

**Beyond Race and Culture:**  
**A Comparative Study of the Effect of Economic Conditions on the  
Development of Identity Among Afro-Caribbean Communities in the United  
Kingdom and France**

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“Down with French imperialism and its domestics, ‘Vive’ the free Antilles” – Graffiti found in a Parisian BUMIDOM office after the May 1968 uprising. Source: Archives d’Outre-Mer (accessed: <http://www.black-feelings.com/nc/bf-blogs/blog/users/OJAL69/>)

### Introduction

Identity and its construction have been popular topics in intellectual and popular discourse for some time now. Two relatively well studied case examples of identity formation are that of the West Indian community in the United Kingdom and the Antillean community in France that formed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century after large scale migration from former colonial possessions in the Caribbean to their respective metropolises. The history of these communities is attractive to study because it is fraught with issues surrounding race, citizenship, imperialism and migration. Academics who study these communities generally fall into two camps. On the one hand you have scholars like historian Félix Germain<sup>1</sup> and anthropologist David Beriss<sup>2</sup> who focus on the self-identification of people in these communities. In their analysis, these scholars focus on the racial and cultural factors that have contributed to the development of a unique identity among these people. On the other hand, sociologist such as Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> See Germain, Félix, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrant in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> See Beriss, David, *Black Skins, French Voices: Caribbean Ethnicity and Activism in Urban France*, (Boulder, Oxford Westview, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> See Byron, Margaret and Condon, Stéphanie, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, (New York, Routledge, 2008)

understandably as sociologists, focus on the material experiences of these migrant communities in the realms of housing, education, employment, etc., making no comment on identity. What is missing in the study of these communities is a history of the contribution of the experiences in housing and employment to the formation of a West Indian and Antillean identity.

Before attempting any historical analysis, the term “identity” should be defined as it is far too vague. As sociologist Rogers Brubaker and historian Frederick Cooper assert in their article “Beyond ‘Identity,’” the term “identity” tries to do too much and so it is often a useless category or concept for analytical purposes. In both academic and popular uses, “identity” is often used to describe something that is seen to be both fluid and constructed as well as concrete and innate.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the term typically encompasses a variety of meanings that are not necessarily connected. An individual’s sense of self, after all, can often be very different from what their familial, communal or social collective understands them to be, let alone how they are classified by their national governments. Yet, the term “identity” is often ascribed for all of these understandings. The authors go on to provide a list of what they deem to be “problematic assumptions” of the term “identity,” including:

*Identity is something people (and groups) can have without being aware of it. In this perspective, identity is something to be discovered, and something about which one can be mistaken. The strong conception of identity thus replicates the Marxian epistemology of class.*

*Strong notions of collective identity imply strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity. They imply high degrees of groupness, an “identity” or sameness among group members, a sharp distinctiveness from nonmembers, a clear boundary between inside and outside.<sup>5</sup>*

Given such common abuses of the term, therefore, a strict definition of “identity” is needed here in order to avoid the general analytical confusion it so often creates.

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<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity.’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

For the purposes of this thesis, the term “identity” here refers to what Brubaker and Cooper refer to in their article as “groupness.” According to the authors, “groupness” is defined as “the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group.”<sup>6</sup> “Groupness” goes one step further than “commonality,” moreover, which “denotes the sharing of some common attribute.” It is also not a reference to “connectedness” which implies there are some sort of “relational ties that link people.”<sup>7</sup> Not only must there be a shared trait such as skin color and relational ties such as a common history, but the individuals that make up a group must actively feel part of a particular group or “identity” that is clearly demarcated. But as Brubaker and Cooper also point out, “self-understanding” alone is not sufficient as it “designates *one’s own* understanding of who one is. . . [and it] cannot capture *other’s* understandings.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, one’s “self-understanding” can fluctuate over time and space.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, “Groupness” is also distinct from “identification” and “classification,” which are also often used interchangeably with the word “identity.” Both “identification” and “classification” require an outside body such as the government to group a people who do not necessarily feel associated with each other or the label that is put on them by the classifier. Following these distinctions, this thesis will use the term “identity” strictly in terms of what Brubaker and Cooper refer to as “groupness;” and any other popular and common uses of the word “identity” will therefore be described using other terms.

I chose to study identity because questions of identity always fascinated me given my own personal background. I was born and raised in the United States by my white Dutch mother and black Haitian father. In America, I am viewed as a black second generation immigrant (thus questionably American thanks to my parents’ heritage). However, to my father I am a *mulat*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

(mulatto/bi-racial) American while my Dutch family completely ignores the color of my skin and simply considers me to be fully American. Unsurprisingly, this curious interplay between race and culture in the formation of identity has long troubled me. After all, within my family alone I have been assigned numerous identities depending upon which of these social categories has colored one or another family member's perception of me. It always seemed, moreover, that such narrow views of identity, organized around these almost arbitrarily constructed categories, played much too large a role in our individual and collective lives. As time went on, I also came to appreciate how either a culture or a race-centric view of identity was not only highly arbitrary but also much too abstract and so, in the process, it often downplayed the role of much more tangible, material factors. As I knew from personal experience, a group of people do not feel a common bond or even assert a shared identity simply because they share a particular pigmentation, homeland, or historical background.

The importance of material conditions as a basis for identity was made evident to me in my upbringing in a working-class Haitian community in South Florida. As Haitian-Americans, yes, our identity was very much rooted in the fact that we did such things as speak broken Haitian Creole with our parents, and eat Soup Joumou on New Year's Day. Yet, our identity was also very much rooted in conditions that stemmed from the fact that our parents were largely low-skilled, un-educated migrants who had fled an impoverished nation only to settle into largely deprived economic conditions and the difficult realities of migrant life. Our parents' struggle with unforgiving immigration services, onerous jobs as low-paid cooks and nurse's aids, and ownership of old beat-up Toyota's was as much of a part of our identity as the language we spoke and the food we ate. In fact, we often felt connected with one another as Haitian-

Americans not only because of our shared historical and cultural backgrounds but also because of our shared present conditions and class experiences.

The histories of the West Indian and Antillean communities are advantageous for the study of the influence of material conditions on identity because they provide a useful and appropriate comparison from which conclusions about the influence of material conditions on identity can be made. These two migrant groups are very similar in their demographics, histories, migration patterns, and relation to their destinations. Thus, one would expect the evolution of the group identifications of these migrants to follow a similar trajectory and reach a similar conclusion. However, differing imperial legacies led to differences between the migration policies of the French and British governments. As a result, the two migrant populations would have different experiences in housing and employment resulting in markedly different identities.

Making appropriate comparisons in history can be difficult. However, there are several reasons to justify the juxtaposition of the experiences of Afro-Caribbean migrants in France and the United Kingdom given the legacy of European colonialism in the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> The migrants grew up in former colonies of their destination countries that were once dominated by sugar plantations tilled by their enslaved ancestors. Many of these islands remained colonies until the mid-20th century, moreover, which meant that labor migrants from these islands often entered France and the United Kingdom with a more privileged legal status than foreign immigrants who were not or were no longer colonial subjects or imperial citizens. In addition to citizenship, Afro-Caribbean migrants were also better positioned than others because they shared cultural, and

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<sup>10</sup> To read more about the appropriateness of this comparison see Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, "Contextualizing Migrant Flows: Socioeconomic, Political, and Legal Backgrounds of Two Colonial Migrations," in *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France* (New York, Routledge, 2008)



linguistic ties to their “mother country.” Finally, these cases share a common set of economic conditions or backgrounds. Both migrant groups left homelands that were economically ravaged due to the decline of the sugar industry. Thanks to both racism and labor needs, both groups were also funneled into lower skilled and lower paid jobs in their respective metropolises. Both groups experienced difficulty adjusting after the transition from their warm, largely rural homelands to the cold urban centers of their mother countries.

There are also similarities between France and the United Kingdom worth mentioning. At the time of migration, both countries were industrialized nations rebuilding after World War II. Rebuilding and the subsequent economic boom would create labor shortage that would attract migrants from their respective empires to their shores. In addition to these post-war economic realities, both France and the United Kingdom were faced with the wave of decolonization that swept the world after World War II. World War II shattered their self-ascribed labels as invincible carriers of civilization to their imperial subjects. Growing calls for independence came from across both the British and French empires including their possessions in the Caribbean. We might also therefore view the migration of Afro-Caribbean migrants to their mother countries as part of the last efforts of the British and French governments to maintain their dominion over their quickly deteriorating empires and their imperial subjects.<sup>11</sup>

There were of course also important and pertinent differences between the British and French views of their imperial subjects, particularly in their understanding of race and citizenship. The ensuing sections will discuss this further, but a brief introduction is warranted. In the United Kingdom, notions of race and citizenship, at least by the mid-20th century, were

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<sup>11</sup> Wendy Webster, “The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain,” in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 126.

closely linked to its past imperial experiences. Those indigenous to the British Isles were white, in contrast to the subjugated black and brown peoples that made up the majority of their overseas Empire. Thus, whiteness, building off the contrast to the remainder of the British Empire, became associated with Britishness. This perception in turn contributed to the British belief in the inferiority of non-white people as British whiteness was believed to be a basis for their domination in the empire. More importantly, the British viewed the United Kingdom as separate from the empire: meaning that those from subjugated territories were seen as part of the Empire, not British. As a result, whiteness became an important basis of citizenship during the period of decolonization, integration into Europe, and mass migration.

French notions concerning race and citizenship, on the other hand, were largely influenced by the Republican ideals that came out of the French Revolution. French identity and citizenship was linked to conscious subscription to uniform French culture and ideals. This notion of citizenship was constructed in contrast to the other notions of citizenship that prevailed at that time and were based on “blood.” Additionally, Republican ideals make for a color-blind citizenship. Republican ideology dictates that (as we will see later this is not truly the case) the French purportedly did not see the world divided into different races of people, only different cultures.<sup>12</sup> While the French did not believe in a global racial hierarchy like the British, all cultures were not seen as equal. Therefore, French citizenship is technically not based on “whiteness” like British citizenship, rather on the acceptance of a particular set of ideals and a vaguely defined French culture: race is not a factor.

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<sup>12</sup> David Beriss, “Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society.” *French Politics, Culture & Society* (2000): 34.

Given the brevity of this thesis in contrast to the vastness of this subject, the ensuing sections will not, of course, do full justice to all the topics they touch upon, but what is important is the comparison that will be made and the conclusions that will be drawn from it. The relevance of topics such as the history of the pan-African movement, the legacies of colonialism, and decolonization and a deeper genealogy of the notions of race and citizenship in these countries cannot be overstated; but this thesis can also only address these vast topics in brief. Nevertheless, the hope is that this comparison might still be enlightening. Keeping in mind differences in terms of notions of race and citizenship, as well as the different national historical experiences with migration involved here, we can see how the mass migration of Afro-Caribbean peoples to France and the United Kingdom were undertaken under similar general historical circumstances but that they nevertheless produced very different results. The British government made no effort to facilitate the migration of Afro-Caribbean people from their former colonies. These migrants thus had no alleviation from their dire economic experiences that were a result of racism. Accordingly, these migrants no longer identified as British, opting to instead identify as West Indian. In comparison, the French government actively facilitated the movement of Afro-Caribbean migrants to the metropole with aid ranging from housing to small loans. Although it cannot be said that due to state aid these migrants were particularly economically successful, they were partially shielded from the full brunt of racism in the economic sphere. Thus, unlike the British case, Afro-Caribbean migrants in France made more of an effort to maintain their French identity but in a new configuration.

This thesis draws on a wide range of sources in order to understand the influence of housing and employment on identity. Housing and employment surveys and statistics gathered by sociologists help illustrate the kind of conditions migrants lived and worked in relative to

national averages, but little in terms of identity formation is discussed. Using this data, it will be demonstrated that the migrants would experience economic conditions that persisted and differed from national norms. Although this material as it stands in the works of researchers such as Ceri Peach is very useful in understanding the living standard of migrants and their descendants, it is not used to understand how adverse conditions affected how migrants and their descendants saw themselves.<sup>13</sup> The researchers focus strictly on labor, migration, and housing patterns and how these patterns were shaped by the post-war economies and migration policies of France and the United Kingdom.

