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# Land of My Father: The Creation, Maintenance, and Reconstruction of the Haitian Cultural Identity Among Second Generation Haitian Americans while Acculturating into the American Culture

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Land of My Father:  
The Creation, Maintenance, and Reconstruction of the Haitian Cultural Identity Among  
Second Generation Haitian Americans while Acculturating into the American Culture

By

Vadricka Y. Etienne

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
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Major Professor: Navita Cummings James, Ph.D.  
Elizabeth M. Aranda, Ph.D.

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## Chapter One: Literature Review and Research Questions

One short plane ride or a perilous sea voyage separates the southeast coast of the United States from the country of Haiti. Haiti is constantly pushed into American mainstream media because of its political unrest, HIV-AIDS challenges, bouts with tragic hurricanes, food shortages and most recently its catastrophic earthquake and consequent bout with cholera. Every year, Haitian immigrants arrive in the United States with hopes of a better future for themselves and their children. These children grow up in a limbo culture. They are not quite Haitian and they are not quite American either. Instead of choosing one or the other, many embrace both cultures, creating a Haitian-American culture.

### Haiti

Haiti is located on the island Hispaniola in the Caribbean. This island was first discovered by Christopher Columbus on his journey to Asia in 1492 and later became one of the first European colonies in the Americas. The western portion of the island became a part of the French colonial empire. After a successful slave uprising in 1804, this area became Haiti, the first independent black country in the western hemisphere.

This highly distinctive history of Haiti has led to the development of a unique sense of race for Haitians (Zéphir 2004). Because their experience with white domination was limited, Haitians were used to having blacks in positions of power which led to a stronger sense of racial pride. Race, then, was constructed based on nationality as opposed to skin color (Zéphir 2004). For Haitians, the term “black” does not carry some of the negative, racist American connotations of black as meaning “inferiority, minority, inequality, and oppression” (p. 120). Instead “black” has positive meaning and is synonymous with “pride and unflinching independence” (Zéphir 2004:119).

### Haiti to America: The First Generation

Immigration to the United States was initially limited, with most Haitians preferring to go to countries that they had the most linguistic, political, and economic ties. In Haiti's case that meant France and other former French colonies. When Francois Duvalier came into power in 1957, the United States became more involved in Haitian politics, with President Kennedy explicitly inviting Haitians to the United States as an immigrant location (Stepick 1998). This, as well as the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, initiated the start of the most recent and largest wave of Haitian immigrants, mostly working class (Lee 2000).

Culturally, the first generation faced difficulties adjusting to the United States because they were viewed as "triple minorities"—black, foreign, and speak a relatively unknown language, Haitian Creole (Stepick et al 2001: 236). Coming into the American racial system, Haitians were viewed "on the basis of physical appearance, rather than cultural criteria, and [treated] as members of the Afro-American population" (Woldenmikael 1989:3). Unfortunately, Haitians are described by all of the different groups in the most negative terms possible. Haitians definitely have a bad reputation (Waters 1999; Butterfield 2002). In Haiti, however, Haitians have a different concept of race.

Keeping the Haitian identity reminds others "that [Haitians] have a home, one to which they might want to return" (St. Jean 2007:156). Haitians fight to hold on to their ethnic identity because they have "discovered that by claiming a Haitian identity, they receive better treatment from white Americans than by claiming a black identity" (Woldenmikael 1989: 45). First generation Haitian immigrants would rather hold on to their Haitian identity because "the label Haitian expresses more positive meanings of Blackness than does Black American" (Zéphir 2004: 121).

St. Jean (2007) recognizes markers of Haitian identity as "history, language, religion, stories, folk tales, [and] ideas of race" (p. 15). For these reasons, Haitians will attempt to

recreate the life they left behind by “speak[ing] Creole, cook[ing] Haitian food, and spend[ing] time chatting about Haiti and the Haitians around them” (Woldemikael 1989: 232). Certain “beliefs and behavior taken for granted in the homeland are often given more significance, especially when there is no longer access to them or the surrounding society ignores their importance” (Stepick 1998:74). The maintenance of their ethnicity acts “as a means of survival in a race-defined and racist society” (Zéphir 2004: 121). While the first generation recognizes racism exists in the United States, they believe “it can be overcome or circumvented through hard work, perseverance and the right values and attitudes” (Waters 1999: 309). The need to be identified as Haitian served an important purpose for first generation Haitian immigrants but that purpose is no longer valid for the second generation.

### Haitian Americans: The Second Generation

The second generation is identified as “the sons and daughters of the sizable Haitian community currently residing in the United States” (Zéphir 2001: 6). Although this group can be segmented into two smaller groups, the true definition of the second generation limits the group to the children born in the United States (Zhou 1997). It is impossible to know exactly how many second generation Haitians are currently living in the United States because there is no way to determine that information (Waters 1994:797). The second generation calls the United States home, “they are fluent in English with no accent; some may also have an active or passive knowledge of Haitian Creole (French in rare instances)” (Zéphir 2004: 129).

The main difficulty that afflicts second generation Haitians is the balance between the traditions of their parents and the tradition of the country they call home (Waters 1994; Zhou 1997). There is definite pressure from parents to identify with the Haitian community to avoid becoming like African Americans (St. Jean 2007). This group faces the specific

challenge of having little to no direct connect to Haiti, aside from their parents. The concept of what it means to be “Haitian in the United States comes largely from self conscious creation and projection of Haitian culture” (Stepick 1998:74). Does the second generation Haitian Americans follow in the manner of their parents and assert their ethnic identity of Haitian or do they blend in by becoming American? Is there a possibility of combining both identities?

Several factors affect the identity choices of the Haitian second generation. Waters (1999) uses gender, class, and race as the factors that determine choice of ethnic identity. The role of gender plays an important part in the development of the ethnic identity choice. With migration, the family structure changes, especially the relationship between the parents and children as well as the gender dynamics. About 55 percent of the ventures to the United States were initiated by women (Lee 2000). While the mother works, the daughters are usually handling the responsibilities of the home. Haitian daughters are able to identify with their mothers’ undertaking as a black immigrant in the United States and develop a “dual frame of reference through which they can compare their lives with that of their mothers” (Lopez 2002: 81). This gendered division of labor also offers an establishment of “[the young women’s] gender identities as independent women who nurtured others and did not need a man to take of them” (Lopez 2002: 81). Women are viewed as the “keepers of culture and family traditions” (Suarez Orozco and Suarez Orozco 78). While this position usually applies to the first generation, this role attempts to protect the children from the negative effects of Americanization. This is most apparent in the treatment of young women versus young men:

...becoming ‘Americanized’ is synonymous with becoming sexually promiscuous...As a result, the activities of the girls outside the home tend to be heavily monitored and controlled. While the boys may be encouraged to venture into the new world, girls and young women



are most likely to be kept close to the family hearth. (Suarez Orozco and Suarez Orozco p. 79).

Young men rarely take on any household responsibilities, allowed to spend much of their time outside. As a result, “men expressed traditional views on family and gender roles...lack[ing] many of the social supports that their female counterparts thrived on” (Lopez 2002: 82). The interaction with the wider society, dependent on the child’s gender, affects the choice of ethnic identity; “in effect, girls experience less overt hostility and exclusion by mainstream society, and boys experience a greater number of attacks on their rights to be full-fledged member of society. In terms of identity, these situations create more of a direct choice for the boys” (Waters 1999: 319). While young men are more likely to take on an monocultural identity of either African American or Haitian, “girls more than boys are likely to choose a hyphenated identity as Haitian Americans and they appear to be more flexible, more willing to adopt African American culture styles while still expressing pride in Haitian roots” (Stepick 1998:67).

A second factor that affects the second generation’s choice of ethnic identity is the socioeconomic status of the parents: “the current state and future prospects of immigrant children are related to the advantages or disadvantages that accrue to the socioeconomic status of their parents” (Zhou 1997:66). One inference that can be made is that “the children of poor parents will not keep an ethnic identity, and the children whose parents achieve social mobility will keep the ethnic identity” (Waters 1999: 325). Living in poorer conditions and constantly interacting with the native minority group, African Americans, the second generation assimilates into that culture and group, “not [the] generic, mainstream Americans, but specifically African Americans and primarily poor African Americans—most vulnerable to American racism” (Stepick 1998: 65). Second generation Haitians with a middle class background have more of an advantage with the ability to attend better schools, have better

security, and more support whereas those in lower socioeconomic positions are apt to grow up in “underprivileged neighborhoods subject to poverty, poor schools, violence and drugs” (Zhou 1997: 68). A middle class upbringing offers a more positive American experience in which the second generation is less likely to face “intense, specific anti-Haitian prejudice and this environment it is more acceptable to display ethnic pride” (Stepick 1998: 64). The ethnic identity of the second generation “would depend on how strongly their parents stressed their Haitian heritage” (Waters 1999: 286).

