps some of the reasons for the cultural divide between African immigrants and African-Americans, ideologies, philosophies, perspectives and approaches also contribute to the separation and divide between the two groups. Once in history, these two groups of black individuals resided in the same continent; however, they seem as if they were two different races. However, the black immigrants rarely share the same experiences and perspectives from the black habitants of the United States. Economically, some think that African immigrants and their families have an unfair edge over African-Americans. According to the American Atlas of Diversity, 49 percent of African immigrants possess a college degree while only 17.4 percent of African-Americans have a college degree[41]. As a result, the average salary for the average African family is approximately $45,000 which ranks as the highest among any immigrant in the United States[42].

Aside from the adjustments that adult African immigrants make when arriving to the United States, their children have to also attempts in order to assimilate into the school life with other young people and claim their part in American youth culture. Mammadou Cire Diallo, young man from West Africa, has lived in the United States for four years and arrived in the United States when he was approximately thirteen years old[43]. Today, he expresses some regret over his daily life in the United States, and a society known for providing for foreigners also gives them a new reality check. Diallo

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[40]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004.
[41]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004
[42]Grove, Thomas. Brother Against Brother. The Bronx Beat. 01 November 2004
[43]*From West Africa to the Bronx.* New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16

states that his life in the Bronx has been definitely filled with hardships and difficulties

due the hectic and time-demanding life of immigrants who are trying to assimilate into a

new culture socially and economically. Life in the United States has changed both his and

his parents' lives for the worst. He chronicles on how his parents have to work extremely

hard in order to make living; even his religious practices have been altered due to the

American lifestyle. Diallo, a Muslim, used to pray five times a day but due to his busy

school schedule, he has become limited to only pray once a day. Diallo plans to go back

to Africa as soon as he becomes financially stable and independent[44]. Karr Sumbur, a 16-

year-old boy from West Africa, also has a negative perception of life in the United States.

He describes the Bronx and United States as a rotten place due his inner-city environment

and the school that he attends. Sumbur states that all he sees in his environment is drug

dealing, gun shots, violent fights, stabbings and a great amount of gang activities[45]. These

are occurrences that many Americans including African-Americans encounter in their

daily environment of the neighborhood in which they reside in. However, this is a

tremendous culture shock to a young man such as Sumbur and could possibly feed into

the stereotypes that were referenced earlier about the perception and stigma associated to

the African-American experience or the neighborhoods in which African-Americans live

in. Sumbur states that all these things serve as obstacles that he needs to overcome in

order to attain his education and assist people in his native countries who are devastated

with different problems from the gang violence or drug- dealing, and that problem is

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[44] *From West Africa to the Bronx.* New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-
Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16
[45] *From West Africa to the Bronx.* New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-
Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16

HIV/AIDS[46]. He also refers to the teasing s that he received in his school due to his pattern of speech and perhaps his heavy African accent[47]. Amadou Diallo, a seventeen year old, has assimilated into African-American culture. One can tell with his choice of hip-hop and urban attire. Contrary to the other boys, Diallo's life has changed for the better since he came to the United States. He mentions that he used to drink and smoke marijuana but ever since moving to the States he hasn't been taking part in those types of activities[48]. However, there is a still a hope of returning back to his native country. A sentiment of returning to their native countries seems to be a shared among all the boys despite of their experiences whether they are positive or negative.

Chapter 3:

While performing some research for this thesis paper, I decided to embark on some interviewing trips in order to get both the perspectives of African immigrants or children of African immigrants and African-Americans who had reasonable amount of interactions with African-Americans whether in a school, work place or any other type of social setting. One of my first places was a restaurant on Arthur Avenue called Sandkofa's. Sandkofa's is a very popular Ghanaian restaurant around the area and one of many established restaurant business that demonstrate the strong presence and influence of West African immigrants in this borough. In this case, the Ghanaian presence in the

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[46]*From West Africa to the Bronx*. New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16

[47]*From West Africa to the Bronx*. New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16