Primary and secondary sources related to government migration policies clarified how the French and British governments viewed the migrants and how the governments' approaches to these migrants affected their housing and employment conditions. Materials concerning British policies speak extensively about the racism that was at the root of the government's policies toward West Indian migrants in addition to how the government's "free-market" approach resulted in harsh experiences for the migrants. In the French case, scholars focus on describing the complex system the French government set up in order to facilitate French-Caribbean migration. Historian Sylvain Pattieu in "Un Traitement Spécifique des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguités" focuses on the activities of the BUMIDOM (a French government agency to be discussed further later) while scholar Audrey Célestine in "French Caribbean Organizations and the 'Black Question' in France" studies how government financial sponsorship of cultural organization might have reinforced an already existing Antillean identity. I draw on these sources extensively in order to understand how these government systems operated. However, no mention in these kinds of works concerning

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<sup>13</sup> See Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*. (London and Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1968)

government policy is made of how government policy, by influencing material conditions, indirectly influenced the actual construction of the West Indian and Antillean identity.

Finally, Newspapers, histories, anthropological research, and scholarly articles related to the topic of these communities were used to understand how the migrants saw themselves and how this understanding evolved over time and generations. These materials understandably focus on the involvement of race and culture in construction of these new communities and identities, implying that prejudice and differences in culture were the sole factors that led these migrants to see themselves as “other.” For example, David Beriss, in “Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society” argues a distinct Antillean identity evolved solely from discrimination and was shaped by French notions of race and culture. Similarly, Nancy Foner, in her comparison of West Indian communities in New York City and London, puts forth the differing perceptions of “blackness” in the two cities as the basis for the difference in how these two communities saw themselves.<sup>14</sup> In these as well as similar works, no connection is made between the conditions the migrants lived in and how they came to understand themselves.<sup>15</sup>

These sources, varying in genre, were produced and are typically discussed in isolation. In isolation, these sources suggest a common understanding of identity that almost exclusively revolves around race and ethnicity. Material conditions such housing, and employment are understood to simply be the living conditions of migrants and have no bearing on how the migrants understood themselves. This thesis combines and builds upon these sources to

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<sup>14</sup> See Nancy Foner, " West Indian Identity in the Diaspora: Comparative and Historical Perspectives." *Latin American Perspectives* 25 (1998).

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the nature of the materials used to construct the arguments for the British and French cases differ slightly. This is due to the fact that the French government, unlike the British government, did not gather statistics on race until very recently (owing to a policy of anti-communitarianism).

demonstrate that housing and employment conditions, and thus indirectly government policies, are more important to understanding the history and self-understanding of these communities than is given credit.

By demonstrating the importance of housing and employment conditions in the construction of the identification of the Antillean and West Indian communities, this paper hopes to make a broader point about identity. These case studies demonstrate that material conditions play much more of a role in the construction of identity than current academic and popular discourse allows for. The self-understanding of the West Indian and Antillean communities were shaped by their daily material experiences. Accordingly, discussions of identity require more consideration of economic conditions.

### West Indian Community

The post-war collapse of the sugar industry in the Caribbean led to the migration of hundreds of thousands of laborers from British territories in the Caribbean to the United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> In the United Kingdom, economic hardship led the migrants to reconsider their self-perception. As citizens of the Commonwealth who grew up in the British Empire, the migrants saw themselves as British and hoped that their migration would offer them economic opportunity. However, a significant portion of metropolitan British society did not consider them British due to their blackness, leading to the erection of a “colour bar” in housing and employment. “Colour bar” is a term used to describe the discrimination black migrants from the Caribbean would experience in various areas of British society. The British government’s laissez-faire approach to this migration resulted in little government intervention to curb the discrimination black migrants faced. The discrimination Afro-Caribbean migrants suffered caused chronic difficulties in attaining decent housing and employment. As a result, Afro-Caribbean migrants and their descendants would no longer identify as British. Rather, a new West-Indian identity formed that was rooted, among other things, in shared experiences of economic hardship.

*At all events, the discussion of future grave but, with effort now, avoidable evils is the most unpopular and at the same time the most necessary occupation for the politician . . . A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a constituent . . . [who stated] in this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man. . . I turn to re-emigration. If all immigration ended tomorrow. . . the prospective size of this element in the population would still leave the basic character of the national danger unaffected.*

-Enoch Powell 1968<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The West Indian population in England and Wales grew from 15,300 to 267,000 between 1951 and 1966. E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 97.

<sup>17</sup> Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood,”(speech, Birmingham, United Kingdom, April 20, 1968), The Telegraph, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>

Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech criticized mass immigration to the United Kingdom as well as the introduction of the Race Relations Act of 1968. Powell and this speech are infamous as Powell was one of the first British politicians to explicitly express the racist mentality that had resided in the British government for decades. Fallout from Powell's speech was fierce. Politicians on both sides of the political spectrum were quick to denounce Powell's belief that "coloured" migrants from the Commonwealth and their descendants were dangers to Britain and should be deported. Yet, Powell correctly asserted in his speech that he was merely speaking what was secretly on the mind of millions of white British people across the socio-economic spectrum. Those who held the beliefs of Powell saw the large migration of people of color from former colonies during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as a threat to Britishness and British "purity." This racist mentality was formed during the years of British imperialism, morphed by the contemporary situation of decolonization, and applied to the migration debate. The mass migration of Afro-Caribbean laborers to the United Kingdom would expose the inconsistencies in "white Britain's" notions of "Britishness" and citizenship.

Notions of race and blackness among British elites were formed by the United Kingdom's imperial history. British elites were exposed to late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century academic works that avowed a global racial hierarchy with the "white race" at the top. The belief in racial superiority justified the colonial subjugation of "lower" black and brown peoples of the British empire; therefore, white supremacy was a pillar of British colonial rule. For example, throughout the empire laws, were in place that banned interracial sex for fear that miscegenation "would undermine the authority of white, and particularly the authority of white men."<sup>18</sup> Mass

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<sup>18</sup> Wendy Webster, "The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain," in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 144.



migration of former imperial subjects brought with it the racist theories used to oppress these migrants in the colonies. Stereotypes stemming from these racial theories as well as fears of miscegenation were why many British officials believed that “colored migration” would lead to the degeneration of Britain and the “British people.”

Hostility towards these migrants must be understood in context. The United Kingdom has a long history of animosity towards perceived outsiders. Interestingly, the British government’s hostility towards black and brown people from the empire was not initially shared by the public. For example, during World War I and World War II, mass riots and internment of German and Italian immigrants were common as these foreigners were viewed with suspicion.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, the public celebrated the Afro-Caribbean and Indian soldiers who contributed to the war effort; an appreciation boosted by government propaganda that promoted the notion of an empire “united across differences of race and ethnicity” against the racist Nazis.<sup>20</sup> This propaganda, however, masked the true resentment of government officials in contact with non-white soldiers. Early on, the British army made it very clear that they did not want non-white recruits and for the few non-white recruits that made it into the army, life was hell as they were subject to abuse by their white officers as well as sub-standard provisions.<sup>21</sup> Treatment of non-white soldiers during both World Wars was so bad that it was a major impetus for the Fifth Pan-African Conference where calls for decolonization from across the empire, based on a rejection of white supremacy, were made.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while non-white soldiers were praised by the British public, those who actually interacted with non-white individuals treated them poorly, providing

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 138, 140

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>21</sup> Winston James, “The Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain,” in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (New York: Oxford, 2004) 354.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 367

a glimpse of the highly racist attitudes of white British people towards their non-white Commonwealth brethren.

Public perceptions of race became evident during the period of mass migration following the Second World War when Afro-Caribbean migrants became a permanent fixture of British life. Previously, Afro-Caribbean migration to the British Isles was small and temporary. Most of the Afro-Caribbean migrants were either soldiers (mentioned above), who were expected to leave once the war was over, or elites studying in British Universities who would return home upon completion of their studies. Thus, until the World War II, the Afro-Caribbean presence in the United Kingdom was considered “manageable” enough to not warrant an official response by the British government, and small enough to not be considered a “problem” by the white British public. It is true that anti-black race riots had occurred during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but these were localized outbursts in sea towns where black sailors were seen as foreign competition during times of economic distress, not existential threats to Britishness.<sup>23</sup> The post-war migration of Afro-Caribbean laborers was not only large but for the first-time permanent, alarming the British public and government and making clear the racism that existed in its society.

Racism is already evident in the British government’s management of its labor shortage. The British government set the European Voluntary Workers scheme to recruit white laborers from Europe, but no attempt was made to set up a similar scheme to recruit black British citizens from the Caribbean despite pleas from Caribbean governors that the scheme be extended to their islands in order to alleviate the economic disaster occurring at the time.<sup>24</sup> Just as revealing is the fact that in 1951 there were 750,000 Irish migrants in the United Kingdom, yet it was the 15,000

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<sup>23</sup> Winston James, “Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain,” 356.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 369

black migrants from the Caribbean that alarmed officials and prompted them to seek ways to restrict migration.<sup>25</sup> The United Kingdom desperately needed laborers to rebuild its bombed-out cities after the second World War. However, instead of turning to British citizens from the Caribbean who speak English and were familiar with British culture, the British government recruited foreign white non-citizens from elsewhere. Fear of migrants of color is apparent at the highest echelons of the British government. Prime minister Attlee openly wondered if black migration from the Caribbean could be diverted to other parts of the empire while Winston Churchill “told Sir Hugh Foot, Governor of Jamaica, that he opposed Jamaican migration to Britain because he hated the idea of a ‘magpie society.’<sup>26</sup> Despite the alarm over Afro-Caribbean migration, several factors prevented the British government from making explicit attempts at curbing migration from the British Caribbean during the forties and fifties.

Notions of Britishness and attempts at maintaining the empire kept the British government from making early attempts at curbing Afro-Caribbean migration. A facet of “Britishness” promoted by the British government was the supposed British liberalism towards race. This facet was useful, as mentioned earlier, in the moral campaign against the racist Nazi regime as well as in allowing the United Kingdom to criticize and distinguish itself against the Jim Crow American South and Apartheid South Africa.<sup>27</sup> This image of a liberal stance towards race was important during the post-War push for decolonization. During this period, calls around the world were made to destroy the imperial system that was rooted in white supremacy. Therefore, the British government could not erect any semblance of migration controls based on race because such racist measures would undermine efforts to maintain the empire. In short, the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 372

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 370

<sup>27</sup> Webster, “The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain,” 130.

appearance of “good race relations” at home was needed in order to maintain good relations abroad.<sup>28</sup> As a result, black migration from the Commonwealth continued, quietly discouraged, but not officially impeded until the early sixties. Despite being unimpeded, this migration and the experiences of the migrants would be largely shaped by racism and led to the disappointment of hundreds of thousands of British citizens looking for acceptance and economic advancement in what they believed to be their motherland.

The racist treatment by the British government and society was shocking to the Afro-Caribbean migrants as they regarded themselves as British. An article from the widely circulated British newspaper, *The Times* notes how “Older West Indians were brought up to regard themselves as English, and the shock of realizing the English did not accept them as such has forced many to think in terms of black identity.”<sup>29</sup> Having had a colonial empire in the Caribbean for around 300 years, the British had left an enduring mark on the region, importing British culture, norms, society, etc. In order to promote colonial cohesion, British colonial officials, since the time of emancipation, taught their subjects to see themselves as British.<sup>30</sup> Buttressing this official rhetoric is the fact that the inhabitants of the island were educated in the British system and exposed to British culture. Regarding themselves as British, migrants from the West Indies saw the British Isles as the motherland and the British monarch as their queen.<sup>31</sup> For these migrants, migration to the United Kingdom was less of a migration and more of a homecoming. Furthermore, the British Nationality Act of 1948 created a “Commonwealth Citizenship” that accorded these migrants the same citizenship rights as Britain-born citizens including the right work and live in the United Kingdom. They expected to be treated no different than someone

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<sup>28</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 50.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, Peter. “Seeds of Racial Unrest.” *The Times*, February 26, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> Webster, “The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain,” 148-9

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

who had moved from Edinburgh to London. However, government rhetoric and experiences in housing and employment would tell the migrants otherwise.