The third factor is related to racial identity. Unlike the offspring of many other Caribbean, Central and South American immigrants, when second generation Haitians shed their parents’ ethnic identity, the second generation Haitians does not become white Americans. They become black Americans (Woldemikael 1989; Kastiniz et al 2001). Waters (1999) explains that the desire to become American resides in the fact that many second generation Haitians call the United States home. And legally, by their birth in the United States, they are citizens of the United States. Haiti is their parents’ country while America is theirs. As Water (1999) suggests, “the ways in which these youngsters experience and react to racial discrimination influence the type of racial and ethnic identity they develop” (p. 287).

There are usually three ways that the second generation can identify themselves ethnically, “a black American, an ethnic or hyphenated national origin, and an immigrant identity” (Waters 1994:795). The first ethnic identity—black American—usually “stress[es] that they are American because they were born here and are disdainful of their parents lack of understanding of American social system” (Waters 1999:296). The lack of an accent, full command of the English language, and understanding of American traditions and cultural values, allow second generation Haitians to push any relation to Haiti to the side (Zéphir 2001). This is possible through changing the pronunciation and/or spelling of names (i.e.,

Pierre to Peter, Marie to Mary, etc) and “claim[ing] to be African American” (Zéphir 2001: 100). The most extreme form of the black identity is to completely deny the existence of Haitian heritage or to “commit a form of cultural suicide” (Stepick 1998: 60). It can be described as a “complete rupture from Haitianness and strong inclination toward Black American monoculturalism” (Zéphir 2004:135). The ones who fall into this extreme are usually in high school, influenced by their peers and the earnest desire to fit in—although there is a possibility of a rediscovery of their Haitian ancestry (Zéphir 2004). Once they gain acceptance from African Americans, Stepick (1998) finds that many of those who once repressed their cultural identity reassert “their pride in their Haitian heritage...they can wear Haitian clothes, eat Haitian food, speak Creole in front of African Americans and declare to both African Americans and those Haitians who are still cover-ups, ‘I’m a real Haitian...!’ (p. 73).

#### Bi-cultural and Hyphenated Identities of Haitian Americans

The best description of the ethnic or hyphenated national origin identity comes from Zéphir (2004) who states that “individuals are bicultural in the sense that neither culture is alien to them” (p. 133). For this category, the most common identifying term is Haitian American. The purpose of this identity is to resolve the rejection Haitians received from “black Americans because they [were] foreigners and [did] not share black culture... [and from] white Americans because they [were] black” (Woldemikael 1989:108).

The characteristics of this group include their love and enjoyment of Haitian food and music and other various aspects of the Haitian culture. Their understanding of the country, however, is limited; “Haiti is linked to heritage, ancestry, and roots...the United States... [is an] everyday reality” (134). This group “agree[s] with their parents and report seeing a strong difference between themselves and black Americans, stressing that being

black is not synonymous with being black American” (Waters 1999: 290). This group is “more likely to than American-identified to attend [Haitian] cultural events, especially [Haitian] churches, or to belong to sport teams that were made up of all [Haitians]” (Waters 1999: 295). Haitian writers describe the benefits of the Haitian American identity. Latour (1996), a Haitian American journalist, clarifies:

I have skated precariously along the hyphen of my Haitian-American identity. Across that line I glide with relative freedom. I bask in the efficiencies of modern life--health-food stores, direct-deposit checking, interoffice envelopes--while relishing cinnamon-spiked Haitian oatmeal and accessing the volatile debate Haitians love more than any other: politics. (P. 46).

Although the second generation sees themselves as Haitian-American, everyone else sees them as “black Americans and [do] not notice that they are ethnically different” (Waters 1994: 806). Consequently, a problem that this group faces is proving their Haitianness. This problem “exposes the second generation to a great deal of racism. When whites learn that they are second- generation immigrants, the whites are likely to let them know that they think of them as exceptions to the rule—the rule being that most blacks are not good people” (Waters 1999:293). According to Waters (1994), one strategy this group utilizes to do this is to attempt to impress others with their non-African American background (p.805). Some conscious ways of expressing ethnicity include use of slight accent, incorporating ethnic background into conversation as well as carrying some form of ethnic identity such as a flag key chain (Water 1999).

The final ethnic identity available to second generation Haitians is the immigrant identity. Most second generation US born in this category, a very small amount, “had strong family roots on the islands, were frequent visitors to the islands and had plans to return to live there as adults” (Waters 1994:810). These individuals feel as if there is no better term than Haitian to describe them (Zéphir 2004). According to the informants of Zéphir’s (2001) field study, an authentic Haitian (re: second generation) had the following qualities:

He or she is a dark-skinned individual who was born and raised in Haiti and chooses to replicate Haitian cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions in the United States... [loyal] to Haiti...active use of Haitian Creole with Haitians...valuing hard work, education, and achievement...disapproval of African American popular cultural styles...and a net sense of superiority over other Black groups. (P. 78).

One problem faced by this ethnic identity is the “American racial classification system, which pushes toward an either/or designation of people as black or white, makes the immigrant option harder to hold onto” (Waters 1999: 308).

Past research has focused on the patterns of assimilation of the second generation Haitian Americans as a whole. Adolescents or young adults “are developmentally capable of choosing an ethnic role,” with the decision taken on during this time one that will last into adulthood (Rotheram-Borus 1993:82). This study will focus on the US born Haitian American college student population in a low immigrant population city in the state of Florida to see how this cohort is able to balance its Haitian cultural identity with their American cultural identity based on their chosen ethnic identity.

Main Question(s):

How, if at all, do second generation Haitian American create, maintain, and reconstruct their Haitian cultural identity within and or in juxtaposition to their U.S. born identities?

Sub questions:

1. What factors correlate with second generation Haitian-Americans (a) who choose to construct an African American identity and (b) those that choose to create a bicultural Haitian-American identity?
2. How do second generation Haitian-Americans construct their personal ethnic identities?
3. How do second generation Haitian-Americans balance a bicultural identity of Haitian and American?

4. How, if at all, does gender affect US born second generation Haitian-American ethnic self identification?
5. How do second generation Haitians-Americans talk about the weaving together of the two cultures? (e.g., what language do they use and what stories do they tell about)

## Chapter Two: Methodology

Focusing on the sustainment of the Haitian culture among second generation Haitian college students born in the United States, this study is a qualitative and quantitative study of how US born second generation Haitian Americans attempt to create, maintain, and reconstruct their Haitian cultural identities while still acculturating into American culture. The data will be collected in two forms: an online questionnaire and in-depth personal interviews. Both forms will be organized through thematic analysis.

### Research Design: Online Survey and In-Depth Interviews

This study will utilize an online questionnaires and in-depth personal interviews with second generation Haitian American college students. Because I have personal experience with this phenomenon of Haitian American identity, I want to understand the experience of others who face the same situation (Leedy 2005). A qualitative research design will be chosen because it allows for the understanding of the second generation Haitian Americans perspectives and understandings of a particular situation. To suit my research purposes, this study will be both a quantitative study utilizing simple descriptive percentages as well as a qualitative study incorporating in-depth, face-to-face interviews and three open ended questions on the online questionnaire. The purpose will be to comprehend the lived experience of second generation Haitian Americans through how they talk about and make sense of their own lives rather than relying on the observations of the researcher in the field.

### Questionnaire and In Depth Interview Participants

To be eligible, the participant must be born in the United States (or immigrated by the age of 5), have at least one parent who is Haitian (born and raised in Haiti), be 18 and/or older, and attend a post-secondary institution in the state of Florida.

Participants will be recruited by various means, with each method used with the hopes that a snowballing effect will take place. Announcements, inviting students to participate, were made during multicultural organizations meetings (e.g. Kreole Konnect, Africa United, and Caribbean Alliance). A mass email will also be sent through the list serves of each organization to reach other members who may not attend the meetings during which I will make the announcements.

### Data Collection

As stated earlier, the study will be completed in two parts: an anonymous questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The first stage will consist of administering a questionnaire that inquires of perception of Haitian American students in Florida (See Appendix A for complete questionnaire).

#### A. Questionnaire

A questionnaire will be constructed through Survey Monkey, an online provider of web based surveys, to administer to the students of Haitian descent at various Florida universities and colleges. A professional account subscription will be used because it provides advance features such as unlimited questions, unlimited responses, the ability to filter response, cross tab responses and the ability to export and print responses. Respondents will fill out the questionnaire on a computer with Internet capabilities. Each respondent will be provided with a link, via email or Facebook that will lead them directly to the main page of the questionnaire. The main page of the questionnaire will explain the purpose of the project, potential contributions of to the study, as well as participants' rights. The respondents will be guaranteed anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses.

#### B. In- depth Interviews



Personal interviews with eight to ten second generation Haitian Americans will be used to understand their personal perspectives and how they have or plan to maintain their Haitian culture. Some of those who participated in the survey may have been unknowingly solicited to participate in the interviews based on their availability. Many of the same techniques used to garner participants for the online questionnaire will be used to get participants for the interviews.

The interviews will be semi structured and audio recorded. Before each interview, I will review the Consent Form (Appendix B) which reiterated the purpose of the study as well as the participants' rights and ability to leave the interview without any negative consequences.

