

**“Strangers at Home:
Caribbean Immigrants in France and the United States”**

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Goals:

We are applying to the Institute for International Studies’ Crossing Boundaries program to support a comparative study of Caribbean immigration to Europe and America. Our specific focus will be on migration from the French Caribbean to France, and Puerto Rican migration to the United States. Our study will cover the period from the mid-19th century to the present, and involve analyses by both historians and sociologists. We are applying for funds to support the research we plan to undertake this summer in France and the United States. We also plan to stage a presentation of our findings at UC-Berkeley the following September, 2003.

Justification:

In the years after the end of the Cold War racism and xenophobia have once again become crucial problems in advanced capitalist societies. Growing economic crises have increased unemployment rates in many parts of the West. Important sectors of the working class and, more generally, of popular milieus in the United States and western Europe blame their social misfortunes on immigrant populations, as developments from Proposition 187 in California to the Pasqua citizenship reforms in France reveal. The racially distinct character of many of these immigrants has posed the possibility (or threat) of a radical reshaping of national populations and indeed national identities. New far-right political movements play an important role in many countries, diffusing a neo-racist discourse based upon a fundamental opposition made between those who belong and those who do not, in other words foreigners. This situation makes the comparative

study of interethnic relations in North America and western Europe one of the most important priorities for the humanities and social sciences today.¹

However, in several of the most important Western countries there exists a group of “immigrants” who are difficult to situate in the opposition between national citizens and foreigners. These are people from the non-independent territories of the Caribbean. In addition to some important cultural characteristics these immigrants have in common an ambiguous identity in relation to their respective metropolises. They are not foreigners but citizens of the countries they have settled in, countries to which their own homelands are linked by long histories of colonial relations. Nevertheless, these are citizens who hardly correspond to prevailing national images of what it means to be English, American, French, or Dutch. They share with many immigrants who are not citizens a common identity as “people of color” and are frequently confronted with discrimination and exclusion, notably in access to housing and employment, and find their very identity as citizens constantly questioned.²

The cases of the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico have much in common. Both have made an historic transition from colonial status to full-fledged political membership of their respective nations. For both migration to the metropole is a major factor in contemporary life, so that large percentages of the populations of both islands currently

¹ See, among many others, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Gerard Noiriel, *Le creuset français: histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-Xxe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1998); Donald L. Horowitz and Gerard Noiriel, eds., *Immigrants in Two Democracies: French and American Experience* (New York: New York University Press, 1992) & Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992); Tyler Stovall, “Histories of Race in France”, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, vol. 18 /#3 (Fall 2000);

² Ramón Grosfoguel, “Colonial Caribbean Migrations to France, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 20/#3 (July, 1997); Stephanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “Emigration from the French Caribbean: the Origins of an Organized Migration”, *International*

live overseas in France and the United States. In both cases migrants have tended to settle in the largest urban areas (Paris and New York), and have had to negotiate relations not only with the dominant white population, but also with other communities of color (Africans and North Africans in France, blacks and Asians in the United States). Finally, both the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico have a history of rejecting national independence in favor of assimilation into the national community. More generally, questions of race and immigration have been (in often very different ways) extremely important for both France and the United States.³ In addition, France and the United States share a unique heritage as republican nation-states that were also empires. The contradictory nature of imperial republicanism, both appealing to universal citizenship yet denying it to colonial subjects, adds a singular dimension to immigration from formerly colonized territories to the metropolitan centers.

This study will therefore use the specific position of Caribbean immigrants to France and the United States in order to examine comparatively both the problems of marginalization and exclusion that they face, and also the strategies for social promotion developed by these groups. In effect, the fact that these migrants are frequently discriminated against even though they are citizens and come from territories that have for a long time enjoyed citizenship rights offers us a unique opportunity to distinguish between the exclusions suffered by immigrants due to their foreign status, and those due to the ideological factors (discourses of national identity, perceptions of cultural difference) that structure interethnic relations more generally

Journal of Urban and Regional Research, vol. 15/#4 (September, 1991); Claude-Valentin Marie, "Les populations des Dom-Tom en métropole", *Ici La-Bas*, #7 (January-February, 1986).

³ See Jean-Philippe Mathy, *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Fred Constant, *Le multiculturalisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).

The scope of our study will be both historic and contemporary, both synchronic and diachronic. Although the phenomenon of Caribbean migration to France and the United States has become much more massive in the years since the second world war, we believe the study of the historical dimensions of this phenomenon is absolutely necessary for this project, for several reasons. We insist on the fact that contemporary Caribbean migration builds upon previous experiences and structures of migration. At the same time, one cannot understand Caribbean immigration without an analysis of the colonial past that structured relations with the metropolitan powers. In the cases of both the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico migration began as an aspect of the colonial encounter, setting forth patterns of citizenship whose traces remain in the postcolonial era. Our project will therefore consider immigration from the two areas from the mid nineteenth century to the present. The study of the French Caribbean will begin with the abolition of slavery in 1848. Our historical study of Puerto Rican migration will begin with the Spanish-American war and the US annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898.