Government policy from Westminster indicated that officials did not regard the migrants as British. As mentioned previously, government officials early on were alarmed by the migration of Afro-Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom, yet were kept from stemming this migration because of considerations for the empire. The creation of a Commonwealth Citizenship was meant to be more of a symbolic gesture to maintain the empire, not an invitation to the masses of the empire to live and work in the United Kingdom. Officials would need some sort of public outcry to justify restrictions. They would receive this justification in the late fifties when the Afro-Caribbean migrant population became large enough to incite violent public backlash such as the 1958 Notting Hill riots.<sup>32</sup> The combination of anti-migrant public outcry and the decision to pursue further integration with Europe over maintenance of the Commonwealth would lead the British government to set upon a legislative journey that would slowly roll back the citizenship rights of the migrants bestowed upon them by the British Nationality Act of 1948. According to the government, the best way to deal with Britain's "race problem" was keeping the objects of hate out of the United Kingdom.

Thus, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, was the first of a series of legislative acts that rolled back the rights bestowed by British Nationality Act of 1948 and sent a clear message to the Afro-Caribbean migrants that they were not first-class British citizens. Under this act, immigration officials could refuse entry of Commonwealth Citizens who either were not born in the United Kingdom for a host of reasons with exceptions for those who could prove

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<sup>32</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 52.

either employment or means to support themselves.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 was passed which stipulated that, in addition the restrictions of the 1962 Act, even if one was a citizen of the United Kingdom, one could be denied entry if one did not have at least one parent or grandparent born in the United Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the Immigrants Act of 1971 dictated that anyone who was not a citizen of the United Kingdom, including Commonwealth Citizens, could be deported for a host of reasons outlined in the Act.<sup>35</sup>

This string of legislation sent a clear message to the Afro-Caribbean community. Generally, restrictions to entry into the United Kingdom insinuated that the United Kingdom was not the rightful motherland of the migrants because they were not British. The restrictions also reflect the imperial legacy of the British seeing the United Kingdom as separate from the Empire. The exemption in the 1962 Act for those who could prove employment or means to support themselves indicates that the government did not want Commonwealth migrants relying on the social safety net provided by the welfare state. This safety net, as the philosophy of the welfare state dictates, is an inherent social right of citizens.<sup>36</sup> Thus, by ensuring that the Afro-Caribbean migrants would not come to rely on this net, the government was implying that it did not see these migrants as entitled to it as they were not British. Racial undertones are evident in the 1968 Act's requirement for some sort of familial connection to the United Kingdom as many white migrants from "settler colonies" such as Canada and Australia had family born in the United Kingdom while migrants of color such as Afro-Caribbean migrants from the West Indies generally did not. Finally, the Immigration Act of 1971, by making them eligible for deportation,

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<sup>33</sup> *Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962* 10 and 11 Eliz. 2. Ch. 21 Arrangement of Sections., <https://web.archive.org/web/20110927012831/http://www.britishcitizen.info/CIA1962.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> *Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/9/enacted>

<sup>35</sup> *Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1971*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/77>

<sup>36</sup> E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 27.

made it clear to the Afro-Caribbean migrants that they were viewed as no different from the hundreds of thousands of foreign immigrants in the United Kingdom. The illusion that colonial officials propagated to the migrants was destroyed. Afro-Caribbean migrants received a clear message from the British government that they were neither welcome nor regarded as British.<sup>37</sup>

Ironically, it was the announcement of migration restrictions in 1962 that would create a surge of Afro-Caribbean migrants trying to beat the ban. This surge of migrants would create a media frenzy that coupled with government rhetoric to exacerbate growing public hostility towards Afro-Caribbean migrants. Attitudes among all levels of the British populace were not welcoming. Due to the “visibility” of the black Afro-Caribbean migrants, they were targeted with minor daily occurrences as well as occasional extreme acts of racism that would eventually give the British government the confidence to enact the discriminatory legislation described above.

E.J.B. Rose’s *Colour and Citizenship* was a survey commissioned in the mid-sixties by the Institute of Race Relation that gives an idea of public attitudes towards Afro-Caribbean at the time migrants. The surveyors focused on areas with “relatively large proportions of coloured Commonwealth immigrants,” and those surveyed were asked a set of questions relating to “coloured Commonwealth immigrants” (including migrants from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, and Cyprus).<sup>38</sup> Based on responses to these questions, respondents were ranked as either “tolerant,” “tolerant-inclined,” “prejudice-inclined,” or “prejudiced.” The results from the survey are revealing. Twenty-seven percent of respondents were rated to be either “prejudice” or

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<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note the change in the British perception of “blackness,” in the context of decolonization during the first half of the twentieth century. “Blackness” would go from being perceived as inferior to something viewed as a threat. More on this can be found in Wendy Webster’s “The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain.”

<sup>38</sup> Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 551.

“prejudice-inclined” while an additional thirty-eight percent was found to be “tolerant-inclined,” meaning that the respondent gave only one hostile reply.”<sup>39</sup> Even more revealing is the fact that these percentages are consistent across age, gender, political leanings, and socio-economic class. The survey makes other interesting revelations. Few of the respondents considered the British to be superior to Americans and other Europeans while “almost two-thirds of the sample felt that British people were superior to those who lived in Asia and Africa.”<sup>40</sup> Questions referring specifically to West Indian migrants show that seventy-five percent of those questioned believed the “West Indian way of life” to either be “not similar” or “not at all similar” to the “British way of life.”<sup>41</sup> More than sixty-percent of respondents found that West Indian migrants “receive more social service benefits than their contributions.”<sup>42</sup> The surveyors concluded that a majority of the hostile feelings towards the migrants were in one way or another based in “confusion, anxiety, and misunderstanding about the migration, its composition, and the background of the migrants.”<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the public shared the views of the government that the migrants were different and not welcome. The government induced surge of migrants would only spread and exacerbate these feelings.

Acute instances of racial tensions as well as the responses to these events further reveal the depth to which the British public and government saw the Afro-Caribbean migrants as invading outsiders. These instances would prompt migrant communities, especially Afro-Caribbean communities, to organize to protect themselves. As mentioned, throughout the fifties, as the Afro-Caribbean population in the United Kingdom grew, so did the frequency of race

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 552

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 566

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 568

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 571

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 371



related outbursts of violence. Gangs of young white youths as well as fascists were known to wander the streets attacking black individuals, homes, and community centers.<sup>44</sup> The largest and most egregious outburst of violence occurred on August 17, 1958 in the London suburb of Notting Hill. On this day, a mob described as a “Keep Britain White” group that consisted of armed white youths and fascists descended upon the suburb, known for having one of the largest West Indian communities in the United Kingdom, in order to go “nigger-hunting,” attacking black individuals and destroying black property.<sup>45</sup> These attacks continued for the rest of the month, shocking the white population of Britain. The enormity of these riots made the British population realize that they were “not above the kind of racial conflict then being played out in the American deep South.”<sup>46</sup>

The Notting Hill riot was not an isolated instance as outbursts of racial tension became common in British cities in the decades to come. Consequently, the British government would adopt a policy of erecting a “colour bar” at the border which came in the form of the various citizenship related legislation mentioned above. The British government essentially “blamed the victim” and used the riots as an excuse to produce various migration-restricting laws, arguing that having less people of color within the country would alleviate racial tensions. In an effort to maintain a semblance of British toleration towards race, the government instituted discrimination-fighting legislation such as the Race Relations Act of 1965. Yet, even members of Parliament recognized that these efforts were toothless.<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, Afro-Caribbean migrants would come to see themselves as something other than British.

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<sup>44</sup> Cecily Jones, “Notting Hill Riots,” in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 346.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 347

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, c506W., vol. 917 (21 October 1976)

Acute incidents of racism set off the construction of a new identity in Britain. Despite being constantly referred to as West Indian or Caribbean by newspapers and government documents, there was not a unified West Indian identity like that among Indian and Pakistani migrants who had a strong sense of national identity.<sup>48</sup> Although this process was fractured, a few exemplary leaders and initiatives in the community stood out and indicate the early direction of this process. One such famous leader was Trinidadian-born Claudia Jones who had grown up in the United States but was deported for being actively involved in the Communist Party. As with many others, the riots of 1958 and the unsolved, racially motivated murder of Antiguan migrant Kelso Cochrane in 1959 would inspire Claudia Jones to take action. The products of her inspiration were two of the most important institutions in the history of the British West Indian community: the Notting Hill Carnival and the *West Indian Gazette*. The Notting Hill Carnival, first organized in 1959, was meant to heal the fracture between the white and black communities of the Notting Hill area by providing a public event that the entire community could enjoy.<sup>49</sup> Claudia Jones also hoped to give more visibility to the black community in order to help integration efforts by having the Carnival broadcasted on the BBC.<sup>50</sup> It was only later in the 1970s that the Carnival would come to be considered a Caribbean event when unemployment and racist political figures such as Enoch Powell would flame racial tensions and lead the West Indian Community to claim that “the Carnival was a celebration of Caribbean culture and black struggle in Britain.”<sup>51</sup> The *West Indian Gazette* was founded by Claudia Jones in 1958 and is important because it was instrumental in the creation of a unique British Afro-Caribbean identity

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<sup>48</sup> Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 421.

<sup>49</sup> Erin D. Somerville, “Notting Hill Carnival,” in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 345.

<sup>50</sup> Bill Schwarz, “‘Claudia Jones’ and the *West Indian Gazette*: Reflections on the Emergence of Post-colonial Britain.” *Twentieth Century British History* 14 (2003): 274.

<sup>51</sup> Erin D. Somerville, “Notting Hill Carnival,” 345.

that was based on blackness. Articles featured in the newspaper discussed a wide range of topics relevant to the Afro-Caribbean community ranging from “up and coming” black artists to the best locations to buy ingredients for Caribbean dishes.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the paper was very “local” in nature in that it catered to the needs of the West Indian community in London while also fostering this sense of community. Claudia Jones also hoped to create a global “black awareness” by also including stories about issues facing the black diaspora around the world such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.<sup>53</sup> In this way, she sought to connect in the minds of her readers the struggles of the British Afro-Caribbean community the struggles of black communities around the world. Individuals and institutions like Claudia Jones and the Notting Hill Carnival shaped and made apparent the new West Indian identity. However, economic factors cemented the West Indian community’s understanding of itself.

The inability of to advance economically due to the “colour bar” contributed significantly to the West Indian community’s identification as something completely other than British. Discrimination in housing as well as employment, permanently confined West Indians to the fringes of society. One could argue that segregation in housing and the funneling towards certain low-paying jobs is a normal aspect of the migrant experience. However, those from the West Indies were not “typical” migrants. They were, at the time of their arrival, full-fledged citizens who spoke the language, understood the society, and held a very similar culture of the host country. Furthermore, the blatant racist treatment of these migrants and their children is exposed by the fact that their housing and employment conditions never improved over the generations.

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<sup>52</sup> Schwarz, “‘Claudia Jones’ and the West Indian Gazette’ Reflections on the Emergence of Post-colonial Britain,” 276.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 270

The Afro-Caribbean migrants were second class citizens in a country they formerly thought was their own.