[48]*From West Africa to the Bronx*. New York Amsterdam News. New York, N.Y. Mar. 22-Mar.28. Vol . 98, Iss. 13; pg. 16

Bronx is evident with many establishments like Sandkofa's throughout various places in the borough. The scenery of Sandkofa's is a very interesting one from an observant perspective and eye. The cultural and social divide between the West African country and its surroundings is very evident. The scene outside of the restaurant consists of young and significant loud African-American men who are socializing and entertaining themselves by telling jokes or shooting dice in front of the neighborhood liquor store. Inside the Sandkofa's restaurant, one discovers a typical West African structure of manners and personal roles by individuals working or eating inside the restaurant. In addition to the smell of African delicacies such as fufu, one cannot help but notice the mannerisms exclusively associated with western African culture or even Sub-Saharan. A woman dressed in traditional African textile clothing with a colorful headwrap covering her braided hair is usually the servant of the food reminiscent of my mother's role when it came to serving dinner to the family. After requesting to take food to a nearby table after my order, the woman told me that I did not to carry my food or pay for it right away. Instead, she directed me to a nearby table, went back to get my order of food and brought it to me. She was the only female servant at the restaurant and was attending to every customer simultaneously. This chain of events surprised me at the retaining the almost all of western African cultural norms even amidst an American neighborhood and environment. While the woman was serving food to the customers, two men in the restaurant were attending to duties associated with the calculations of the restaurant's profits.

After finishing my meal, the woman brought me a bowl of water so that I could wash my hands before I proceeded to interview the two Ghanaian individuals on the next

table. I first introduced myself as a student researcher to the interviewees, presented them with my disclaimer of complete unrestricted honesty and promised them to keep them anonymous if they wished to remain so. My first series of question concentrated on the interviewees' backgrounds including their country of origin. Both men happened to be close friends form Ghana and had been in the United States for a little over ten years each. One man was single, and the other was married to an African-American woman. They had one child as a result of their marriage together. My second series of questions revolved around their thoughts about the presented idea of cultural divide in the Bronx between African immigrants and African-Americans. Both agreed that there was some cultural divide to some sort, and they both experienced that divide including the Ghanaian who is married to an African-American woman. The single Ghanaian referred to inherently different philosophies while approaching different aspects of life such as family, independence, education, work ethic and other varieties of subjects. For example, the difference in the value of education between his native Ghana and African-American communities in the Bronx is very polarizing. In his explanation, education determines the worth of a man in his native town, and one's status in the community. This emphasis on education in his native Ghana contributes to the relentless drive in the name of pursuit of an education of his fellow countrymen when presented that opportunity overseas or on foreign land. In addition to insatiable desire for obtaining an education, the allure of upward mobility from such economic hardships in his native country also serves a motivating factor for the attainment of an education. In his opinion, African-Americans in the United States do not value education as much as African immigrants. Education has become almost secondary to things such as entertainment and sports due to the lack of

emphasis or importance that education plays in certain African-American communities. The interview with the single Ghanaian man mostly revolved on the value of education and different philosophies as factors that create the divide between African immigrants and African-Americans. Due to this these two factors, he does not have any close African-American friends as a result due to different approaches and philosophies; however, he states that purely the fact that they are African-Americans does not hinder him to create relationships with African-Americans. In addition, he also adds that there are probably African-Americans who share the same philosophies as him but he has not yet found them.

The married interviewee concentrated more on the topics on the theme of relationships and the contrast in those aspects between the two cultures. He states that he and his African-American wife have a child, and their interactions between the child and each of the parents vary greatly. He attributes this variation in their interactions with the child as a result of different cultures and upbringing. The interviewee often refers to the American notion of independence and individualism in contrast to the African culture of extended family and its influence on the development of an individual's character. One of the problems that the interviewee faces with his wife is the amount of responsibility that his wife gives to the child. The interviewee thinks that African-Americans and Americans in general should greatly be involved in their children's from adolescence even after the age of eighteen; an age where an individual is considered an adult in the United States. He states that the African concept of the family extends beyond the two parents; instead, it involves other extended siblings who are always involved in the lives of the youth within their society. This aspect of Ghanaian culture definitely lacks in his family life