### c. IRB Approval

The approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB) will be sought for the second portion of the research project, the in depth interviews. While the online questionnaire, according to the definition offered by the IRB, fit the requirement of research, it did not directly involve human subjects or ask personal, identifiable information from the subjects. In order to ensure that no personal information was taken, the IP address will not be recorded nor will it ask for particular information that could identify the respondent. Approval will be needed for the in depth interviews because personal information is needed to help offer an understanding of the lived experience of the second generation Haitian Americans. Each interviewee will be given a consent form before the interview began. I will explain the points of the form, give the interviewee time to review the form, and then if the participants agrees, the form will be signed by both parties.

### Data Analysis

After the data is collected, questionnaire results will be tabulated and frequencies of responses will be recorded. The opened ended responses will be reviewed, identified, and coded according to recurring themes. Interviews will be transcribed. The final results, of the online questionnaire data and interview transcriptions, will be an overall description of this phenomenon through the words and experiences of the second generation Haitian American population.

## Chapter Three: Results

The results from this study are presented in two sections: Questionnaire Results and Interview Results.

### Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire was developed from the set of proposed research questions. Parts of the questionnaire were a revised version of the questions used from Zéphir's survey from *Trends in Ethnic Identification Among Second-Generation Haitian Immigrants in New York City (2001)* as well as adaptations of various acculturation scales. The remaining questions were composed to find an answer to the research questions. Out of forty-eight questions, three questions were free response/open-ended. The questionnaire, as a whole, addressed issues of basic demographics, language, ethnic and racial identity, family background, and sense of belonging in the United States. The participants were told that the questionnaire might take about 5-10 minutes though, on average, it actually took about 20 minutes. I underestimated the amount of time the participant would need to complete the questionnaire. The results from the questionnaire were collected during the time frame of four months (December 2009-March 2010).

### *Demographics*

There were 90 questionnaires fully completed online through Survey Monkey but only sixty-five questionnaires fulfilled all the requirements for participation. Of these, fifty-one (78.5%) were completed by women and fourteen (21.5%) taken by men. The average age was 21, with 26.2% of the respondents being this age. The majority of the students were completing their last two years of college. Fifty-seven (89.1%) respondents were born in the United States but only fourteen respondents stated that they were actual U.S. citizens. For sixty-two (95.4%) respondents, both parents are Haitian; for one (1.5%) respondent, only

their mother was Haitian while for two (3.1%) respondents only their father was Haitian-born.

For twenty-one (33.3%) of the respondents, their mother's high level educational attainment was some college; whereas for the fathers, thirty-one (49.2%) respondents said that high school was the highest level of educational attainment for them. For the sixty-five of the respondents, fifty-six (86.2%) are single, one (1.5%) is living with a partner, seven respondents (10.8%) are married, and one (1.5%) is divorced. Four (6.2%) respondents were parents, with their children under the age of two. Thirty-one (47.7%) of the respondents were junior and seniors. Thirty-seven of the respondents grew up in Miami, FL and the surrounding cities (including Ft. Lauderdale). Sixty-three individuals answered the question about family still living in Haiti. Sixty-two (98.4%) respondents still have family living in Haiti; one (1.6%) did not. Postal services, telephone and the Internet are all used to maintain contact with family in Haiti. Telephone is the most popular with fifty (82%) respondents using this method. In the free response section, two individuals specified that they specifically did not keep contact, their parents did.

Twenty-seven (42.2%) respondents went to a high school that had predominately Caucasian students. African American students dominated in the high schools of twenty-six (40.6%) respondents while only six (9.4%) respondents went to a high school with predominately Latino/Hispanic students. Four (6.3%) students went to a high school made up primarily of West Indian students. None of the respondents went to a high school with mainly Asian students and one respondent answered "Other."

### *Ethnic Identity*

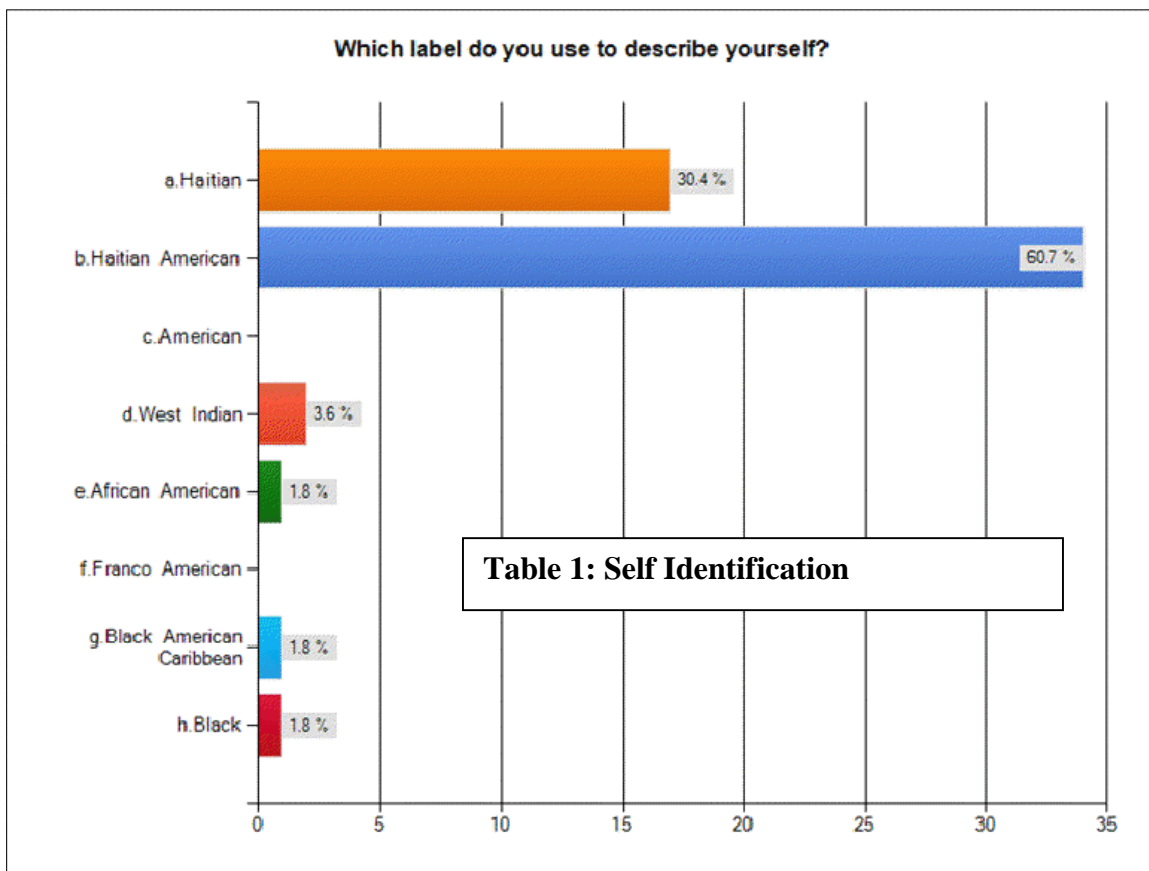
Sixty-four individuals responded to the questions that dealt with ethnic identity exploration and commitment. When asked if time was spent learning more about their heritage,

forty-four (84.4%) respondents agreed, three (4.6%) were neutral and seven (11%) people disagreed. Forty-one (64.1%) respondents agreed that they were active in organizations that had a majority of Haitian/Haitian American members; fourteen (21.9%) respondents disagreed and nine (14.1%) were neutral.

The questions dealing with ethnic identity commitment revealed interesting results. Fifty-eight (89.3%) agreed that they had strong sense of belonging to the Haitian ethnic group. Four (6.2%) were undecided while three (4.6%) disagreed. Forty-two (65.6%) respondents strongly agreed that they participated in Haitian cultural practices such as food, language and music.

Of the sixty-five respondents, thirty-two (49.2%) disagreed when asked if they agreed with the statement “Overall, I am Black American/African American. Eighteen (27.7%) respondents were undecided. Fifteen (23%) respondents agreed. When asked if they viewed themselves most like a White American, fifty-nine (93.6%) disagreed. Three (4.8%) were neutral while one (1.6%) agreed. When asked if they viewed themselves as Haitian or Haitian American, sixty-two (95.3%) agreed. Zero disagreed while three (4.6%) respondents were neutral.

Others have used the labels to describe the respondents at one point and to varying degrees: Haitian, Haitian American, American, West Indian, African American, Black American Caribbean, and Black. Franco American was not used to describe the respondents. When describing themselves, thirty-nine (60%) respondents chose the label ‘Haitian American,’ ‘twenty-four (36.9%) respondents choose the label Haitian’. The label of West Indian and Black received one vote (1.5%) each. Franco American, American, African American, Black American Caribbean did not receive any votes.