Second class citizenship followed the community in the housing market. Post-war Britain experienced a massive housing shortage due to a significant portion of the housing stock being destroyed during the war as well as the large influx of migrants. The housing shortage led the new welfare state to consider housing as a social right.<sup>54</sup> Seeing how social rights were considered an essential aspect of the citizenship of an Englishman, the denial of the right to quality housing was further proof to the migrants that they were not considered first-class citizens.<sup>55</sup> The lack of coordination between migration and housing would exacerbate the housing situation generally as well as particularly for Afro-Caribbean migrants. Since the migration of laborers from the Caribbean was not conducted in a controlled manner by the government, there was no such coordination between housing and migration policy that might have alleviated the housing crisis. Migrants from the Caribbean were left to their own devices to find housing. Unfortunately, in addition to the housing shortage, as British geographer Ceri Peach notes, in the fifties and sixties “There [was} a general reluctance on the part of the white population either to sell or to rent back accommodation to West Indians so they were thrown back on to making intensive use of any accommodation that was available to them.”<sup>56</sup> As Peach notes, the housing shortage coupled with discrimination forced Afro-Caribbean migrants into horrible housing situations that they would barely escape generations later.

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<sup>54</sup> Susan J. Smith, *The Politics of 'Race' and Residence: Citizenship, Segregation and White Supremacy in Britain*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 51

<sup>55</sup> E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*. (London and Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1968), 87

Restrictions to housing due to the shortage and discrimination forced Afro-Caribbean migrants to seek housing either through family networks or the few private renters who would rent to them. These migrants experienced overcrowding, poor living conditions as well as unusually high rents that would come to be called the “colour tax.” British public housing, referred to as council housing, would have relieved such issues. However, despite qualifying for such housing, local councils restricted the Afro-Caribbean migrants’ access to public housing and the few who did gain access were relegated to the worst quality.<sup>57</sup> It was not until the late sixties that the Afro-Caribbean community gained more unrestricted access to public housing but only due to the fact that the white British population generally became able to afford to live outside of such housing due to a booming economy.<sup>58</sup>

Census data from 1966 reveals the substandard housing conditions Afro-Caribbean migrants were forced into. In Rose’s *Colour and Citizenship* overcrowding is evident in the fact that people from Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean lived 1.07 and 1.14 persons per room, respectively, compared to the national average of 0.57 persons per room.<sup>59</sup> Subpar conditions are revealed the fact that 26.3% of Jamaicans and 25.5% of migrants from other parts of the Caribbean living in the London area lived in households without kitchens as compared to 10.9% of white English inhabitants.<sup>60</sup> An interview of the migrant Henrietta conducted by researcher Stephanie Condon provides an image of these terrible conditions. Henrietta describes how in 1954, her and her husband struggled to find people that would rent to them spacious rooms with amenities. Thus, they were forced to settle with “rooms let out by a Jamaican [where] we were

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 85

<sup>58</sup> Byron, Margaret and Condon, Stéphanie, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 144

<sup>59</sup> E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 122.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 130

allowed to use his bath but just on Thursday nights . . . And I was so cold that I slept with my coat on’.”<sup>61</sup> The conditions of inner-city housing would catch the attention of Parliament which commissioned the Milner-Holland Report on London Housing that reported the existence of a “colour bar” in housing which created the terrible conditions experienced by migrants.<sup>62</sup> Some members of Parliament would express shame over the overcrowding, exorbitant rents, sub-par living conditions, and high eviction rates in supposedly the wealthiest city in Europe.<sup>63</sup> Yet, conservative politicians would blame the migrants themselves rather than the rampant discrimination for these housing conditions. These conditions would be used as support by Conservatives for immigration controls as early as the fifties.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the British government would only haphazardly intervene to prevent housing discrimination in 1968, nearly two decades after the wave of migration began.<sup>65</sup>

Expectedly, discrimination in housing led to segregation. Although the segregation of the West-Indian population in the United Kingdom is said to not have been as bad as that of black people in the United States at the time, it was still significant enough to have an effect on the livelihoods of individuals.<sup>66</sup> A combination of factors involving employment, discriminatory housing practices, and family networks would lead the early migrants of the fifties and sixties to cluster in the major cities. Rose notes that in the sixties, compared to other migrant/immigrant groups, West Indians in general and Jamaicans in particular were acutely concentrated.<sup>67</sup> London

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<sup>61</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 134.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 136

<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, cc836-94., vol. 264 (29 March 1965)

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 136

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Ceri Peach, “Segregation of Black Immigrants in Britain: Spatial Pattern and Social Process.” *Current Anthropology* 19 (1978): 612-13

<sup>67</sup> E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 103.

itself contained fifty-three percent of the Jamaican population and forty-five percent of the Caribbean migrant population.<sup>68</sup> The uniqueness of the concentration of Afro-Caribbean migrants as compared to other migrants is also noted by geographer Ceri Peach who states that “Nevertheless, it is clearly possible for the Irish to move into all areas while it is not yet demonstrated that this is true for West Indians. Similarly, it is true that while there are no exclusively coloured districts, there are exclusively non-West Indian districts. While there are no ghettos, white rings can already be added to the urban features of British towns.”<sup>69</sup> The mobility of Irish migrants compared to the forced concentration of Afro-Caribbean migrants insinuates a race bar that is supported by Peach’s belief that there was evidence that the arrival of Afro-Caribbean migrants accelerated the flight of white British residents to these “white rings.”<sup>70</sup>

If the unusual concentration of Afro-Caribbean migrants is not enough to convince one of a “colour bar,” the persistence of this “bar” is further proof of racial factors at play in housing. Human geographer Susan J. Smith in her work *The Politics of ‘Race’ and Residence* notes that by the eighties there had been “no gradual decline of segregation over time as traditional (and as we shall see political) models of immigration, dispersal and ‘assimilation’ once predicted” and concludes that segregation had become a normal aspect of British cities (note, in her study Smith is referring to all “Black British” groups including West Indians and people from the Indian sub-continent).<sup>71</sup> Not only were black populations, including West Indians, experiencing segregation, they were still highly concentrated in urban areas, not having been able to breakout into the suburban “white rings.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, even after thirty years, Afro-Caribbean migrants and their

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 101

<sup>69</sup> Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>71</sup> Susan J. Smith, *The Politics of ‘Race’ and Residence: Citizenship, Segregation and White Supremacy in Britain*. 35-6.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 33

descendants were still not physically included into British society, relegated to the worst neighborhoods of urban areas.

Afro-Caribbean migrants faced similar discrimination in employment as well. Many of the migrants who came to the United Kingdom were very skilled workers.<sup>73</sup> Based on stories of the booming economy from friends who had already made the journey, these skilled migrants came to the United Kingdom with hopes of acquiring good paying jobs that matched their skillset and possibly find room for career advancement. Indeed, there was a “color hierarchy” in employment on many of the islands that was a vestige of the colonial system. Typically, the lighter one was, the better the job one could acquire. Thus, many “darker” migrants believed that migrating to the motherland would allow them to avoid this system and find opportunity.<sup>74</sup> However, they would find a similar racial hierarchy in employment when they arrived in the United Kingdom. One migrant early on recognized the challenge the racial hierarchy in employment would pose when she comments in a survey that “If the white man was sweeping the streets, then any job I asked for would mean a challenge to him” and thus she admits that she could not occupy any jobs that white British people might take.<sup>75</sup> What allowed any form of employment to be available to black migrants in the first place was the fact that the post-war economic expansion allowed many lower-class white British people to move up the socio-economic ladder. The jobs that were left were low-paying, unskilled jobs that white British people would not do. Statistics from the 1966 census show an underrepresentation of males from the Caribbean in professional jobs with only 0.8 percent of the Caribbean migrant population holding these kinds of jobs as compared to the average of the general male population of 4.2

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<sup>73</sup> E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 422

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 421

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 420



percent.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, there was an overrepresentation of male Caribbean male migrants in labor intensive occupations such as woodworking and general labor, which employed 8.4 and 18.1 percent of these migrants, respectively, as compared to the national average of 2.7 and 6 percent.<sup>77</sup> This overrepresentation of Afro-Caribbean migrants in unskilled, labor intensive jobs was not due to the demographics and qualifications of the migrants, as many migrants found themselves in jobs that under-utilized their experience and skillset.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the “colour bar” that the migrants experienced in housing would also be present in employment.

The “colour bar” in employment fed off and into the “colour bar” in housing. Afro-Caribbean migrants during the early years of migration were attracted to and concentrated in the abysmal inner-city neighborhoods that they lived in because these areas were located close to the declining industries that the white population was moving out of.<sup>79</sup> The industries where the migrants could find employment were slowly becoming out-of-date and the influx of cheap migrant labor only delayed their death. By the seventies and eighties these industries disappeared. Yet, the “colour bar” in housing would prevent the Afro-Caribbean community from moving out of its inner-city enclaves and into locations and industries where labor was in demand. As a result, unemployment among the Afro-Caribbean community skyrocketed and explosive disillusionment formed among the younger generations who did not identify with the background of their parents but also did not feel welcomed by the land they were born in because of the way they were treated.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 155

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>78</sup> Byron, Margaret and Condon, Stéphanie, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 62.

<sup>79</sup> Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain*, 62.

Growing frustration is evident in the seventies. *The Times* notes in 1972 that urban black youths were plagued by unemployment and homelessness, calling them “a shifting, hopeless crowd tormented by questions to which Black Power seems to provide answers.”<sup>80</sup> This hopelessness manifested itself in small violent outbursts against police harassment particularly during the Notting Hill Carnival. Police harassment was symptomatic of poverty. Poor housing and unemployment accentuated to white Britain the notion that black youths were volatile threats to society. This poverty also made black youths unable to afford the social currency necessary to fight harassment from official sources. These youths grieved that “whites don’t like us or understand us.”<sup>81</sup> Afro-Caribbean youths were not blind to the fact that their circumstances had racial causes. Thus, blackness was understood as what held them back and the basis of their new identity.<sup>82</sup>

Explosive instances such as the Brixton Riots of 1981 would rock the United Kingdom, and, like the Nottingham riots of 1958, wake up “white Britain” to the plight of the British West Indian Caribbean community. Rioters were mainly black youths disgruntled with their material situation and constant police harassment. This riot was not an aberration but rather the product of years of mistreatment. Black British community activist Chris Mullard commented already in 1973 that “if “society ignores our presence, our justifiable demands, then Britain will be creating the very kind of situation it wishes to avoid – it will be paving the way for Notting Hill riots all over again and for a deep hatred which could only lead to more and more violence. This is no idle threat. Black Britons are already fighting, and will continue to fight for their rights if they must.”<sup>83</sup> The “colour bar” in housing and employment wreaked havoc on the children of the

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Evans. “Hope for Young Black Britons in Search of Identity.” *The Times*, March 27, 1972

<sup>81</sup> Peter Evans. “Seeds of Racial Unrest.” *The Times*, February 26, 1971

<sup>82</sup> Peter Evans. “Hope for Young Black Britons in Search of an Identity.” *The Times*, February 26, 1971

<sup>83</sup> Peter Evans. “The Wilderness of not being White.” *The Times*, March 30, 1973

Afro-Caribbean migrants. Unlike their parents, the West Indian youth did not live in a time of economic expansion that provided their parents with low-paying, unskilled jobs. To add to the frustration of these youths is the fact that the United Kingdom was the only country that they knew. Their parents might have been disappointed and disillusioned at their situation but accepted it as the typical migrant experience. The youth however were frustrated by the fact that they were unable to strive for a better future in their own country, experiencing “colour bars” in all aspects of society including housing, employment, and schooling. As a result, when the industries that their parents worked in disappeared, they were left without any prospects for decent livelihoods in their own home country simply because of the color of their skin.