with his wife. Nobody else other than the two parents is heavily involved in the child's life. Therefore, outside influences such as friends and school have replaced the role of the extended family as far as molding the character and personality of the child. As a result, the structure of family life amongst African-immigrants and African-Americans can be regarded as one more factor that differentiates each culture from each other. He also agreed with the other interviewee in regards to different philosophies when it came to African immigrants in the Bronx and African-American residents. He states that even though he is married to an African-American wife, he does not have many African-American friends, and his interactions with African-Americans are only limited to the workplace. Interactions with fellow Ghanaian countrymen and other West Africans dominate in other social circles. When asked bout the possibility of returning back home, they both expressed the desire to return to their native countries in the near future.

After the interviews, I proceeded in returning to my desk to gather my things and leave the restaurant while the woman who had served me earlier was now collecting my plates. After conducting my interview, I reflected upon the notion of the extended family and its involvement in a youth's life. I realized that my extended family had tried to influence me even during my college life. They would consistently call me during every weekend to speak to me about a variety of things. These were aunts and uncles who were calling from other countries such as the Congo, South Africa and other foreign countries. This displays the great involvement that the extended family has even when the youth has grown up to be a young adult. It is almost as if every elder in the family such as aunts, uncle and grandparents are as much as responsible in discovering the child's best interests as the parents are.

My experience on the notion of the extended family is applicable to the Fordham University. Upon my arrival at Fordham University, the security guards were more welcoming once they found out that I was Congolese. Before mentioning my heritage, the security guards were checking identification cards as usual. However, I noticed they wanted to become more involved in the happenings *my life*. They were always asking me about my academic life and always offered extended advice about adjusting to the college lifestyle. They even offered phone numbers in order to keep in contact with them and ask for assistance if I needed any. This whole display of African solidarity is an extension of the family involvement purely because these security guards regarded me as another African brother despite the differences in nationalities. They were able to recognize that I was another product of African immigration whose parents once shared the same experiences as far as transitioning into a new country and able to earn an honest living. Until this day, some of the security guards had even kept in contact with my parents in Atlanta and sometimes act as overseers of my activities at Fordham. One of the security guards had actually lectured me about some of the behaviors that the students were engaging with a special emphasis on the consumption of alcohol. They warned me about some of the excessive and binge drinking also promised to contact my parents if they ever saw me partaking in those types of behaviors. This phenomenon of community-building and extended brotherhood is manifested in West African communities in New York City. One might commit a mistake by perceiving African as one monolithic group; however, one has to understand that immigrants may come from the same region of Africa (in this case West Africa) but they are citizens of different countries. Therefore, they do not necessarily share the same customs or possess the same societal values,

standard and norms as other Africans from different countries. However, when African

immigrants of different nationalities arrive in New York City, they find a common

element and component that enable them to create these extended communities and

families. One of those components is the religion of Islam. Islam enables them to

construct communities where national identities or places of origins are almost invisible

but instead a religion that teaches a sense of brotherhood and family prevails[49]. The

religion even goes as far as united some West African traders from different countries for

economic purposes. The importance of family however goes beyond regulating each

other's activities and behaviors but also emotional and social support. Emotional and

social support becomes very important especially when immigration and cultural divides

lead to isolation from the main socio-cultural environment[50]. These barriers between one

and the dominant socio-cultural environment transform African immigrants into

powerless human beings because they are in an environment where they do not possess

any control over[51]. Therefore, the African psyche which is dependent on the collective,

clan and family becomes in dire of emotional and social support in a society and

environment where they can be categorized as social outcastes[52]. Besides social and

emotional support, the extended African family provides a sense of self-worth and

efficiency in whatever field of life such as school or the workplace. The importance of

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[49] Stoller, Paul & Jasmin Tahmaseb McConatha. *City Life: West African Communities in New York.* Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. Vol. 30. 6 December 2001. pp. 651-677.
[50] Stoller, Paul & Jasmin Tahmaseb McConatha. *City Life: West African Communities in New York.* Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. Vol. 30. 6 December 2001. pp. 651-677.