### *Cultural Adaptation*

Fifty-seven (87.7%) respondents felt that they could do equally well in both the Haitian culture as well as the Black American culture. Six (9.3%) individuals disagreed. When comparing the Haitian culture and White culture, forty-nine (76.6%) agreed that they could function equally well in both cultures; nine (14.1%) disagreed while six (9.4%) were neutral. On the question of comfort, fifty-five (84.7%) respondents agree that they were comfortable in both the Haitian and Black American/African American culture while only forty-three (67.2%) White American culture. Forty (63.2%) respondents wished to be accepted by Haitians/Haitian Americans, in comparison to the twenty-four (38.8%) respondents who wished to be accepted by Black Americans/African Americans and fourteen (22.2%) respondents who wanted to be accepted by White Americans. Thirteen (20.6%) respondents felt most comfortable in Haitian/Haitian American cultural settings while six (9.5%) felt

most comfortable in Black/African American cultural settings No respondent felt most comfortable in White American cultural settings. Forty-four (69.8%) respondents claimed that the particular cultural setting had no influence on their comfort level.

I feel most comfortable in cultural settings (e.g., church, social groups, restaurants, parties, student organizations, etc.) with the following?

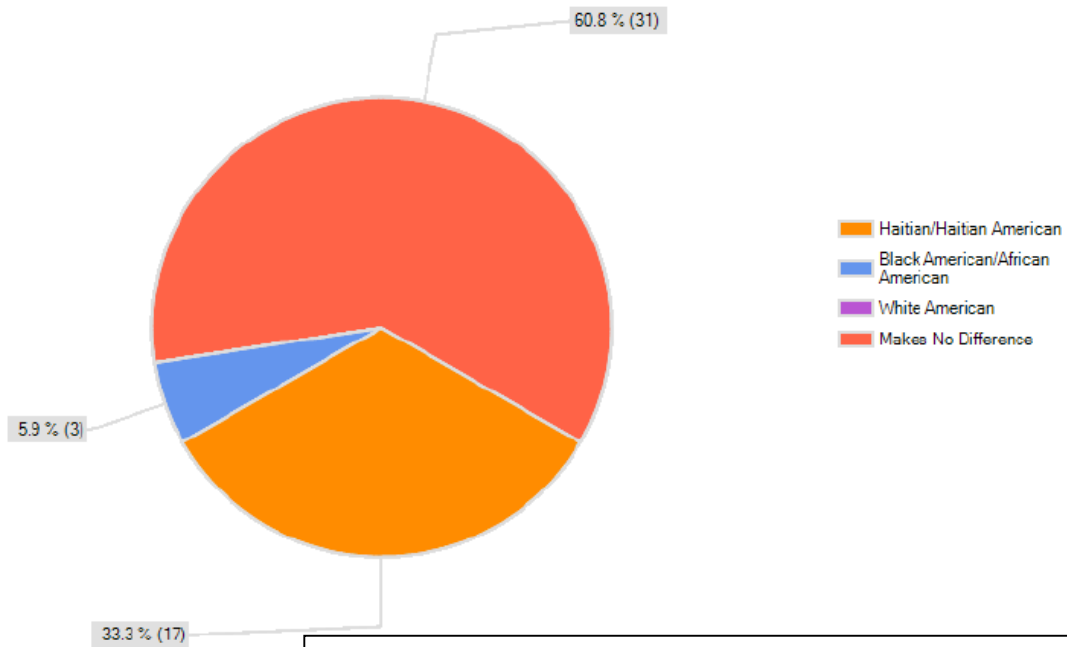


Table 2: Comfort Level in Various Cultural Settings

*Romance and Friendship*

Within their romantic lives, most respondents preferred dating Haitians/ Haitian Americans or African Americans. Thirty-eight (59.4%) individuals agreed that they mainly dated Haitians/Haitian Americans. Thirty-five (54.7%) agreed that they tended to date Black/African Americans. These results are contrasted with the forty-four (68.6%) respondents disagreeing to dating mainly White Americans. The question for marriage mirrored the results of dating. Only one person strongly desired to marry a White American

while thirty-five (54.7%) people wanted to marry a Haitian/Haitian American; twenty-nine (45.3%) were unsure or neutral if they wanted to marry a Black/African American.

For thirty (46.9%) respondents, the majority of their friends were of Haitian descent. Fourteen (21.9%) respondents were primarily friends with African Americans. Only one respondent was primarily friends with White Americans. One respondent's friends were primarily Latinos/Hispanics. The majority of eleven (17.2%) respondents' friends were West Indian. The majority of seven (10.9%) respondents were member of other ethnic groups.

### *Gendered Experiences*

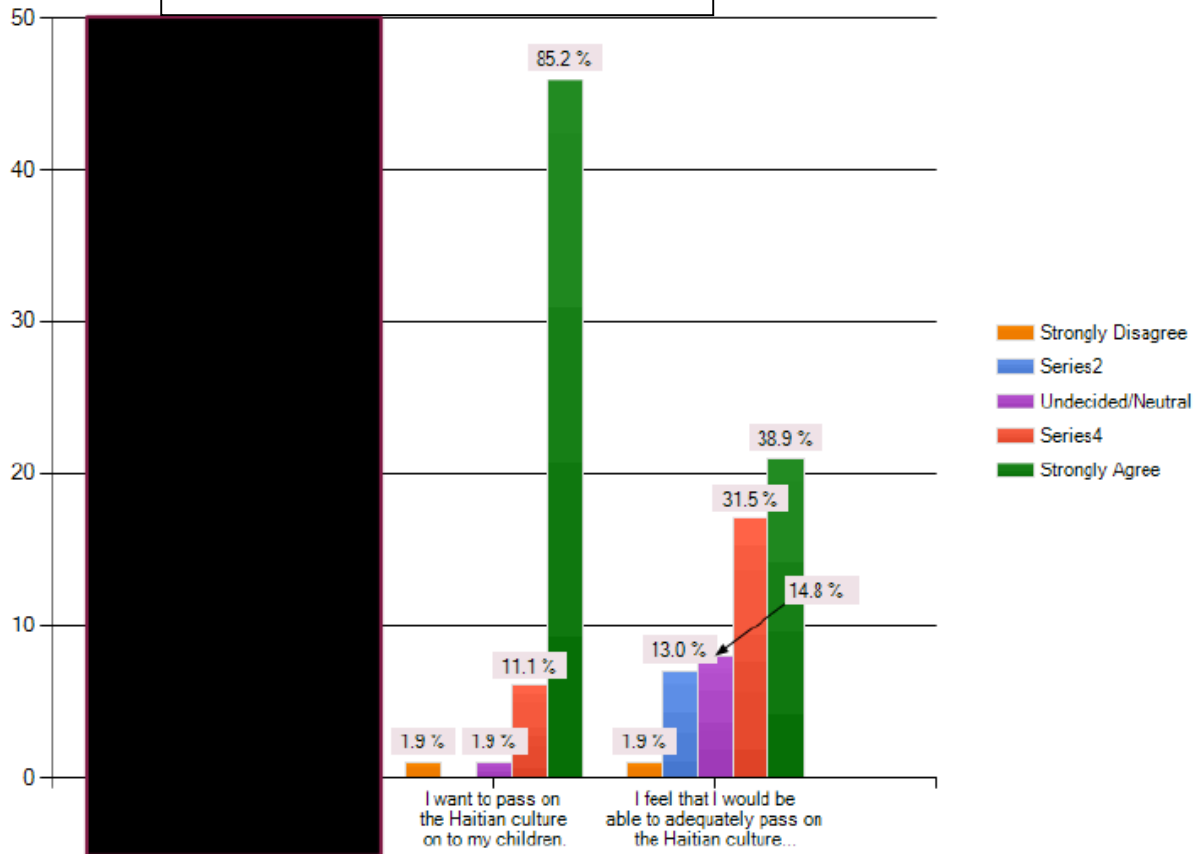
As stated above, fifty-one of the respondents in this survey were women and fourteen were men. On questions addressing the gendered experiences of Haitian American students, thirty-three (50.8%) respondents agreed that both genders have similar cultural experiences growing up. However, twenty-two (33.8%) respondents disagreed that women and men had similar experiences. Forty-eight (73.8%) respondents agreed that they can recall a time when they were treated differently based on gender, based in the context of their Haitian culture. Eleven (16.9%) disagreed and six (9.2%) were neutral. When separating the results by gender, five (35.7%) males strongly disagreed with the statement that they were treated differently based on gender while twenty-three (45.1%) of the female respondents strongly agreed with the statement.

### *Future Generations*

Fifty-nine (90.8%) participants strongly agreed that they want to pass on their Haitian culture to their children and six (9.2%) agreed. No one was neutral or disagreed. When asked if the respondents would be adequately able to pass on their culture, twenty-six (40%) strongly agreed; twenty-two (33.8%) agreed; eight (12.3%) were neutral; eight (12.3%) disagreed; one male (1.5%) strongly disagreed.



Table 3: Future Generations



*Language and Language Use*

Thirty respondents claimed English was the first language, 29 of the respondents claimed Haitian Creole. Only two respondents identified French as their first language with one participant using Dutch. Three respondents used both English and Creole when learning how to speak. On a day to day basis, the majority of the respondents used English; with a few using Creole at equal amounts or when needed. Fifty-three respondents felt most comfortable using English. Nine individuals were comfortable in English and Creole while only three felt most comfortable in Creole. Aside from English and French, French and Spanish were popular second (and third) language options with one respondent citing American Sign Language.