In the aftermath of the 1981 riots, government officials finally admitted to the complaints that the black community had been making for decades but the government had turned a deaf ear to. In the official government report on the 1981 Brixton riots, government officials comment that “they believe[d] that young blacks have a real fear of the police. This led to hostility because the blacks felt rejected by white society.”<sup>84</sup> Government neglect in terms of investment and services to ease housing and employment issues was also acknowledged as evidenced by William Pitt, chairman of the London Liberal Party’s comment that “The Brixton riots were the price to be paid for the Government’s deliberate diversion of funds from deprived inner-city areas to rich shire counties”<sup>85</sup>

This “deliberate diversion of funds from deprived inner-city areas” simply added to the harsh experiences that the British government’s laissez faire approach to migration would subject Afro-Caribbean migrants and their children to. These material experiences in turn would be

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<sup>84</sup> Lucy Hodges. “Brixton Groups Decide to give Evidence to Scarman after all.” *The Times*, June 12, 1981

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Warman. “Brixton riots the result of shifting funds out of cities, Liberals say.” *The Times*, April 15, 1981

instrumental in the younger generations understanding of themselves in terms of blackness. The government's laissez-faire approach to the migration of Afro-Caribbean migrants was influenced by its racist mentality that distinguished white British from colored imperial subjects. Racist attitudes would keep the government from counteracting in meaningful way the housing and employment difficulties Afro-Caribbean migrants experienced due to discrimination. A dire economic situation combined with discriminatory forces to cause the deterioration of the material situation of the generations following the original migration.

A new identity among the children of the first Afro-Caribbean migrants was bound to develop. As one young man, described as a "black militant" by *The Times* comments, "And we began to realize that you (white Britain) no longer followed the fashions that you instilled into us. They were old fashioned in your eyes. So, some of us have asked ourselves who we are. We feel we are West Indians. But more than that some of us think we are black."<sup>86</sup> The younger generation, because of the harsh economic realities they faced, held no illusions of "Britishness" as their parents did. For this reason, there was a noticeable rift between the younger and older generations. Criticizing the older generation, one young child of Afro-Caribbean migrants comments "You see the trouble is the English made a good job of anglicizing West Indians in in the days of Queen Victoria. Now West Indians are refusing to be brought up to date in England by their own children."<sup>87</sup> The younger generation refused to hold on to the quasi-British West Indian identity of their parents as it did not speak to their experiences growing up in the Britain the seventies and eighties. They knew white society rejected them.

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Evans, "Background to and Implications of the Mangrove Restaurant Case." *The Times*, December 17, 1971

<sup>87</sup> Peter Evans, "Seed of Racial Unrest." *The Times*, February 26, 1971

The Brixton Riots of 1981 were a collective expression of the frustration among black youths. There was no single unifying organization that created this new identity and was a voice for the entire Afro-Caribbean Community. It is revealing that reporters during both the fifties and eighties comment how there were multiple “black organizations” that were both disorganized and often at odds with each other.<sup>88 89</sup> Indeed, the process of the creation of a new form of self-understanding among the Afro-Caribbean Community was a fractured one. Again, there were some unifying institutions such as the *West Indian Gazette* and the Notting Hill Carnival that helped guide the direction of this process. However, violent inner-city outbursts during the seventies and eighties were the product of a collective shared experience in and frustration with substandard housing and employment. These youths understood themselves to be black because the “colour bar” in housing and employment made them experience their blackness daily. Thus, it was a shared material experience that was a product of racism and government mismanagement that heavily contributed to the formation of a new “black based” West Indian community that rejected “Britishness” as part of its identification.

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<sup>88</sup> “Disillusion West Indians.” *The Times*, August 27, 1956

<sup>89</sup> Lucy Hodges, “Black in Brixton Told Why to Boycott Scarman.” *The Times*, June 3, 1981

### Antilleans in France

The French government would take a dramatically different approach to the mass migration of Afro-Caribbean laborers to the metropole than the British government. Between 1963 and 1981, 310,000 black migrants from the French Département d’Outre-Mer (Overseas Departments), or DOM, would arrive en-masse as cheap laborers for the expanding French economy<sup>90 91</sup> Unlike in the British case, the French government would facilitate, not impede, this migration largely through the activities of the state agency aptly named Le Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations dans les Départements d’Outre-Mer (BUMIDOM), or The Office for the Development of the Migration in the Overseas Departments. State intervention would afford Afro-Caribbean migrants a higher standard of living than other immigrants to France at the time. However, disappointing experiences in housing and employment due to discrimination would lead these migrants to re-evaluate their French identity and their relation to the metropole. The result would be the birth of the distinct Antillean community in France that was neither rooted in blackness nor expressed itself in the same manner as the West Indian identity.

*“The truth of the matter is that there are no pure races; making politics depend on ethnographic analysis is to have it respond to chimera . . . A nation is therefore a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make. It presupposes a past but is reiterated in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation’s existence is (please excuse the metaphor) a daily plebiscite”*

-Ernest Renan 1882<sup>92</sup>

Before a discussion of migration, it must be made clear that French notions of race, citizenship, and blackness differed from those of the British. Ernest Renan’s statement above,

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<sup>90</sup> Audrey Célestine “French Caribbean Organizations and the ‘Black Question’ in France,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 4 (2011): 133.

<sup>91</sup> The French Overseas Departments include the territories of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, and Réunion. However, for the purposes of this section Overseas Departments (DOM) will refer exclusively to Guadeloupe and Martinique.

<sup>92</sup> Renan, Ernest. “What is a Nation?” Lecture, Sarbonne, Paris, March 11, 1882.  
[http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf)

taken from his 1882 lecture, *What is a Nation*, summarizes an understanding of French citizenship that has been dominant in recent history. According to Renan, French nationality and citizenship is not based on characteristics that commonly unify other nations such as race, language, dynasties, or religion. Rather, French nationality and citizenship belongs to those who make the conscious decision to be a part of “the nation” and accept its Republican values. Thus, anyone who chooses to be part of the French nation and accept its values should be accepted and treated as a first-class French citizen regardless of one’s race or ethnic heritage.

Another popular notion of French nationality and citizenship that is closely related to Renan’s Republican version is that of being French means fully adopting a certain culture that brings with it a certain set of values. This view stresses the notion that there is “one France,” meaning that France is not made up of different groups or communities of people. Communities based on culture, religion, skin color, class, etc., receiving special privileges or treatment is forbidden. Rather, all who accept a certain vaguely defined set of cultural norms and values are to be considered French and treated equally. This notion asserts that “Frenchness” is something that can be learned and earned by anyone and that French citizenship is color-blind.<sup>93</sup> In this definition, cultural assimilation is key.

Emphasis on culture and values has led to discussions of race being seen as foreign and/or outright rejected in the French public conscious. As in the British case, dividing the world into various races was seen as a product of the barbarian Nazi and American Jim Crow regimes, which the French partly defined themselves against.<sup>94</sup> Rather, to the French, the world is divided

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<sup>93</sup> David Beriss, *Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6

into various cultures that are not necessarily equal.<sup>95</sup> As David Bariss argues, “the manner in which culture is understood in France resembles in many ways the biological determinism characteristic of the American conception of race.”<sup>96</sup> To the American reader, the best way to understand the French conceptions of race is to look at historical American conceptions of race.

Although discussions concerning culture have been more important in the French public sphere, race, and in particular conceptions of “blackness,” were not irrelevant. Similar to the British case, notions of blackness, although not as explicitly discussed, were developed by imperial experiences. As such, blackness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was associated with slavery.<sup>97</sup> Towards the mid—twentieth century, blackness became associated with the African migrants who arrived en-masse from the “uncivilized” parts of the former empire to feed the labor shortage during the French economic boom.<sup>98</sup> Thus, “blackness” was associated with inferiority, barbarity and foreignness. These competing periods in French history would lead black people to be viewed as either victims of French colonialism or barbaric foreign threats.<sup>99</sup> Such a conception of “blackness” may not have been as explicit or pervasive in daily life and official circles as in the British case, but it still existed and would lead to social and economic consequences for both French Caribbean and African migrants. Indeed, unlike past waves of European immigrants who would eventually be successfully assimilated, the connotations surrounding blackness would make black migrants be viewed with an extra level of suspicion that would make it nearly impossible to seamlessly integrate. Black migrants would

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>97</sup> Didier Gondola, “Transient Citizens: The Othering and Indigenization of *Blacks* and *Beurs* within the French Republic,” in *Frenchness and the African the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, eds. Charles Tshimanga, Didier Gondola, Peter J. Bloom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 151.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,



become a visible community that was treated as “other” in a country that denounced communitarianism.

Negative connotations surrounding blackness did not discourage the French government from facilitating the mass migration of Afro-Caribbean laborers which it saw as advantageous to the state in two ways. Firstly, the wave of revolution and decolonization that swept the world during the mid-twentieth century heavily affected the French Empire, as over a fifteen-year period, the empire would lose most of its imperial possessions in Africa and Asia. In the midst of global calls to the end of imperialism, the collapse of the sugar industry would cause wide-spread economic hardship in the French Caribbean. It was hoped that “departmentalization,” the process by which France’s Caribbean possessions became official French departments and thus more integrated into the French state, would raise the living standards of the inhabitants of these territories. However, departmentalization would fail as vast economic discrepancies between the French metropole and the overseas departments would stubbornly persist. The failure of departmentalization coupled with the success of other independence movements would lead to growing calls among French Caribbean students and activists for independence for their home islands.<sup>100</sup> The idea among certain activists was that if more inclusion into the French state could not solve their economic needs then possibly total independence and self-determination would. French officials feared that student activism and intellectual discourse would translate into popular uprising among the economically depressed masses in these territories. Thus, it was hoped that migration would relieve tension on the island by siphoning off the most economically

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<sup>100</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic : African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 11.

depressed and potentially most revolutionary inhabitants of these territories, preventing more attrition to the French Empire.<sup>101</sup>

Indeed, this hope is evident in the BUMIDOM's focus on the recruitment of young, low-skilled workers as well as whole families. In 1982 fifty-five percent of people of Caribbean origin in France were under the age of twenty-five as compared to thirty-six percent of metropolitan France and forty percent of other migrant groups.<sup>102</sup> The BUMIDOM focused on recruiting young people, particularly those labeled "social misfits" either due to unemployment, mental illness, or under-education as they were considered most prone to rebellion.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, overpopulation was seen as another source of revolutionary tension as too many people were competing for too few resources. Overpopulation was relieved by the encouragement of family reunification and migration of single women (who would hopefully start families in France) as well as whole families.<sup>104</sup> As a result, unlike most other migrant groups, there was a balanced ratio between men and women.<sup>105</sup> Finally, most migrants were low-skilled and low-educated workers who were most affected by the collapse of the agricultural economy.<sup>106</sup> Migration to France was advertised to the migrants as an opportunity for economic advancement.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sylain Pattieu, "Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguïtés" *Politix* 4 (2016): 86.

<sup>102</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, "Afro-Caribbean Migrants in France: Employment, State Policy and the Migration Process." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16 (1991): 443.

<sup>103</sup> Sylvain Pattieu, *Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguïtés*, 91.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, 91.

<sup>105</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, "The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16 (2010): 262.

<sup>106</sup> Sylain Pattieu, *Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguïtés*, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic : African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, 78.

Secondly, France was in the midst of its post-war economic expansion that would come to be known as Les Trente Glorieuses or The Glorious Thirty (referring to the thirty years between 1945 and 1975). Les Trente Glorieuses caused a labor shortage in the public and private sector that was filled by hundreds of thousands of unskilled laborers from France's former colonies in Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>108</sup> The state preferred DOM migrants because, in addition to being cheap, their French citizenship qualified them for public employment. DOM migrants were also more culturally similar to metropolitan French society than North and West African migrants. For these reasons, Afro-Caribbean migrants were recruited to fill low-skilled positions that would otherwise be filled by less desired foreign immigrants.