[51] Stoller, Paul & Jasmin Tahmaseb McConatha. *City Life: West African Communities in New York.* Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. Vol. 30. 6 December 2001. pp. 651-677.

[52] Stoller, Paul & Jasmin Tahmaseb McConatha. *City Life: West African Communities in New York.* Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. Vol. 30. 6 December 2001. pp. 651-677.

the extended family even stretches in scenarios where single males who have left their

wives and children in their native countries and find themselves alone in a new world.

The networks among the various African communities established in New York City are

in a position to provide support and assistance for individuals in these difficult situations.

The interviewee also indicated that his wife's family was not greatly involved as

he wanted in his child's life. The fast pace life in working middle class America demands

for both parents and even members of the extended family can be preoccupied with their

own professions and their own children's well being, education and upbringing. All these

factors present some restrictions in the involvement of a significant amount of family

members into the life of a child. An example of this dilemma was evident earlier in

slightly different context. The teenager from West Africa explained how life in the

United States had infringed with the routines of his religious life. When he was living in

his native country, he prayed for approximately five times during the day; now, he is

limited to praying for only once a day due to the busy schedule at school. In the case of

the married interviewee, native cultural practices are sometimes compromised in the

name of adjusting or assimilating into a new culture.

My next interviewee was an international Nigerian who had come to the United

States in 2003 from his native western country of Nigeria. He had been living in the

Bronx in the past four years and had a significant amount of interactions with African-

Americans. He had attended a private Catholic school in Nigeria and had come to the

United States to pursue an advanced education in a university. He tells me that when he

came to the United States and arrived at his school, he would mostly identify more with

white students than African-Americans on campus. He was critical of what he called a

culture of materialism that was existent within the African-Americans who he encountered and interacted with in his school campus. He felt that African-Americans were always worried about the superficial elements of an individual. He later on explained that he would later be critical on the style of urban or hip-hop attire that young African-American males would adapt because he states that "he does not make them look serious or presentable" to others. The next topic of the interview revolved around his perception of African-American women. He saw African-American women as somewhat confrontational and less courteous *Thar* of the white females on his campus. He does have a white girlfriend and cites that his perception of African-American females did in fact play a factor in his decision to have a white girlfriend. It was not a matter of preference over one race for him but instead it regarded culture. He states that he would be also involved with a Nigerian woman if the opportunity presented itself. Again, one can see the *fascinating* distinction between culture and race with this specific interview with the Nigerian student. The cultural differences and the perception toward other blacks is so strong that he in fact resorted to dating white females for the first time in his life. As a result of this interview, one can conclude the great cultural disconnect when the student referred to the urban attire the young African-American males wore. This conclusion by the interviewee about the "seriousness" of African-American males could perhaps have been attributed to the presentation of hip-hop as somewhat an anti-establishment movement in which the *main* faces of this culture are African-American males. Since it has become globally marketable, individuals from all corners of the globe including Africa see black American faces connected to this culture and sometimes it might be the only avenue in which African-Americans are represented in the media in front of a worldwide audience.

The perception of some

This image perhaps contributes to some of those immigrant groups who arrive to the United States prior to any interactions and contacts with African-Americans. The concluding part of the interview involved the student's expression toward the return back to Africa after attaining his American education in the United States. He had planned to become a physician and practice in Nigeria.