Twenty-three (35.9%) respondents placed their Haitian Creole language ability between ‘fluent’ and ‘intermediate’. Only eighteen (28.1%) said it was fluent while two (3.1%) said that they had no Haitian Creole language ability at all. When in the general

public, thirty-four (53.2%) respondents felt very comfortable speaking in Haitian Creole. In Haitian cultural settings, nineteen (30.6%) felt very uncomfortable speaking Haitian Creole. In non-Haitian cultural settings, thirty-five (56.4%) participants felt very comfortable using Haitian Creole while only fifteen (24.2%) felt very uncomfortable. With friends of the same Haitian heritage, the respondents spoke English (78.5%), Haitian Creole (70.8%), or French (7.7%). Fourteen (21.5%) participants used a combination of English and Creole. For this question, respondents were able to “check all those that apply.”

When asked about the pronunciation of names, thirty-eight (58.5%) used the “à la américaine” while seventeen (26.2%) used “à la haïtienne.” Ten (15.4%) respondents chose not applicable. Thirty-three (50.8%) respondents have Americanized their name through spelling and/or pronunciation while thirty-two (49.2%) did not. According to the respondents, twenty-six (40.6%) believe that the correct way to pronounce their name is the way their parents do while six (9.4%) respondents believe that the way they pronounce it is correct. Thirty-two (50.0%) respondents felt that both ways were right because it was the same. When asked about informal term used to ethnically identify themselves, two respondents cited the term “Zoe.”

### *Open Ended Questions*

The first open ended question was “If you are able to identify other Haitian/Haitian Americans, what indicates their Haitian heritage? The responses to this question elicited fifty responses with fifteen participants opting to skip answering the question. There were eight themes that were extracted were a) language, b) demeanor, c) knowledge of culture, d) feelings, e) physical features, f) morals/values, g) childhood experiences, and h) dress.

The language theme was identified thirty four times (68%) in the fifty responses. This theme included the speaking of Haitian Creole, the presence of an accent, and the

possession of “Francophone last names.” Demeanor, identified ten times (20%), dealt with behavior of an individual, mannerism, and body language. The knowledge of Haitian culture was noted two times (4%). Feelings, or the personal instinct that another individual was Haitian/Haitian American, was identified four times (8%). The theme of physical features, such as facial appearance was noted thirteen times (26%). Morals and values were cited four times (8%). Childhood experiences, which included childhood photographs and memories, were identified three times (6%). Dress was cited seven times (14%).

The second open-ended question, what is the greatest challenge of being the child of one (or two) Haitian immigrants, was answered fifty-seven times (87.7%) and skipped by eight respondents (12.3%). Five respondents felt that there was no challenge to being the child of Haitian immigrations. This dropped the number to fifty-two responses.

There were two major themes that were coded in the responses: language and cultural differences. Language included assumptions made because of the presence of an accent and the child having to play a translator role. A twenty-one year old female from the University South Florida explained:

The language barrier between parents and society. Having to make phone calls to all companies and bussinesses [sic] and fill out forms that you would not yet see at a young age.

The second major theme of cultural differences included expectations for children and lack of understanding of the American culture on the part of the parents. Under this theme, five sub-themes emerged. These were a) keeping a positive Haitian culture alive, b) education, c) finances, d) relating to others and e) biculturalism. Each of the sub-themes was originally a major theme until the researcher realized that they were a result, or consequence of cultural differences between the Haitian and American culture.

Individuals who reported under the sub-theme of keeping a positive Haitian culture alive spoke of debunking stigmas about the Haitian culture such as voodoo and poverty as

well as constantly having to defend the worth of their parents' country. This sub-theme was cited 7 times.

Education was cited three times. Participants spoke of a lack of education on their parents' part which made applying to college and doing school work difficult. Another twenty-one year old female described her experience like this:

We basically had to teach ourselves everything because they do things differently in Haiti. When applying for colleges and preparing the financial information we had to seek help from teachers because our parents never had to do any of this.

Finances was mentioned three times as well, although it was always connected to the lack of education of the parents thus the lack of financial stability because the parents were not making a decent paycheck.

Respondents described difficulty in relating to others six times. The sub-theme covered the challenges that respondents faced when dealing with others, most likely those outside of the Haitian culture. Many respondents spoke of the freedoms that American children were given more in comparison to themselves as well as a lack of understanding of non-Haitian cultures, specifically the African American culture. A twenty-four year old female from Miami, FL explains:

...being allowed to be like your peers in school. As a child of Haitian immigrants, you are not allowed to go out to parties, sleep overs and sometimes even talk on the phone

The final sub-theme was biculturalism. Eight individuals described the challenges of dealing with two cultures, Haitian and American. They are often the bridge for their parents from the Haitian culture to the American culture. In this sub-theme, there is also mention of internal conflict that the respondents feel when pitted against the Haitian culture while living in American culture. A nineteen year old male from Valencia Community College describes his experience as such:

...My parents based everything in the American culture with their experiences [sic] while growing up in Haiti. I.E. not getting a hair cut will get me expelled from school; that movies are a place for youths to meet and have sex.

Another student, a twenty-three year old female explains her challenge in maintaining two cultures:

The greatest challenge is trying to hold fast to the Haitian culture while living in a country where the dominant culture doesn't mirror my parents. It's hard to keep the language and practice the Haitian culture, such as observing holidays, child rearing styles, cuisine, etc when one is battling against mainstream America.

### In Depth Interview Results

Using the in-depth interviews I conducted in spring 2011, I will discuss three main themes that emerged from this study. Through the words of the respondents, the idea of how the second generation Haitian American created, maintained and reconstructed their Haitian cultural identity emerged.

The creation of a Facebook group increased traffic to the online questionnaire. Everyone on my friend list was invited to participate. If the invited did not fit the requirements of participant, they were encouraged to pass along the link. I also sent out an email to the presidents of Haitian Student Organizations in the state of Florida, via an umbrella organization, to increase participation from students outside of low immigrant population city. This umbrella organization provides the working email addresses of the presidents of various Florida universities.

The interviews were semi-recorded and audio-recorded. When necessary, I repeated, rephrased, and elaborated on particular questions, to make sure the participants understood as well as to probe deeper and encourage the participants to expound on given points. Using a predetermined list of open ended questions, the interviews were conducted in an informal manner—like a conversation—with many interviews going off on random tangents. The questions were ordered to produce relative ease for the participants while answering the

questions. The first few questions such as where they grew up and how many siblings they had were used to help the participants warm up to the interview and the idea of sharing while the final questions required more personal probing on the part of the participant.

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The interviews took place in various locations; some in library study rooms, a few in my home, and others in the home of the participants. The data collection of the interviews took place from February 23<sup>rd</sup> to April 6<sup>th</sup> 2011. The interviews were primarily in English and this was expected. As second generation college students in American universities, by description, they would have a greater command of the English language. During the interview, a few informants used Haitian Creole to express themselves though the phrases were short and often noticeably with an American accent, often to name certain foods or to utilize Haitian expressions. The second generation, as noted earlier, primarily functions in English and usually limits Creole usage to older Haitians adults or their parents (Stepick 1998). After transcribing the interviews, themes emerged that describe common occurrences the lived experience of US born second generation Haitian Americans—especially in the sense of creating, maintaining, and reconstructing the Haitian cultural identity.

As explained before, my shared experienced as a child of Haitian immigrants often created an atmosphere of “assumed understanding” where the participant would assume that I, because I was also Haitian American, would understand certain situation so that they did not have to explain. Even with further probing for clarification, many interviewees maintained this assumptive state.

The study consisted of eight interviews (four males, four females) ranging from the ages of 19 to 25 years of age. Each participant attended the same Florida institution though ranging from sophomore to senior status. Three participants were born and raised up north,

while the remaining respondents were raised in South Florida. Of the eight, only five claimed active participation in the Haitian Student Organization located on campus. All participants attended the same large southwest university.

I explored the complexities of the creation of the Haitian culture among the interviewed second generation Haitian American. The passing on of the culture and the identity of claiming Haitian cultural identity were two separate events. Many respondents shared the sentiment that their parents did not make the conscious effort to pass on the Haitian culture, in the sense that the parents did not sit down and explain Haiti's history, politics, and culture. In that sense, the first generation did not pass on the culture, but in unconscious methods, the culture was passed on. Their parents, from what I am understand, simply parented--passing on what they saw from their own childhood. They cooked Haitian food, enjoyed Haitian music, and spoke Haitian Creole with their spouses and friends. As one respondent, Jean<sup>1</sup>, explained:

I think when you're born Haitian. You're just kinda infused into the culture...you sort of pick up thing.