The state therefore set up the BUMIDOM in 1962 in order to recruit migrants from the Overseas Departments and facilitate their transition to metropolitan France.<sup>109</sup> Between 1963 and 1981 the BUMIDOM would directly facilitate the migration of 160,300 DOM migrants to the French metropole, encouraging the migration of an additional 150,000 laborers.<sup>110</sup> The bureau recruited migrants, organized the trips to France, helped migrants find housing, organized social activities and even provided financial assistance in the form of small loans, all in order to ease the transition into metropolitan life.<sup>111</sup> The BUMIDOM's budget was not incredibly large and thus its services varied in quality and quantity. At its best, the bureau was able to directly provide housing, training and even funds for holiday trips home.<sup>112</sup> However, the bureau could only simply connect DOM migrants with potential employers (public and private) who the

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<sup>108</sup> Audrey Célestine, *French Caribbean Organizations and the 'Black Question' in France*, 132.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 132

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 133

<sup>111</sup> Sylain Pattieu, *Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguités*, 83.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

BUMIDOM relied on to provide housing and employment.<sup>113</sup> It is important to remember that the French-Caribbean migrants were citizens; thus, although the BUMIDOM steered the migrants towards certain housing and employment, it could not force them to do anything. The limited budget and ambiguous intentions of the BUMIDOM and the metropolitan French officials that ran it led to mixed results given the institution's stated purpose of bringing *citizens* to the metropole.<sup>114</sup>

The Antillean community's impression of the BUMIDOM was ambivalent as the institution was seen as both a source of aid as well as an archaic vestige of imperialism. These mixed feelings stem from the arguably ambivalent intentions of the institution's officials. On the one hand it could be argued that there was a sincere effort on the part of government officials, through the BUMIDOM, to improve the metropole lives of migrants and protect them from discrimination in the spirit of color-blind citizenship. Surprisingly, unlike the hostile comments made in the British Parliament, researchers Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon find no hostility in recordings of French Parliamentary debates towards Afro-Caribbean migrants during this period.<sup>115</sup> Admittedly, this lack of hostile rhetoric could be an effort by the French government to thwart anti-colonial arguments by avoiding racist discussions. On the other hand, the lack of hostility towards black migrants from the French Overseas Departments could also at least partially be explained by a sincere belief among government officials in the Republican ideal of a color-blind citizenship that dictated that the migrants be treated as first-class citizens. Accordingly, the BUMIDOM sought in its activities to achieve equality for DOM migrants with

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>114</sup> Sylvain Pattieu, *Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d'Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguités*, 86.

<sup>115</sup> Audrey Célestine, *French Caribbean Organizations and the 'Black Question' in France*, 133.

their white metropolitan French counterparts.<sup>116</sup> Many migrants would believe this rhetoric and see the BUMIDOM as an ally.

However, the ways in which the institution disappointed the migrants (which will be explored in further later) would make it appear to be continuing historic colony-metropole relations. Most of the migrants were funneled into jobs at the bottom of the “economic ladder,” seemingly to providing cheap labor to the white metropole just as their ancestors had. Harsh economic realities in the metropole would lead some migrants to feel that the BUMIDOM had brought them over to simply suffer. This frustration was evident during the May 1968 protests when French Caribbean students, workers, and activists targeted BUMIDOM offices.<sup>117</sup> Thus, it is up for debate as to whether the French government sincerely saw French Caribbean migrants as first-class citizens in need of government protection, or as cheap laborers in need of encouragement to be convinced to move.

Regardless of the French government’s intentions, migrants from the French Caribbean, upon departure, understood themselves to be first-class French citizens. This self-understanding is demonstrated in how the Afro-Caribbean migrants saw themselves in relation to foreign immigrants, particularly those from West Africa who arrived in France en-masse around the same period as Antillean migrants. The mentioning of West African migrants is warranted because metropolitan French society grouped these migrants as the black community before any sort of sense of “connectedness” between the two communities existed.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Sylain Pattieu, *Un Traitement Spécifiques des Migrations d’Outre-Mer: Le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses Ambiguités*, 85.

<sup>117</sup> Elaine Carey and Alfred Andrea, *Protest in the Streets: 1968 Across the Globe* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016), 41.

<sup>118</sup> Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, “Paint it ‘Black’: How Africans and Afro-Caribbeans Became ‘Black’ in France,” in *Black France/France Noire: The History of Blackness*, eds. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting: Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 146.

These two communities had vastly different colonial experiences that would affect their relation to the French metropole. French Caribbean migrants were the descendants of slaves who worked on plantations in French territories that were acquired 17<sup>th</sup> century and were in the midst of further integration with metropolitan France by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. These migrants and their ancestors had been citizens since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and considered themselves to be French as they had been enveloped in French culture and governance. French colonial expansion into West Africa would begin in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and would not involve a slave-based, plantation style economy. Western Africa would not be integrated into the French metropole like France's Caribbean territories, but would become independent countries by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, migrants from these areas would neither have citizenship, nor see themselves as French but rather hold pride in their newly independent countries.<sup>119</sup> As a result, there would be major cultural differences that would keep apart two communities.

Until the mid-1980's working-class Antillean migrants did not associate themselves with West African immigrants due to these cultural differences. The separation between the communities is evident in the experiences of scholar Rémy Bazenguissa-ganga who states that African and Afro-Caribbean migrants who arrived during the mid-twentieth century that he interviewed rarely had friends from the other community.<sup>120</sup> Having grown up as French-educated French citizens in French territories, Antillean migrants saw themselves as French and their migration an internal one. Any cultural uniqueness about them should have been treated the same way as the cultural uniqueness of other French provinces such as Corsica or Brittany. Seeing themselves as French, Antillean migrants would view African immigrants with very

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 149

<sup>120</sup> Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, "Paint it 'Black': How Africans and Afro-Caribbeans Became 'Black' in France," in *Black France/France Noire: The History of Blackness*, eds. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting: Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 152.

similar prejudices as metropolitan French people. Bazenguissa-ganga points to one Afro-Caribbean acquaintance “who would advise young women not to marry Africans because they were ‘savages’.”<sup>121</sup> As can be deduced, Antillean migrants would be surprised that they would experience similar racism and discrimination as other migrants of color.

Finally, French Caribbean migrants did not initially see themselves as an “Antillean Community.” Migrants from Martinique did not feel any more common cause with migrants from Guadeloupe than someone from another part of France. There was no “Antillean community” initially, but common experiences in migration, housing, and employment would spur the development of this distinct identity in Paris, not the Caribbean. Preventing total rejection of their “Frenchness” and identification with West Africans would be state intervention.

Unfulfilled economic aspirations would change how the Afro-Caribbean migrants understood themselves. Owing to the promises of the BUMIDOM and their supposedly color-blind French citizenship, these migrants expected to be treated by metropole society as first-class citizens with equal access to economic opportunity. Racism and discrimination would break these promises. Instead, the migrants were funneled into low-skill jobs where they remained. In the private sector, they found themselves side by side and treated the same as foreign immigrants. Those fortunate enough to work in the public sector found themselves in the lowest skilled and lowest paid positions. The sources of the difficulties in employment affected the migrants’ search for housing as they concentrated in Paris which was experiencing a housing shortage. Exacerbating the experience of a housing shortage for Antillean migrants was the discrimination they faced as many landlords would set a cap on the number of Antillean migrants

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 152

they housed if not banning them all together. In many ways the treatment that these migrants experienced was very similar to that of foreign immigrants who did not possess citizenship. However, the BUMIDOM shielded the DOM migrants from these housing difficulties stemming from racism and discrimination enough that the migrants would still perceive themselves in a higher social standing than those from North and West Africa.

In regards to employment, the BUMIDOM helped train DOM migrants and connected them with potential employers. Large private employers such as the tire company Michelin as well as public sector institutions such as the post-office recruited directly from the BUMIDOM's ranks and trained the migrants themselves.<sup>122</sup> Migrants not selected by these enterprises were sent to training facilities around France that were run by the BUMIDOM. At these facilities, migrants received heavily gendered vocational training as men were trained in construction skills such as brick laying while women learned how to be domestics.<sup>123</sup>

Employment statistics reveal the influence of the BUMIDOM. Again, the purpose of the BUMIDOM was to recruit laborers in order to fill low-skilled positions. Antillean migrants had a similar distribution in terms of educational level as the metropolitan French population "with its mix of predominantly low-skilled but also small elite groups;" however, Antillean migrants were disproportionately concentrated in lower level public sector roles.<sup>124</sup> This disproportionate concentration is due in large part to the BUMIDOM's policy of directing workers to sectors that were in most need. Massive expansion of the state during Les Trente Glorieuses necessitated a large number of cheap, low-skilled workers to fill roles in areas such as the post office and public

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<sup>122</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 78.

<sup>123</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 78-9.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-5.



transit. Again, public employment required citizenship; thus, DOM migrants supplied by the BUMIDOM were relied on. As a result, for example, in 1968, 12.2 percent of Caribbean male migrants were either in the army or police force, while only 2.5 percent of metropole males held similar positions.<sup>125</sup> In spite of having a more established community in the metropole by the 1980s, the effect of the BUMIDOM recruitment, is still evident as in 1982, 59.1 percent of female salaried French Caribbean workers worked in public services compared to only 29.4 percent of the entirety of the French population.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, 43.5 of salaried male French Caribbean workers worked in the public sector compared to only 20.8 percent of the total French workforce.<sup>127</sup> Another interesting comparison that demonstrates the effect of the BUMIDOM on labor is the fact that 52 percent of Caribbean men in France were employed by the state “as compared to 32 percent of Caribbean men in Britain at that time.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly, “53 percent of actively employed Caribbean women in retain were working in state sectors as compared to 61 percent of those in France.”<sup>129</sup>

French Caribbean migrants had mixed feelings about the type of occupations they would end up in. Those who landed in the public sector appreciated the stability and benefits that public-sector employment afforded. However, “Caribbean migrants to France often found themselves accepting the more demanding and least attractive public-sector occupations.<sup>130</sup> Those directed by the BUMIDOM towards private sector occupations were equally disappointed. As mentioned, many French Caribbean women ended up being trained and working as domestics for metropolitan families. Scholar Felix Germain in his work *Decolonizing the Republic* notes

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 79

that BUMIDOM officials believed that domestic positions were desirable jobs that DOM women would be grateful for due to the stability and pay.<sup>131</sup> However, the migrant women associated these jobs with the lowly domestic work the older women in their families did for rich families on their home islands.<sup>132</sup> DOM women saw their migration as a chance for upward economic mobility and thus shied away from domestic work where they saw little advancement in.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, many of the women placed in this employment by the BUMIDOM would seek and leave for more respected public-sector jobs as soon as they became available.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, many DOM men, trained by the DOM for construction work that was often associated with migrant labor, would rarely end up staying in the positions they trained for, leaving for more respected positions in the public sector like the women.<sup>135</sup>

Regardless of the industry and occupation the DOM migrants ended up in, there was general disappointment with the prospects for career advancement. The BUMIDOM advertised that passage of formal exams would allow for migrants to move up the ranks, especially in the public sector.<sup>136</sup> Yet, most migrants starting at the lowest positions would not advance far, reaching positions such as “nursing assistant or ambulance driver.”<sup>137</sup> The inability to advance was particularly problematic and frustrating for later generations who struggled to find work when public sector jobs became less abundant after the close of *Les Trente Glorieuses*.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic : African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, 79.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 78.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>137</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic : African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, 79.

<sup>138</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 108.

DOM migrants were equally disappointed with their housing conditions. Like London, Paris was also experiencing a massive housing shortage during the 1960s. The shortage was initially caused by “problems associated with rapid urbanization and an ageing housing stock.”<sup>139</sup> The shortage was exacerbated by the flood of Pieds-Noirs, people of French origin fleeing the Algerian War for Independence, as well as foreign immigrant workers and DOM migrants. Lack of coordination between housing and migration policy caused major issues for all migrant groups, both citizens and non-citizens.<sup>140</sup> A shortage of affordable and comfortable housing was further exasperated for the DOM migrants by clear racism that was cloaked as a “difference of culture.” To avoid this discrimination in housing, DOM migrants came to rely on a combination of BUMIDOM provided dormitories, family networks, and employer provided housing for shelter. The provision of housing through these channels had a significant impact on the formation of a new identity among the Antillean population in France.