This student's experience in the United States also demonstrates the diversity and variety of African immigrants. The notion and image of the hard-working African immigrant family who works tirelessly in order to attain economic prosperity and be incorporated into the American force is applicable in many cases perhaps even the majority of the time about the African immigrant experience. From the international West African student to the local African vendors whom spend their workday on Fordham Road selling bootlegged albums and movies, those young men are engaging in activities that one *epitomize* ~~might regard as the idea~~ of "hustle" popularized by African-American hip-hop youth culture. The notion of hustling in terms of selling CDs or other images correlated to what hip-hop presents as somewhat a code of ethics or lifestyle that its followers should apply. This type of integration between the world of African-American hip-hop and an African immigrant *erode some* ~~disintegrate any~~ of the stereotypes that individuals may present about what the African immigrant experience is supposed to look like. Asides from the images of Africans presented on Fordham Road, one can explore West 125th Street in Harlem where an abundance of young Malians cannot be distinguished from young African-American males from their hip-hop aesthetics to their interactions with African-American and Latin females. One also has to understand that children of the immigrant families also assimilate to the popular youth culture despite some of the cultural differences that

might be obvious. I'm an example of this specific scenario. I was always aware of my Congolese heritage and submitted to the process of learning different dialects or languages spoken in my parents' hometown and country. However, I am also an American and have been "americanized". I consider myself a part of hip-hop culture of African-American youth. The majority of my friends are African-Americans, and I consider myself African-American. This phenomenon just displays an array of different and diverse experiences that African immigrants encounter upon their arrival in the United States. African immigrants are not different from any other immigrant group that has made the trek from their native countries to the United States. Despite their strong sense of cultural identity, some immigrants are embracing of the new culture and want their families to become immersed into a new society and way of life. When looking at the African immigrant experience, the dynamics of assimilating and retaining their won identity could become very complicated. Many immigrants still possess hopes of returning to their native countries but the conditions of civil-war stricken countries have not greatly ameliorated. Therefore, they have already established a stable community and family in the United States, and some of their children are born in the United States. They have established an American identity just like any other African-American whose parents were born in the United States.

Chapter 4:

During the research, I decided to pursue the other perspective of this relationship. Since this thesis explores the interactions of Africans and African-Americans in the Bronx, it is necessary to obtain both sides of this relationship or interaction despite the more in-depth emphasis on the African immigrant experience. Before conducting

interviews with African-American individuals, some of the stereotypes or pre-conceived

notions about African immigrants surfaced when reflecting on the previous conversations

that I personally had with African-Americans who did not possess any knowledge of my

ethnicity upon my arrival at Fordham University. The perceptions that some individuals

ranged from historical references of slavery to contemporary issues of African pride and

arrogance were brought to light with my insightful interactions with these specific

African-American individuals. From the perspective of African-Americans, the cultural

differences between Africans and African-Americans are attributed to African arrogance

which leads to their separation from African-Americans. According to African-

Americans, this arrogance stems from the reprehension that some African immigrants

possess with the term "African-American". This term is not recognized by African

immigrants because they express feeling of a disconnect between black Americans and

the continent of Africa. Therefore, black Americans should not adapt the term because

they are not African and do not possess any element of African culture.

As a reaction to African disapproval of the term, African-Americans want to

disassociate themselves from Africans and refer to the historical context of slavery in

order to validate some of the reasons that might cause African-Americans to distance

themselves from African immigrants. The argument around slavery often highlights the

fact that Africans sold other Africans into slavery during the trans-Atlantic slave trade;

therefore, some African-Americans feel that their personal resentments toward African

immigrants is substantiated due to that argument. As a result, some African-Americans

develop some sentiments of resentments toward African immigrants as a result of what

they perceive as African immigrants who are separating or distancing themselves from