Some parents, such as Thomas's, a self identified Haitian, felt that his parents "made an effort to teach certain things" but shielded him from the negative aspects of the Haitian culture. Claiming Haitian ancestry was a common occurrence among this group simply because of birth. For the most part, most of the women identified as Haitian American except for one. The men, despite the few that claimed a lack of cultural connection, all identified as Haitian. The common thread through the responses is that the respondents were Haitian because of blood and American because of birth. When I asked Melissa, a 21 year old senior, why she considered herself Haitian American, she answered:

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1 For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, all names and identities were changed.

Both my parents are from Haiti and so since Haitian is in my blood, though I don't speak language as well as I should. I do consider myself Haitian one hundred percent (100%), I consider myself American as well because I was born in the States...Haitian American.

Rose, a 22 year old senior, continued in the same manner, saying

...although I was born in America and recognize very strong influences, I had a Haitian household which also has had some strong influences on my personality, outlook on life, world view as well so I feel like both ethnicities are very...impactful.

The creation of the cultural identity continues with interaction with individuals outside of the Haitian family--especially school friends. These interactions usually had two results—denial of Haitian heritage or the defense of Haitian cultural heritage. During the time that the respondents were in middle school, many explained that this was the time that the Haitian stereotypes were rampant such Voodoo, being fresh of the boat (FOB) and eating cat. As Marie, a 21 year old female senior explained:

...it was looked down upon to be Haitian....as a kid you're just like 'I don't want to be Haitian, I don't want anyone to think that I'm Haitian because I don't want to be made fun of, I just want to fit it.'

The maintenance of the Haitian cultural identity, present time, proves to have its own difficulties. Many of the respondents, except for one who stated that although he would want to participate he hasn't done so, cited the local Haitian Student Organization as their main point of affiliation to the Haitian culture. There was an importance to maintaining an affiliation, because, as Ashley, a psychology major, explains:

it's really important cause I need something to keep me feeling Haitian enough to pass on...later onto my children

The need to be considered "Haitian enough" was another common thread throughout the responses. Though earlier, the respondents declared that they were Haitian because of blood, there seem to be a need to prove it to other Haitians and Haitian Americans. Waters (1994) explained that the second generation is usually identified as black and not seen ethnically different from the native minority group. Frantz, a 20 year old junior, described his method



of identifying other Haitian/Haitian Americans. He would throw out a Creole word to see if the other person responds accordingly, to see if he is correct. Though he says that it's simply to see whether or not his identification was correct, another reason would be a way of identifying himself as Haitian. Previously, Frantz spoke of the lack of emphasis on the Haitian culture growing up. He claimed that his parents were more focused on assimilating to teach him about his culture. Melissa behaved in the same manner but was more open about her behavior.

Melissa: ...who's someone to tell me I'm Haitian or not Haitian

Me: Do you purposely give off indicators to prove that you're Haitian?

Melissa: Sometimes I do that in front of other Haitians...some people try to joke around and say 'oh you're not Haitian enough...you fake Haitian.' So probably I try to speak more Crenglish, Creole mixed with English, to...uh...I don't know...to make me a better...

Me: To prove a point?

Melissa: Yeah...it gets me really upset when people say I'm not Haitian or Haitian...who's to tell me? It's in my blood.

The respondents also maintained contact with their own families and by extension their Haitian culture by calling their parents and speaking and comprehending Creole, visiting, and eating Haitian food at various restaurants. The maintenance of the culture continues with, as stated before, the local HSO but also with the friends of the respondents. Frantz mostly had friends of Haitian descent.

...how can I deny my culture when I'm attracted to...other young Haitian American [people] who've grown up like I have, who share the same cultural background?

The recurring theme was the gravitation towards those who were like them and could relate as well as a means of maintaining affiliation to the culture because there could be Haitian Creole usage amongst them.

Certain events, real or imagined invoked a connection to the Haitian culture. The hypothetical situation of Haiti vs. US in a soccer match led many of the respondents to choose Haiti. Real events, such as the 2011 earthquake, evoke similar but obviously stronger connections. Thomas explains:

...I felt more Haitian after the tragic earthquake...like I really got involved more...I felt more connected to the Haitian culture.

After the earthquake, Thomas began volunteering at a local charity that sponsored several Haitian victims in the local area. He was around Haitians on a more constant basis and improved his Creole language skills.

Ethnic identity was split with the males choosing to identify as Haitian while the women chose a more bicultural identity. One respondent, Jean, further explained his identity choice(s).

Me: What term do you use to ethnically identify?

Jean: ...um...can it be more than one?

Me: It can be whatever you want it to be.

Jean: ...I don't know...there's so much like semantics when it comes to limiting yourself to one term... When I'm in a room full of black people, or people of color, I consider myself Haitian—just Haitian. When it comes to a general class when the races are pretty mixed, I consider myself Haitian American or if I'm in a room full of white people, I'll just consider myself African American...

Me: Why does it matter who you're in a room with?

Jean: ...it's just specifics...gives everyone an idea of where you're from.

On a day to day basis, Jean considers himself to be Haitian.

At this moment, it is most appropriate to note that when I previously used the term 'reconstruct' I used the term in the present sense, when after the interviews, I realized that the term should be 'will reconstruct' in terms of the passing on of the culture to the potential third generation. Looking forward, towards the reconstruction of the Haitian culture, there was some hesitation on the part of the males. The women rarely expressed a definite need to marry a man of Haitian descent while three out four of the men strongly desired marrying a Haitian woman. The sentiments among the women were that marrying a Haitian man would be nice but not important. Both genders explained that there would be an easier connection to family, food, and understanding of one another. Rose, who is dating a man from Africa, explains:

...I'm very strongly ingrained in my culture and no matter what partner I am with I would still fasten—strongly—to my culture because I have been instructed very well on it and I'm just use to it...

The males faced a myriad of difficulties, especially those going to a cultural revival at the moment. When asked why he was going through a cultural revival, Frantz stated:

..I would be sad for my culture...that my parents came from...to die in my generation...that's a part of me I need to know because it's my parents' homeland and in a sense it's my homeland too...

Charles, a 21 year old senior explained:

...maybe the whole fighting thing deterred me from wanting to learn [about the Haitian culture]...then...cause now I'm all into it...like I feel I'm years behind...I want to catch up...I want to know the language, learn the dances...

Me: Why now?

Charles: ...I wanna be Haitian! I'm tired of being Ameri—I don't even think Americans have that much culture.

Along with the cultural revival, Charles and Frantz joined the other respondents in having a desire to pass on their culture to their children. Charles articulates what seems to be the sentiment of the men if they do not marry a Haitian woman:

...and I don't know much about my culture...what are the kids going to learn?

Among the respondents there was a large emphasis on using the grandparents, or the first generation, as a means of transferring culture. Though many said that they would make a conscious effort to pass on the language to their children and found it to be the most important aspect of the culture to pass on. The need to reconstruct the Haitian culture, and pass it on is best explained by Charles:

...as I learn more, I will be able to pass more onto them [my children] and teach them about this culture and our people...how we strived [sic], how we failed, and letting them know that 'hey this is a part of you though you don't see it every day because you're not there and you haven't grown up in that culture it's still a part of you because it's a part of me.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

For the past twenty years, I have experienced the world as the child of two Haitian immigrants growing up in America. With both feet planted firmly on my parents' little recreation of their childhood in Haiti, I still could witness the America I was not experiencing. I soon realized that my childhood experiences were different from my peers. I did not know, or fully understand, that I was Haitian until it was brought to my attention the extent that I was not Haitian enough. I could not speak my limited Creole vocabulary without an American accent. My dancing ability was limited to the little twirls that I did during major family functions such as first communion parties. The most that I had in common with other Haitian Americans was that numerous limitations that our parents put on us—no sleepovers, get good grades, no dating until you're older—while other people my age could experience these things. As a second generation Haitian American, I felt lost, like a stranger in both lands because I did not have a place to truly call my own. Entering college I joined a Haitian Student Organization, in which I met other Haitian Americans who experience similar issues of ethnic identity as myself. As I grappled with my ethnic identity, I wondered about my future and whether or not I would be able to pass on my cultural heritage to my own children. With these lived experiences and personal questions needing answers, the following analysis illustrate those who have endured the same issues and their methods of overcoming them.

### Revisiting Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis questioned how, if at all, do second generation Haitian Americans create, maintain, and reconstruct their Haitian cultural identity while acculturating into the American culture, specifically looking at how they maintain an affiliation with the Haitian culture. Secondly, I examine the factors that influence the

formation of their personal ethnic identity choices such as gender. Finally, I questioned the concept of biculturalism among this population as well as how Haitian Americans talk about weaving together these two cultures.

The creation of the Haitian cultural identity among the second generation is a combination of the parents' conscious, an unconscious, effort to pass on their culture with the second generation as well as the interaction with others. The ability to be Haitian lay in the blood of the second generation. This claim cannot be taken away. This can be seen in the 60.7% of respondents who self identified as Haitian American, 30.4% who claimed to be Haitian, as well as the 0% that claimed to be solely American. Parents' efforts, and successes, passing on the culture can be seen in the Haitian language acquisition. Only 29 respondents claimed that Haitian Creole was their first language, but in general, only 23 (35.9%) would place their language ability between intermediate and fluent. A lack of practice, perhaps due to discomfort or to assimilation on the part of the child, leads to a barrier to the entrance into the Haitian community—especially because the newcomer may not be able to understand.