Skin color and stereotypes haunted French Caribbean migrants in the housing market. Due to their skin color, landlords often confused or associated DOM migrants with West African migrants who were often refused housing due to general discrimination against foreigners. Those who were identified as French DOM migrants still had to deal with the French-Caribbean stereotypes that made landlords and housing authorities often hesitant if not flat out refuse to rent to DOM migrants. French Caribbean migrants were stereotyped as loud tenants who danced to Caribbean music until four o’clock in the morning and were often late in paying the rent.<sup>141</sup> The result was the employment of various methods on the part of landlords to restrict access to Afro-Caribbean migrants. Sociologists Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon mention how some

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<sup>139</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 16 (2010): 258

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 259

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 277

housing authorities “impose[d] unwritten residence requirements: five years for the metropolitan (meaning white) French, ten years for French for the French from the DOM, fifteen years for ‘foreigners’.”<sup>142</sup> Scholar Sylvain Pattieu, in a paper concerning the influence of the BUMIDOM, quotes one BUMIDOM record where an application for public housing for DOM migrants was rejected because according to the housing agency, “they had already hit a “critical point” of 10% of colored people.”<sup>143</sup> This quotation reveals not only the existence of a color quota but also the fact that French Caribbean migrants were often lumped together with immigrant groups. The housing agency said that it had hit a critical number of “colored people.” It did not matter to the agency whether these tenants were citizens or unnaturalized immigrants. Clearly, color-blind citizenship did not extend to the housing market where DOM migrants became second-class citizens. Thus, the housing market was a critical area where DOM migrants would question their French identity. The racism that French Caribbean migrants experienced in the housing market was also not lost on BUMIDOM officials who would try several methods in an attempt to overcome housing discrimination.<sup>144</sup>

The BUMIDOM’s budget was not large enough to reserve and secure housing for its recruits in convenient locations, thus it would have to employ a range of measures to alleviate the experience of discrimination in the housing market.<sup>145</sup> Firstly, the BUMIDOM had a policy of dispersing migrants. The agency would either recommend jobs or send migrants to training facilities in the provinces outside of Paris in the hopes that the migrants would find employment and settle in these regions. The purpose of this policy was two-fold. BUMIDOM officials hoped

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 276

<sup>143</sup> Sylvain Pattieu, “The BUMIDOM in Paris and its suburbs: contradictions in a state migration policy 1960s-1970s.” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 10 (2017): 18

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>145</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 16 (2010): 272.

dispersing DOM migrants would shield them from racism in a tight housing market. It was hoped by officials that every region would be able to seamlessly integrate a few French Caribbean migrants much easier than one region (i.e. Paris) receiving all of them. Additionally, officials feared that concentration of DOM migrants in a single area would make it hard for them to assimilate. Officials worried that the migrants would form ghettos where they would become a very visible minority that would hold onto old customs rather than adjust to metropolitan life.<sup>146</sup> However, this policy of dispersion did work. Most DOM migrants either directly settled in the Paris region or moved there after spending some time in the outer provinces as this was the region with the most attractive jobs and where family members lived. Again, these migrants had rights as French citizens and thus their movement could not be restricted. In 1962, sixty-two percent of DOM migrants lived in the Paris region and by 1982 that figure had jumped to seventy-five percent.<sup>147</sup> Thus, dispersal of French Caribbean migrants which might have helped alleviate the racism felt in the Parisian housing market, failed. The BUMIDOM would have to turn to other methods in order to house the low-wage workers in a manner that allowed them to feel French.

Another solution pursued was the purchasing of cheaper accommodations in the suburbs of Paris; however, these accommodations were very far from the migrants' jobs. One DOM migrant who initially lived in a BUMIDOM provided suburban accommodation stated that it took her over an hour and several modes of transportation in order to reach her job every day.<sup>148</sup> Many migrants would choose to live in crowded flats closer to the city center rather than living in the more spacious yet distant housing that the BUMIDOM provided. In fact, relatively few

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 263

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 285

migrants directly used the BUMIDOM for permanent housing as “only 9 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women had used the agency as an intermediary in their housing search, whereas 17 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women had acquired housing through their employer, the remainder through family, friends, the press, or by themselves.”<sup>149</sup>

The BUMIDOM was much more effective in the provision of temporary housing for migrants while they worked and searched for more permanent accommodations. The BUMIDOM, along with other governmental agencies, funded the creation of community centers which became a focal point of the evolving Antillean community in Paris. These community centers not only served as an important source of temporary housing for recently arrived migrants, but they also provided a whole host of other services and activities that helped cultivate a sense of connectivity. At these centers, migrants both recent as well as more established could access government services as well as seek assistance from other members of the Antillean community.<sup>150</sup> Migrants could also use the centers as a cheap venue for a whole host of bonding activities included marriages, televised sport games, and evening classes.<sup>151</sup> Historian Sylvain Pattieu says of these community centers that they contributed to the “visibility of Black people in Paris on an unprecedented scale.”<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, it is easy to see how these community centers contributed to the “othering” of migrants from the French Caribbean. Already a visible minority, these centers provided a point of concentration for these migrants that made their visibility more pronounced. Additionally,

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<sup>149</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 16 (2010): 273

<sup>150</sup> Sylvain Pattieu, *The BUMIDOM in Paris and its suburbs: contradictions in a state migration policy 1960s-1970s*, 14.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

despite claims of a unique provincial culture, it could not be ignored that such government-funded community centers and special treatment in general did not exist for internal migrants from other distinct French regions such as Corsica and Brittany.<sup>153</sup> The migrants themselves knew that the necessity for community centers was a sign of their “otherness.” These centers would serve to enhance their feelings of uniqueness as they provided a place to celebrate their unique culture as well as congregate and bond over mutual experiences of discrimination and the difficulties of migrant life. Thus, despite the goal of assimilation and impartial treatment, the BUMIDOM would impede assimilation, and enhance the feelings and views of French Caribbean migrants as “other.” By sponsoring these community centers, the BUMIDOM increased the visibility of DOM migrants as well as provided a physical venue that facilitated the bonding of migrants and hampered their integration into metropolitan French society.

Finally, employers would play a major role in housing. As mentioned earlier, “17 percent of men and 21 percent of women had acquired housing through their employers.”<sup>154</sup> At the time, certain employers, including those in the public sectors, were required by French law “to contribute 0.9 per cent (formerly 1 per cent) of their wages bill to housing [to] have a number of dwelling reserved for their workers proportionate to the size of their contribution.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, the types of occupations that French Caribbean migrants were directed to by the BUMIDOM had a dramatic effect on their housing situations. This reserved housing was considered public housing, and the high proportion of French Caribbean migrants in public housing is reflective of the high proportion of French Caribbean migrants working for public institutions. Beyond simply reserving public housing, some institutions such as “the Ministries of the Postal Services and

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 16 (2010): 273

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 274

Defence” that many French Caribbean migrants work for either had a policy of housing all of their employees or setting up companies to construct housing for their employees.<sup>156</sup> The effect of employment on housing is clearly significant as in the Parisian region in 1982, 41.64 percent of individuals born in the Caribbean and living in Paris lived in public housing as compared to 20.65 percent of foreign households and 18.47 percent of total households.<sup>157</sup> The high proportion of Caribbean migrants in public housing would not in itself be an issue for the assimilation of DOM migrants, rather it would be the set-up of public housing. Interviews of housing managers from this period conducted by researchers Condon and Ogden reveal that builders simplified the allocation process by “reserve[ing] one block, for example, for the postal service.”<sup>158</sup> Thus, due to this building process and the connection between housing and employment, the concentration of DOM migrants in a few industries led to their concentration in neighborhoods and housing facilities. Like the community centers, these housing blocks with concentrated populations of DOM migrants contributed to their visibility as well segregation from the rest of French society. These housing managers went on to say that “when the blocks began to deteriorate, we realized we had created Caribbean ghettos.”<sup>159</sup>

Despite these substandard housing and employment conditions, Antillean migrants were arguably still better off than the millions of immigrants from North and West Africa that arrived in France around the same period. For one, access to public sector jobs gave Antillean migrants a greater degree of job stability than privately employed foreign immigrants. Indeed, in the 1980’s unemployment rates among Antillean migrants was much lower than that of foreign

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 265

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 275

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.



immigrants.<sup>160</sup> Concentration in public housing afforded DOM migrants better accommodations than most foreign immigrants. Antillean migrants were not found in the sprawling slums, called *bidonville* that surrounded French cities at the time and were populated by foreign migrants. Surprisingly, concentration in public housing gave Antillean migrants a higher standard of living in terms of housing than the national average, as according to the Institut National de la Statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), “in 1982, 77 per cent of Caribbean households lived in dwellings equipped with an inside lavatory, bathroom and central heating . . . whereas the proportion for Algerians was only 47 per cent and for all French 63 per cent.”<sup>161</sup> Therefore, government aid in the form of better employment and housing options put Antillean migrants a higher social status that led the community to distance itself from foreign migrants and assert a unique identity.

The Antillean community was not, however, ignorant to the difficulties and discrimination they faced due to being black. The “dilemma” facing Antillean migrants in the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century can be summed up by an experience of David Bariss, while doing research for “Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society.” When conducting research, he attended a townhall meeting in metropolitan France where members of the local Antillean community voiced their grievances to the mayor. The mayor, in Republican fashion, refused to believe that his Antillean constituents were the subjects of racism and discrimination as they were French citizens. French citizenship was meant to be color blind and afford all of its members equal treatment. The crowd bemoans the mayor’s ignorance and one constituent shouts “French people cannot tell an Antillean from

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<sup>160</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 100.

<sup>161</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, “The State, Housing Policy, and Afro-Caribbean Migration to France” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 16 (2010): 264.

an African.”<sup>162</sup> Additionally, the mayor, after denying the existence of racism in his town went on to chastise the crowd, saying that it was not racism that was the Antillean community’s issue but rather it was their “culture.” He says to the crowd “your habit of noisy parties and loud music in public housing. I realize . . . that you are a fun loving and boisterous but you must control yourselves better.”<sup>163</sup> As it is clear from this exchange, the community was fully aware that the economic challenges it faced were rooted in racism. In cases that it was not their skin color, Antilleans knew it was because of their “culture” and thus their perceived foreignness. Despite possessing French citizenship, the Antilleans were treated differently and they began to see themselves as different.

Indeed, the formation of culture based organizations, along with the BUMIDOM and community centers, was an implicit recognition of a particular community with special needs which challenged traditional notions of French Citizenship. These organizations performed an important role in the evolution of the Antillean community in France. One such organization, AMITAG (the Association of West Indian and Guyanese Workers) founded in 1960, was partially funded by the state through BUMIDOM and provided a range of services to the Antillean community including job placement, temporary housing, free legal service as well as organizing cultural activities.<sup>164</sup> The AMITAG preceded the formation of other government funded organizations in the 1980s that sought to ensure and advocate for the well-being of the Antillean in France.<sup>165</sup> These organizations are evidence of the formation of a unique community in France that understood itself as having particular needs. Again, prior to mass migration of

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<sup>162</sup> David Beriss, *Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society*, 31.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>164</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, 128.

<sup>165</sup> Audrey Célestine, *French Caribbean Organizations and the ‘Black Question’ in France*, 136

French Caribbean laborers to metropole France, there did not exist an Antillean identity. It was the unique material experiences related to migration and discrimination that necessitated the need for these aid organizations that solidified the community. The existence of these organizations is not only evidence of a new group but also reinforced this new identity. French republican citizenship “rejects special treatment based on differences of race and gender, because the republic supposedly provides the necessary ingredients to achieve equality for everyone.”<sup>166</sup> State sponsorship of organizations like AMITAG in addition to the BUMIDOM is the ultimate admittance of the failure of the supposed color-blind French citizenship in the face of racism. The existence and funding of these organizations by the state institutionalized the “othering” that these migrants experienced in housing and employment.