African-Americans. As a result, they therefore resort to argue that their previous enslavement is partly attributed to Africans and contemporary African immigrants in the United States. While searching for African-Americans for my interview, I encountered African-American interviewees who had a significant amount of interactions with African immigrants or children of African immigrants. Both were residents of the Bronx for little over four years and had noticed a great presence of African immigrants or children of African immigrants in their neighborhood, school and workplace. Both interviewees had attended lived together in the Bronx for approximately five years and had created great friendships with African females from countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. The first interviewee is originally from the southern region of the United States and had moved to New York City in order to pursue her college education. She states that her hometown was not a very diverse place. Her hometown was mainly composed of two groups, and these two racial groups consisted only of African-Americans and whites. Upon her arrival to New York City (especially Bronx), she encountered a new degree of diversity with various Latin groups ranging from Puerto Rican to Dominicans living in harmony with African-Americans in addition to the majority population of whites whom she encountered in her college campus. She was amazed with the degree of diversity that she encountered both at her institution and other social circles in her environment. She had also befriended African friends at her institution, and they had become some of her best friends. During my interview, she stated that she had a good relationship with her African friends, and the cultural divide did not take instrumental role with her relationships with her African friends. She did however notice a difference of the role of the family specifically the parents. Contrary to the role of her parents in both her social

and academic life, my interviewee was amazed at the involvement of her African friends'
parents into the life of their children. Especially, the academic lives of her friends were
one of the primary concerns of her friends' parents.

Despite her friends' age of adulthood, the interviewee claims that her friends'
parents were somehow responsible for molding some aspect of her friends' lives. Once
again, one encounters the importance of family in African culture and tradition even
during one's adulthood. Sometimes in this instant, the independence of an adult female
has to be compromised with the parents who want the best interest for their children or
child. However, her friends seemed to have assimilated into American culture according
to my interviewee. They did not dwell into the cultural divide instead they had kept a
balance between their African identity and black American identity. In fact, the
interviewee did not see any aspect of their African identity surface during their
interactions. Although, they might have kept both separated according to social circles;
when interacting with friends, the American youth element of their personality surfaced
whereas the African immigrant component of their identity dominated among their time
with their parents and other members of their extended family. But neither elements of
their personality overlapped each other when interacting with different individuals in
their social circles. This could be a characteristic of children of immigrants who were
being raised around a "African' environment in their homes and perhaps attended schools
with American children where they had to adapt and take on a new identity in order to
identify or make friends with American children either at school or in a social space
where African culture was not prevalent and almost non-existent. Therefore, the risk of
cultural divide that seems to be a major cause in some of the tensions between African

immigrants and black Americans becomes minimized compared to African immigrants who have just arrived in the United States. They have been given a chance to familiarize themselves with American culture; hence, the cultural divide asserts itself and becomes the root of division between two groups of people.

Chapter 5:

The cultural divide is not of course race-based. The images of African countries that are presented on televisions in the Western world affect everybody's perception of the continent. The images of Africa most often revolve around what some may call the primitive or uncivilized aspect of the culture. Since African-Americans are very much part of American culture and the western world, their perception of Africa might be influenced or shaped by the images of the media since they too are part of the western world. Odehyee Abena Owiredua, Ghanaian immigrant who resides in New York City, recognizes that a strain in the relationship between African immigrants and African-Americans exists. She states "I love black people, but there is a negative relationship between African immigrants and African-Americans"[53]. She also says that African-Americans look down and feels inferior to them sometimes due to the ignorant questions that she is often asked by her African-American peers referring to her living conditions whether she lives in a house or not[54]. She feels hurt when asked these questions These types of questions from African-Americans could create some type of resentment on the

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[53] Fears, Darryl. "A Diverse and Divided Black Community: As Foreign Population Grows, Nationality Trumps Skin Color". Washington Post. 24 Feb. 2002. Page A01.
[54] Fears, Darryl. "A Diverse and Divided Black Community: As Foreign Population Grows, Nationality Trumps Skin Color". Washington Post. 24 Feb. 2002. Page A01.

part of Owiredua but those types of questions are not solely limited to African-Americans but perhaps any American who does not have a clue about African culture and views Africa as a large concept or even could consider it a country. African-Americans in this case happen to be the Americans whom the majority of African immigrants share almost the same social circles. However, the projections of these negative images about the African continent might cause some African-Americans to disassociate or separate themselves from any ties or connections that they might have toward the African continent.