With regard to intersections of immigration and race in the case of migration from the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico, we argue that they are based upon a symbolic representation of certain “immigrants” as a “foreign” presence on the national body. This representation rests both upon a biological conception of the nation and upon racialized stigmas inherited from colonial ideologies. This enables us to understand why communities indistinguishable at the level of formal law experience social discrimination, and why their experiences are often analogous to immigrant communities that enjoy no formal citizenship rights. For Caribbean immigrants, the understanding that their citizenship in no way shelters them from exclusionary practices that target them as

members of a stigmatized minority therefore involves an understanding of the ideological character of such notions of citizenship. By studying the specific experiences of Caribbean immigration to metropolitan France and the United States, this project should therefore contribute to a better understanding of both the similarities and especially the differences that exist between France and the United States concerning the integration of immigrant populations. More generally, it should cast new light upon differing concepts of nationality and citizenship in these countries, and the specific policies that arise from them.

Research Design

The migration process can be analytically divided into four sub-processes: The first two are the origins and the institutional framework of the migration process which explain the historical-structural processes that produced the emigration from the sending country. The last two are the context of reception and the cultural/discursive impact which address the process of incorporation into the receiving society. These four aspects will structure our comparison of the Caribbean colonial migrations to the metropolises after the Second World War in the following manner:

A. Origins - What are the global capitalist accumulation and geopolitical processes that explain the post-war massive labor migration of the modern colonies to their respective metropolises? What was the rationale for the reforms that transformed these old colonies into 'modern colonies' after the Second World War? What were the similarities and differences in their process of transformation into 'modern colonies'? How do these 'modern colonies' differ from Caribbean nation-states? What was the

relationship between the emergence of these 'modern colonies' and the massive labor migration experienced after 1950? What are the race and ethnic differences between the two colonial migrations to be studied?

B. Institutional Framework - Contrary to the migration from Caribbean nation-states, the migration of these colonial populations was encouraged and institutionally organized by the colonial and/or metropolitan state. Which state institutions and policies were created or involved in these colonial migrations? How did they differ for each colony? What facilities and regulations were implemented to enable the transportation and the job hiring process of the migrations?

C. Context of Reception - Once the colonial migrants arrived at their metropolis, how were they received by the core state, public opinion and the dominant ethnic group? Was their reception favorable or were they discriminated against? Were there historical changes in their reception? What were the specific state policies towards each of these colonial peoples? What kind of rights did they have as citizens of the metropolitan society? Did a certain metropolitan state have more successful public policies than the others in terms of facilitating the incorporation of these groups into the host society? How were the migrants incorporated into the labor market? What were the historical changes of their labor market incorporation after the 1973 world capitalist crisis? Are women and men incorporated differently into the metropolitan society? What are the dominant features of their household structures?

D. Discourses and Cultural Impact - What are the discourses of the dominant ethnic groups and the metropolitan state to explain the poverty, difficulties or disadvantages confronted by these colonial populations? How do the racist practices and

discourses differ from one society to another and how have they affected Caribbean colonial migrants? What are the discourses and strategies articulated by these oppressed colonial peoples in their struggles against poverty and/or discrimination? Are they claiming social equity and cultural rights as a minority group or are they claiming equal treatment as metropolitan citizens? What are the different definitions of citizenship? What is the relationship between these colonial peoples and other immigrant groups from peripheral nation-states? Is there solidarity or tension among these groups? Have Caribbean colonial migrants assimilated to the mainstream language and culture, have they remained insulated, or have their practices been transformed into a border or hybrid culture?

Research Methods and Data Sources

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods will structure the outlined research project. First, we will use historical comparative methods to evaluate the similarities and differences between these colonial migrants. The four research areas (origins, institutional framework, context of reception and cultural/discursive impact of the migration process) will guide the comparisons among the groups. Second, each member of the research group will make use of quantitative and ethnographic methods to answer and give depth to many of the questions concerning the discourses/cultural area of our research. Third, some questions of the research design can be answered by an examination of primary documents, government publications and secondary literature. In particular, the area related with contexts of reception can be answered using census data, published literature and government documents. Fourth, some questions regarding the origins and the institutional context of the migration will require historical/archival

research. There are libraries and archives in each country that have important documents in this respect. However, the main questions regarding identity strategies and identification processes have to be answered through quantitative and qualitative interviews. This is the most expensive part of our project. We would like to conduct a pilot survey with a questionnaire that correlates identification processes and strategies to variables such as class, gender, race, time of migration, etc. Initially we plan to do 250 interviews in New York and the same amount in Paris.

[budget data omitted]