Thus, by the 1980’s there was a growing acceptance among the Antillean community of the inability to completely assimilate into metropolitan French society. The statistics above demonstrate that there would not be further integration into French metropolitan society as the community remained concentrated in public sector housing and employment. Adding to the frustration of the community was the growing scarcity of these jobs in the 1980s that led to higher unemployment rates among Antillean youths.<sup>167</sup> The inability to assimilate economically kept Antilleans segregated from French society as the community continued to be concentrated in lower-status housing and employment.

David Beriss’s research illustrates the formation of a new identity, among the Antillean community, by the 1980s, that existed in a “grey area.” Again, the Antillean community was

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<sup>166</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, 82.

<sup>167</sup> Margaret Byron and Stéphanie Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France*, 87.

very aware that their skin color was the ultimate source of their perceived “otherness” and the discrimination that they faced in metropolitan France. Yet, despite facing similar racism as foreign groups of color, according to Beriss, few Antillean migrants and their children that he knew and interacted with were interested in organizations such as SOS-Racisme which sought to build a coalition among oppressed groups of color to fight racism and discrimination as these groups “fail[ed] to provide a context in which Antilleans might assert their particularity.”<sup>168</sup> The Antillean community did not see their fight as the same as foreign immigrants. They would not be present in the urban riots, whose causes are rooted in familiar discrimination based economic depression, attended by immigrant youths that would rock French cities in the 1980s. Audrey Célestine’s article “French Caribbean Organizations and the ‘Black question’ in France” further demonstrates the Antillean community’s insistence on asserting its Frenchness and distinguishing itself from other minority groups persists well into the early 21st century. She notes how in the early 2000’s, several Antillean organizations pushed back against CRAN’s (a pan-black French organization dedicated to fighting discrimination) attempt to “commemorate the memory of slavery,” asserting that it was a French/French-Antillean community issue, not an African one.<sup>169</sup> Such a distinction was made in an attempt to have the broader history of the Antillean community included in the larger French narrative, rather than grouped together with that of those of African descent.

At the same town hall meeting mentioned previously, the Antillean constituents would demand of the mayor better access to public resources, in combatting the racism they felt existed

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<sup>168</sup> David Beriss, *Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society*, 38.

<sup>169</sup> Audrey Célestine, *French Caribbean Organizations and the ‘Black Question’ in France*, 138.

in city hall, as a unique community.<sup>170</sup> The Antillean constituents would claim “We represent a cultural group here and as such we feel that we have been neglected.”<sup>171</sup> It must be said though, as Beriss recognizes such an attempt was difficult as “by simultaneously demanding to be recognize as French and to be taken seriously as culturally distinct, Antilleans in metropolitan France push the French concept of culture to its limit.”<sup>172</sup> The Antillean community wanted special considerations to gain equal treatment as *French* citizens. They did not want to be associated with foreign immigrant groups of which many in the Antillean community harbored discriminatory views that were similar to those held by Metropolitan French people. The refusal of association is made clear by remarks made by the leader of the Collectif DOM (an organization dedicated to the betterment of the Antillean Community) who states, “What is common between a French Caribbean, a Guadeloupean breastfed by the French Republic, who is Catholic and undocumented immigrants, who are Muslim, polygamists and for some practice female mutilation.”<sup>173</sup> Here, the leader of Collectif DOM asserts Antillean Frenchness based on traditional notions of “Frenchness” of shared culture (“catholic”) and values (“breastfed by the French Republic”).

However, as the British case demonstrates, citizenship and shared values and culture mean nothing when a community is alienated in its economic conditions such as housing and employment. Distinction based on values and culture was only asserted because French citizenship, unlike in the British case, brought material benefits due to the nature of French Afro-Caribbean migration policy. Because of these benefits, therefore, Antilleans asserted their

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<sup>170</sup> David Beriss, *Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

<sup>173</sup> Audrey Célestine, *French Caribbean Organizations and the ‘Black Question’ in France*, 138.

“Frenchness” and did not come to feel connected with the African community despite shared skin color. On the other hand, West Indians, who would receive no such protection, abandoned their “Britishness,” opting for a “black based” identity that saw itself as part of a global black/African diaspora. It is in these policies and material conditions that we see the legacy of imperialism. The nature of the British and French Empires differed considerably between each other as well as the relationships with their various colonies, resulting in different policies and experiences for various migrant groups.

Indeed, citizenship, race, and culture are important in how these communities came to understand themselves. However, these factors would have been less consequential in the process of self-identification if it were not for the positive (in the case of citizenship for the Antillean community) and negative influence they had on government policies and thus material conditions of the communities. Race and culture were not as important to Antilleans because of the material benefits they received from citizenship. For this reason, this community saw itself more as French, and less as part of the “black community” in France.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> It should be noted that this self-perception begins to change in the 1990s and early 2000s due to reasons that are outside the scope of this thesis.

### **Conclusion**

This paper sought to use the comparison of the cases of Afro-Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom and France to explore the influence of economic conditions and government policies on identity. “Identity” was defined as what sociologists Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper call “groupness,” a situation where a group of people not only share some common attribute (commonality) but also actively feel connected to one another (connectedness). Such a definition implies that identity comes from within a group and is not assigned. The two cases would demonstrate that identity is neither innate nor self-evident and that government and economic conditions play an important role in its construction.

The British example would present a case in which government inaction led to full rejection of identification with the mother country by the migrants. Economic necessity pushed tens of thousands of black migrants from the British Caribbean to the United Kingdom. Having been taught that they were British back on their home islands, the migrants came with expectations of social acceptance and opportunities for economic advancement. The British government made no attempt at facilitating this migration; thus, the migrants were largely left on their own to find housing and employment. Discrimination in both areas pushed the migrants to low-skilled employment and substandard housing. The descendants of these migrants faced similar discrimination as their parents and were not able to achieve an improved living standard despite growing up in the country of their birth. Just as in the migration process, the government made haphazard attempts at stemming the discrimination the Afro-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom faced. As a result, chronic economic underperformance bred a feeling of alienation among the community, especially the youths. Unable to improve their material lot in a

country that they were formerly told was their motherland, the Afro-Caribbean community wholly rejected their “Britishness.”<sup>175</sup>

In comparison is the French case where the government actively recruited and facilitated the migration Afro-Caribbean laborers from their economically depressed islands. State aid through the BUMIDOM government agency came in the form of training, job placement, and assistance in housing. Placement in public sector employment and housing, either directly or indirectly through the BUMIDOM, afforded Afro-Caribbean migrants with a generally higher living standard than foreign immigrants. However, the Afro-Caribbean community in France still experienced racism and discrimination which was most felt in housing and employment. In these areas, the migrants and their descendants did not achieve conditions on par with overall metropolitan French society. Such conditions led to disillusionment as the migrants, owing to their citizenship, believed that they would have equality with citizens from the metropole including in economic opportunity. The result would be an attempt by the community to redefine “Frenchness” rather than wholly reject it.

Different government policies produced clear differences in the new identities of these two migrant groups. Such stark differences in the new identities are noteworthy owing to the similar backgrounds of the migrant groups. Both groups came from former colonial possessions

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<sup>175</sup> Worth mentioning is the West Indian community’s relationship the “Asian” Community, the other major migrant community in Britain at the time. This community was made up of migrants from Britain’s former colonies in South Asia (including today’s Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka) as well as those of Indian descent from East Africa and the Caribbean. To be sure, British society grouped the West Indian and Asian communities under the category of “black;” however, scholars Winston James in *Inside Babylon* and Wendy Webster in *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* note that despite being grouped together and facing similar forms of discrimination, the relationship between these communities was complicated. The two communities would jointly fight discrimination in the seventies and eighties under the shared political identity of “Black,” but tension between the communities would persist. Winston James largely attributes this antagonism to cultural differences as well as the tense historical relationship between these communities in the British Caribbean. He also notes that the Asian community was generally higher on the “occupational ladder” (which one can study in detail in E.J.B.’s *Colour and Citizenship*) which he attributes to causing political friction as the community would therefore be more likely to vote for the conservative Tory Party. I would argue that the better living standards of the Asian community in itself is a factor for why the community generally differentiated itself from the West Indian community.



facing economic downturn to fill labor shortages in their mother countries that they [the migrants] held citizenship and saw as their own. Additionally, both groups experienced discrimination based on the color of their skin. Without any government support, the Afro-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom felt the full brunt of racism and discrimination in their material conditions. Shared experiences in housing and employment created a new community in the United Kingdom that came to identify itself as West Indian. On the other hand, major involvement on the part of the French government blunted the effects of racism that the Afro-Caribbean community in France experienced. The result would be the creation of an Antillean identity that did not wholly reject its Frenchness. Again, no “Antillean” identity existed previously, but similar housing and employment experiences, influenced by the state through the BUMIDOM, led to feelings of connectivity among migrants from Guadeloupe and Martinique. These migrants, however, generally did not profess solidarity with other economically depressed migrant groups owing to the Antillean migrants state-provided higher living standard. They saw themselves as agents of the state due to their public employment, and above foreign migrants on the social spectrum; thus, the Antillean identity distanced itself from other oppressed groups and challenged historical French anti-communitarianism.<sup>176</sup> The Antillean community wanted to be regarded as a French community in need of recognition and protection due to the unique challenges they faced.

The comparison of these communities in this thesis demonstrates that the understanding of them and identity in general is lacking. This thesis is the result of extensive cross-disciplinary research that drew upon a variety of primary quantitative and qualitative sources as well as secondary analysis. While conducting this research, I found gaps in the understanding of the

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<sup>176</sup> Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Paint it 'Black': How Africans and Afro-Caribbeans Became 'Black' in France*, 154.

evolution of these communities. Those who studied the self-identification of West Indians and Antilleans focus almost exclusively on race, ethnicity, and culture, dangerously implying that these two distinct communities would have inevitably evolved and become what they did simply due to differences in culture and skin color. “Connectedness” and identification cannot be assumed due to shared culture or skin color as they often are in academic and popular discourse. Otherwise, the trajectories of these communities would have been much more similar. It is here where sociologists and those who studied the migration, labor and housing patterns of these communities missed an opportunity to comment on how these communities came to understand themselves. This thesis bridges this gap by demonstrating that housing and employment had a significant impact on the formation of these communities. Shared experiences in housing and employment served more of a basis for West Indian and Antillean identities than is given credit. Differences between the trajectories of these communities can be, to an extent, explained by differences in material conditions.

These material conditions were in turn significantly influenced by state policy that was a product of each country’s respective imperial legacy and how it viewed itself in relation to its various colonies. In the British Empire a distinction was made between the United Kingdom and “the Empire.” This racialized distinction affected migration policy as the welfare state, which was being constructed at the time of mass Caribbean migration, was intended for *white* British citizens (whether they be from the British Isles or a settler colony). Similarly, the French state’s policies towards its various migrant communities was heavily influenced by its imperial past. The policies differed between communities due to the substantially different natures of the former relationships between the French metropole and its colonies in the Caribbean, North

Africa and West Africa. It is in this way that imperial legacy, by-way of government policies, affects the daily lives of individual migrants and therefore how they see themselves.

Most people generally agree that identity is complex, yet academic and popular discussions of identity formation have been simplified to the point of putting the lion's share of emphasis on race and culture. This thesis seeks to bring a more complex and historical approach to understanding identity. Identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed, and its result is contingent on a variety of factors in addition to the context that the construction takes place in. Afro-Caribbean migrants from the French and British Caribbean were initially very similar but would migrate into very different contexts with different imperial histories, government policies, and views on citizenship (relevant topics that could not be appropriately discussed given the length of this thesis). As a result, the West Indian and Antillean communities came to understand themselves in markedly different ways. Studying these communities requires an interdisciplinary approach as does identity more broadly. We need to think beyond just race and ethnicity as to what connects and defines us. Our contemporary situations and how we understand ourselves do not exist in a vacuum but rather is a culmination of centuries of events and conscious human actions. It is our histories that create our mundane daily experiences which in turn play a significant role in who we are.

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