In addition to the factors of cultural divide, black communities especially in New York City and other urban center throughout the country have become more diverse, and they are no longer monolithic as a result of black immigrants primarily from the African continent and the black Caribbean island nations in the West Indies. A significant amount of individuals in these populations are interacting with African-Americans due to their living conditions and location of their neighborhoods. Skin color becomes a secondary issue when a dynamic presents itself where the majority of the population would be considered black but there exist a variety of languages spoken or the English language spoken with different accents in addition to the differences of customs within the family bloodline. All these components emphasize the importance of immigrant cultures in the face of a new society and country that demands some type of assimilation in order for a group to partly be incorporated into the American way of life. Therefore, the retaining of one's culture might not always be compatible with the dominant culture, and conflict or friction may arise as a result of the difference.

However there are instances were unity and realization that any non-white ethnic or racial groups are not exempted from being subjugated to the systemic racism and discrimination imposed by a white supremacist society. It is evident on the unjustifiable senseless murder of West African Guinean immigrant Ammadou Diallo in 1999 by New York Police Department officers. The mobilization of the community in the Bronx which consisted of both African immigrants and African-Americans from the neighborhood created a unity where cultural divide and ethnic identification was almost invisible at this instant but the mentality of multiple police officers who were responsible for the murder of a hard-working immigrant who consistently sent money back to his West African native country in order to alleviate some of his family members' financial burden and situation. The officers who murdered Ammadou Diallo did not ponder if he was an African immigrant or African-American instead he was black and therefore gave them justification to devalue the worth of his life and senselessly murdered him as a result. Due to this tragic incidence, one can remember a unity amongst a predominantly black crowd that ranged from mourning women dressed in traditional West African garment such as Kakiadou Diallo, mother of Ammadou Diallo, to young African-American males in their urban and hip-hop attire. The crowd was uniformly outraged as a result of a white justice system with its fraternities of white police officers who would have murder a man because of the color of his skin and not his cultural heritage nor his place of origin. I think that these two groups have to come to realize that division between African immigrants and African-Americans is equally detrimental to both groups. For African immigrants, their cultural pride sometimes could potentially prevent them that they are not going to face the same problem that African-Americans face amidst living in a

country where they are the minority whereas in their native country, they made up the black majority and access to most available resources and opportunities. One of the complaints that some African immigrants are the lack of upward mobility amongst African-Americans or the unwillingness on the part of African-Americans to take advantage of opportunities that the United States provides for its citizens; however, the history of racial discrimination, struggle for civil rights and racial segregation still has some of its effects today. These types of factors rarely enter the African consciousness when an African individual come to these types of conclusions about the state of African-Americans in the United States. In addition to the absorption of the African-American images that are broadcasted throughout the world by the media, some African immigrants have to learn to apply this image to the broad spectrum of all African-Americans in the United States. Usually, these images are not positive since they are portrayed through the medium of mainstream hip-hop popular culture which displays African-American men as violent gangsters and African-American women as disposable objects of their sexual fantasies, materialism or violence. Despite being purely entertainment, the expansion of these images could create pre-conceived notions about African-Americans that individuals who initially live outside African-American social circles might internalize and come to false conclusions as a result.

Some African misconceptions might revolve around the perception of primitiveness in their practices such as the discovery of practices of polygamy in the Malian family who was involved in the tragic Bronx fire. Individuals need to realize that African immigrants are no different from the early eastern European immigrants and Italians who migrated to the New York City at the turn of the twentieth century searching

for opportunities and possible avenues in order to succeed in life and perhaps return to their country of origin when they find themselves in a better situation in life. Some feel the need to retain as much as possible of their culture and way of life despite finding themselves in a new country and society. Therefore, limited interactions with other ethnic groups might be the solution for some individuals who could sometimes translate total separation from other groups but it emphasizes the importance of culture especially for a group of individuals who are displaced from their natural element and environment due to a variety of social strife. A longing and desire for their native country are very much existent among these individuals, and the re-enactment of establishments such as restaurant and clothing shops normally found at home and now being present in the United States in the communities in which they live in is very much a testament to their current state of upholding hope for a possible return.