Another interesting aspect of the research was the few questionnaire respondents who felt comfortable in Haitian/Haitian American cultural settings which could be because only 18 respondents in total claim fluency in Haitian, a point mentioned earlier. There did not seem to be a transfer of information on the part of parents in the sense of explaining what certain events and dates were, although the parent may know. During one interview, one respondent claimed that he would continue the tradition of eating Soup Joumou (Pumpkin/Squash Soup) yet when asked if he would explain to them the meaning of eating the soup on January 1<sup>st</sup>, he seemed confused and stated that they would eat it because it's tradition. His parents, much like mine, did not explain the history and significance behind

the simple dish. It was not until I reached college that I learned that the Soup Joumou was delicacy for the slave owners and when the French were finally defeated on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the former slaves ate the soup as a sign of independence.

The maintenance of the culture, an important aspect of the project for me, is done through being active in Haitian Student Organization on college campuses, which offers a space to sustain the created culture or nurture a cultural revival. Though I wonder if the constant reference to the use of HSOs as a maintenance tool stems from the method of securing the participants—announcements made in HSOs and other organizations that Haitian Americans might frequent. While the HSO was an important factor, continual contact with the first generation as well as friends of Haitian descent offers a stable method of maintaining the culture. In the questionnaire, thirty (59.4%) of respondents mainly date Haitians or Haitians Americans and thirty respondents (46.9%) said that the majority of their friends were of Haitian decent. Branching out towards other ethnicities happens but the concept of gravitating towards those ‘like me’ resounds loudly in the second-generation. It also helps that the “in thing” seems to be Haiti-oriented, especially because of the Earthquake or the visibility of prominent Haitians such as Wyclef Jean in the media.

There were, however, gender differences. This is seen through the responses of the questionnaire and especially in the free response question. While the males rarely mentioned having a different experience due to gender, the women expressed this sentiment. In the questionnaire, forty-eight (73.8%) respondents could recall a time when they were treated differently within the context of culture. I agree with McIntosh's (1989) term of “unacknowledged male privilege” (p. 10). Because men are in power, they never fully acknowledge the privileges they receive in comparison to their female counterparts. In the free response section, it was the women who felt as if their parents were too strict and could

not participate in childhood activities such as sleepovers or going to parties. As explained by other scholars, women are kept closer to home while the men are given the freedom to leave. While this in an effort to keep the girls safe, the men run into discrimination and difficulty with authority (Lopez 2002; Waters 1999). While my study did not find reactive identities formed due to negative interaction with the larger society, it is a phenomenon that does happen. Throughout the in depth interviews, gender's effect was perceived thorough the desire of passing of culture. The women respondent did not feel the need to marry a Haitian/Haitian American because they felt that they could adequately pass on their culture. It was the men who felt that the culture was passed on through the mother, which is why the always expressed the need to marry a woman of Haitian descent.

The reconstruction of the culture will come into play as the second-generation marries and has children. How will they pass on maintained culture? All the participants of the questionnaire, at varying level, of agreement, wanted to pass on their Haitian culture to their children but only twenty-six (40%) respondents strongly agreed that they could adequately pass it on. The in depth interview respondents explained their plans of passing on the culture. The importance of language was reiterated among the interviewees, proving that language was a big marker of connection to the culture as well as a barrier or a key into the events and programs. The in-depth respondents plan on making conscious efforts to pass on their culture by sitting down with their children and teaching them about their culture, making them spending time with their Haitian grandparents, and participating in cultural events. These are only hopes of what the second generation plans on doing. Only time will be able to judge the effectiveness of their efforts—especially in the midst of working, dealing with a marriage, and other major and minor life events.

## Limitations

The low Haitian immigrant city in Florida is the primary location site for this research. This city is not considered a popular Haitian residential location, like Miami and New York (Stepick 1998; Woldemikael 1989; Zéphir 2001). The research will only include approximately 60 students for the online questionnaire and eight students for the personal interviews. This small number limits application and generalizability of the findings to the second generation Haitian Americans as a whole, but the opportunities for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of subjects in this study is viewed as an asset.

A second potential limitation is that the methods of attaining the participants excludes the possibility of encountering “undercovers” because they will not feel the need to participate in a study about Haitians when they are trying to erase that part of themselves (Zéphir 2001: 100). However, it should be noted that “undercovers” are not the focus of this research.

There also was an imbalance in the participant pool. There was an overwhelming amount of female participants. The recruitment of more male participants, during the questionnaire portion, would have offered a more balanced perspective. Also, the recruitment of the participant pool, exclusively through cultural organizations, excludes second generation Haitians Americans who do not participate in this organization and learning of their maintenance and reconstruction of the Haitian cultural identity

Another limitation was the inconsistency of thought. The project took about two years to complete. During this time, my initial thought process, especially toward the project, changed due to different life experiences including a study abroad trip to the Dominican Republic during which my concept of a Haitian American was challenged repeatedly. Seeking IRB approval earlier in the project would have shorten the empty time during the project.



The final limitation with the project would be placing more emphasis on the on the in-depth interviews instead of the questionnaire. If I could re-do the project, I would eliminate the questionnaire. The participants would be able to answer the research questions through their own words. In hind sight, there was no need for a questionnaire.

### Practical Implications

While this research project has research implications such as contributing to the existing literature of Haitian American Identity and American Immigration Theory and Research, there are also pragmatic implications as well. One practical implication, and perhaps the most important, is how to raise second generation and especially third generation Haitian Americans. The questioning of how to raise the third generation was an area of concern that inspired this research. There were several recommendations suggested during an impromptu thesis meeting focus group as well as by the participants of the in depth interviews. While all the suggestions can be used, a few are specific to whether or not the family lives in a “hot spot” or a location where there is a large and active Haitian population.

### 12 Recommendations for Raising Haitian American Children in the United States

1. Speak Creole (and/or Haitian French) to Your Children
  - It's best to begin early—the younger the children are the better. It does not matter about your own personal language ability—whatever you do is better than nothing. If you are not as fluent as you would like, be sure to take your children around Grandparents and other relatives and friends who are fluent and encourage these individuals to speak in Haitian Creole (and/or French) with your child.
2. Take Your Children to Haitian Cultural Events.
3. Raise your children eating Haitian food

- Parent may need to learn to cook Haitian foods or at least a few special dishes. Other options include visiting Haitian relatives who cook and/or going to Haitian restaurants. Also, explain the food names to your children; use both Haitian Creole and English words;
4. Travel to Haiti
    - Avoid only doing touristic things because it might give the child a skewed view of the Haiti. Also expose them to the economic reality of Haiti if possible.
  5. Travel to U.S. Haitian Hot Spots (if you live in a non-Hot Spot)
  6. Join Haitian cultural organizations
  7. Expose your children to Haitian Proverbs and Jokes (humor)
  8. Show pride in your culture in ways that your child can see
    - Speak positively about Haiti in front of your child; wear a T-shirt that says “I love Haiti” or “I am from Haiti”. Simply express a pride in your own heritage.
  9. Expose your children Haitian music
  10. Study Haitian history
    - Expose your child to the giants of Haitian history such as Toussaint and Dessalines and their contributions to Haiti. Teaching the child of Haiti's historical contribution to the world can offer a sense of pride
  11. Use the Internet and communication technologies to stay linked in and informed about Haiti and Haitian current events. (online newspapers, podcasts, chat rooms)
  12. Take your children to a Haitian church.
    - If you are religious—or even if you are not religious. This is mainly for the language acquisition. Many Haitian churches have service in Haitian Creole and read the French bible. It will give your child the ability to hear and understand the language as well as interaction with other Haitians and Haitian Americans.

## Future Research

The in depth interview respondents made constant references to using their parents as a resource for raising their children in the Haitian culture. Many have a fear of the culture

dying out and had plans of incorporating the Haitian culture in the child's childhood. A longitudinal study comparing the plans made for raising the child and the actual methods used and an exploration the identities of the third generation would be a future direction of research.

These recommendations, as well as this research project as a whole, offer an interesting perspective into the lived experiences of second generation Haitian Americans and their tactics of creating, maintaining, and reconstructing their cultural heritage.

## Appendix A: Questions for Questionnaire

### General

1. Where did you grow up?
  - a. Miami, FL (and surrounding areas)
  - b. Boston, Miami (and surrounding areas)
  - c. New York (and surrounding areas)
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Was one, or both, of your biological parents born in Haiti: yes/ no
  - a. If yes, which one? Mother or Father or Both
  - b. If no, you are not eligible to fill out this questionnaire
3. Do you have any siblings?
  - a. If yes, How many?
4. What is your birth order:
  - a. Oldest
  - b. Middle Child
  - c. Youngest
  - d. Only
5. Who in your family most influenced your sense of cultural identity?  
(state relationship) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you ever been to Haiti?\*\*\*
  - a. If yes, at what age? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Was this a personal choice or that of your parents?
7. Do you still have family living in Haiti?
  - a. If yes, do you still maintain contact with them?
8. If you do maintain contact with them, how do you do so?
  - a. Telephone
  - b. Internet
  - c. Mail
  - d. Other
9. What is the highest level of education attained by Mother
  - a. High School
  - b. Some College
  - c. Bachelors
  - d. Masters
  - e. PhD
10. What is the highest level of education attained by Father
  - a. High School
  - b. Some College
  - c. Bachelors
  - d. Masters
  - e. PhD

### Language

1. What is your native language?
2. In a typical day, what language do you use most often?
3. What language do you feel most comfortable in?
4. What other languages do you speak?

5. Rate your overall Haitian Creole language ability? 1-5 (1-None –5-Fluent)
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking Haitian Creole in public?
  - a. In general: (1-Very Uncomfortable- 5-Very Comfortable)
  - b. In Haitian cultural settings: (1-Very Uncomfortable- 5-Very Comfortable)
  - c. In non-Haitian cultural settings: (1-Very Uncomfortable- 5-Very Comfortable)
7. What language do you use when with friends of the same ethnic background
  - a. English
  - b. Creole
  - c. French
  - d. English and Creole
8. Are there any informal (i.e. not seen on formal documents) terms to ethnically identify yourself, both positive and negative?

**Ethnicity and Race:**

1. What label do you think best fits you?\*\*)
  - a. Haitian
  - b. Haitian American
  - c. American
  - d. West Indian
  - e. African American
  - f. Franco American
  - g. Black American Caribbean
  - h. Black
2. What label do you think describes you least?\*\*)
  - a. Haitian
  - b. Haitian American
  - c. American
  - d. West Indian
  - e. African American
  - f. Franco American
  - g. Black American Caribbean
  - h. Black
3. I went to a high school that predominately had \_\_\_\_\_ students
  - a. Caucasian
  - b. African American
  - c. Latinos
  - d. West Indian
  - e. Asian
  - f. Other
4. What do you want people to think you are?\*\*)
  - a. Haitian
  - b. Haitian Americans
5. What is the ethnic identity you are normally perceived as?\*\*)
  - a. Haitian
  - b. Haitian Americans
6. The majority of your friends are:\*\*
  - a. Haitian
  - b. Haitian Americans

- c. African Americans
  - d. White Americans
  - e. Latinos
  - f. West Indians (people from the Caribbean)
  - g. Members of other ethnic groups
7. Do you pronounce your name “à la haitienne” or “à la américaine”?\*\*
- a. “à la haitienne”
  - b. “à la américaine”
  - c. Not applicable
8. Have you ever Americanized your name through spelling and/or pronunciation? Yes/No
9. Do you insist that people pronounce your name correctly, that is, the way you do (or your parents, if different)\*\* Yes/No
10. I feel most comfortable in \_\_\_\_\_ cultural settings (ex: church, restaurants, parties, student organizations, etc) [Rank in order of comfort the following groups]
- a. Haitian/Haitian American
  - b. Black American/African American
  - c. White American

#### Gender

- 1.(1-Strongly Disagree – 5-Strongly Agree)
- 1.Male/Female
  - 2.I feel that Haitian/Haitian American men and women have similar cultural experiences growing up
  - 3.I feel that I would be able to pass on the Haitian culture to my children
  - 4.I can think of an occasion when I was treated different because of my gender (within the context of my

#### Ethnic Identity Exploration

1-5 (1-Strongly Disagree – 5-Strongly Agree)

- 1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs\*
- 2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of Haitian descent.\*

#### Ethnic Identity Commitment

- 1. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Haitian ethnic group.\*
- 2. I participate in cultural practices of my ethnic group, such as special food, music, language, or customs\*
- 3. I feel that Haitian
- 4. Overall, I am American\*\*\*
- 5. Overall, I am Haitian/Haitian American\*\*\*
- 6. I wish to be accepted by Haitians/Haitian Americans\*\*\*
- 7. I wish to be accepted by Americans\*\*\*
- 8. The people I date are Haitian/Haitian Americans\*\*\*
- 9. The people I date are American\*\*\*
- 10. My friends are Haitian/Haitian Americans

11. My friends are American
12. I feel that I can function equally well in both the Haitian culture and the American culture
13. I feel comfortable in both the Haitian culture and the American culture

Demographics:

1. How old are you? 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26+
2. Were you born in the United States?
  - a. If not, how old were you when you came to the US?
    - i. If you were not born here, are you a citizen?
3. If a student at USF, current standing:
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  - e. Graduate
  - f. Graduate Student
  - g. Other

Open Ended Questions

1. What are the greatest challenges of being the child of one or more Haitian immigrants?

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where you grew up, where you were born, etc
2. What term do you use to identify yourself ethnically? Why?
3. Did your parents make an effort to teach you about the Haitian culture? If yes, how so?
4. Was there ever a time that you did not want to identify with the Haitian culture? If yes, why? How did you resolve/go forward?
5. Are the majority of your friends of a particular ethnicity? If yes, which one? Is there a particular reason for this?
6. How, if at all, do you maintain an affiliation with the Haitian culture while away from your family? How important, if at all, is it to do this?
7. Are there times that you feel more connected to one culture versus another? If yes, when and why?
8. Can you identify other Haitian/Haitian Americans in public settings? If yes, how?
9. Do you feel that you give off these indicators? If yes, how? Do you do this intentionally, unintentionally or a combination thereof?
10. How important is it to date someone who is Haitian or Haitian American?
11. If you want to marry, how important is it for you to marry a Haitian/Haitian American?
12. If you have children, do you want to pass on your Haitian culture to your children? If yes, how do you plan on doing this?
13. Are there aspects of the Haitian culture that you accept? If yes, what are those aspects? If no, what aspects do you reject?
14. How, if at all, do current events in Haiti affect the way in which you ethnically identify yourself?
15. How “in tune” with the Haitian culture/community would you say you are? In what ways and how often? Which of the following are important to you to do on a daily/weekly basis?
  - a. Cook Haitian food
  - b. attend Haitian church
  - c. go to events that promote Haitian culture
  - d. dance to Kompa
  - e. travel to Haiti
  - f. other
1. Why are these important to you?
2. Who in your family or community most influenced your sense of cultural identity?
3. How did s/he shape your cultural identity?
4. Do you ever feel conflicted by your identity? If yes, how so?
5. Do you ever feel as if you must choose one? If yes, please describe a situation.
6. How, if it all, do you bring them together?



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## Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # Pro00000543

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: Land of My Father

The person who is in charge of this research study is Vadricka Etienne. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Elizabeth Aranda (Sociology) and Dr. Navita Cumming James (Communication).

The research will be conducted at the University of South Florida (Tampa Campus) but the interview sessions may take place in the participants home, if permission is given. If permission is not granted, the interviews will take place at a public location (the library, food court, etc).

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- This project hopes to understand how second generation college age Haitian Americans create, maintain, and reconstruct their Haitian cultural identity while still acculturating into American culture
- This study that will, potentially, contribute to the understanding of a) how second generation U.S. born Haitian Americans create and maintain cultural identities, b) the U.S. immigrant generation experience, c) the role of Haitian Americans in American Pluralism, and d) how to make the acculturation process easier and more productive for future Haitian immigrants and their offspring.
- This study is being conducted for a senior thesis, meaning that the Principal Investigator is a student at the University of South Florida.

## Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Engage in three (3) in depth personal interviews. Each interview will last about 60-90 minutes. The first interview covers past experience everything leading up to the present moment. The second interview gives details about the current situation. The last interview will be one of reflection and how future plans.
- The interview will be semi-structured and audio-recorded. The tapes will be kept for 5 years and will be destroyed by re-recording something over the tapes and the documents of the transcriptions of the tapes will be deleted. The researcher will do her best to ensure the privacy of the participant by coming up with a code name to identify each participant.
- The method is being used to help create a relationship between participant and researcher, check consistency of participant's words, and gives both parties time to think and reflect.
- The interview will be primarily conducted in English, though there is a possibility that the participant may express himself/herself in Haitian Creole.
- The individual interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participant.
- The interviews will be conducted on and around the University of South Florida Tampa campus during the Spring Semester of 2011.

## Total Number of Participants

About 20 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

## Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study.

## Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

## Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The Principal Investigator holds, and has held for the past two (2) years, an executive board position in Club Creole, the Haitian Student Association at the University of South Florida. The researcher is also Haitian and dealing with the same questions that are part of the interview.

In order to manage these conflicts, the discussion of what is said during the interviews will not take place outside of the interview (unless prompted by the participant) in order to protect the privacy of the participant. Also, during the interview, the researcher will do her best in order to not ask leading questions to satisfy her own personal questions and allow the participant to lead the interviews, as long as the topic at hand is relevant.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research and/or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. The decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status.

## New information about the study

During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in the study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

## You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an adverse event or unanticipated problem, call Vadricka Etienne at (407) 290-5564.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

## Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study and authorize that the interviews be audio recorded. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

## Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization