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BEYOND THE IMMIGRATION CENTERS:  
A HISTORY OF HAITIAN COMMUNITY IN THREE MICHIGAN CITIES,  
1966-1998

presented by  
CHANTALLE FRANCESCA VERNA

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of the requirements for

MASTER OF ARTS degree in HISTORY-URBAN STUDIES

Major professor

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BEYOND THE IMMIGRATION CENTERS:  
A HISTORY OF HAITIAN COMMUNITY IN THREE MICHIGAN CITIES,  
1966-1998

By

Chantalle Francesca Verna

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History and Urban Affairs Programs

2000

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## ABSTRACT

### BEYOND THE IMMIGRATION CENTERS: A HISTORY OF HAITIAN COMMUNITY IN THREE MICHIGAN CITIES, 1966-1998

By

Chantalle Francesca Verna

Until recently, scholarship on Haitian communities in the United States focused primarily on immigration centers such as New York City and South Florida. The present study of three Michigan cities (Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing) contributes notably to the emerging body of literature by illuminating understudied aspects of the Haitian experience in America. Based on oral interviews and analysis of local organizational documents, this research shows that linkages with public and private institutions gave the immigrants in-roads to cities and communities across the country. Also, cross-cultural organizing was one of the best strategies for uniting these communities with their small and dispersed Haitian populations. To better understand the processes of Haitian migration and community-building is to broaden our vision of the enduring historical experience between Haiti and the United States.

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## **DEDICATION**

For:

Clara Jean Baron & Techlerr Baron  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks are due for the vast amount of support I received while working on this project. First and foremost, I must thank my family without whom I would not be the person I am today nor driven to take on this type of project. My parents, Monique Baron and Alex Verna, instilled confidence and ambition in me; and, they nurtured me in the warm embrace of a very extended family that has been an ever-present base of support during the course of all my endeavors.

At Michigan State University, I have had the opportunity to work with admirable and dedicated scholars. From the very beginning, my major advisor Dr. Richard W. Thomas provided nothing but faith and encouragement. He patiently dealt with my anxieties, sent me to sit by the Red Cedar River to find my passions, and pushed me to produce scholarship that would enrich the literature and our world. Dr. Leslie Page Moch, also provided ceaseless support and useful critique as I worked toward completing the project. Drs. Darlene Clark Hine and Ruben Rumbaut offered countless resources and professional inspiration. Dr. Rumbaut's Fall 1998 seminar was instrumental in helping me produce the invaluable first draft of ideas and information.

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Many other faculty and staff members helped to make the thesis possible. I must mention Dr. June Manning Thomas who was a mentor and model for meticulous work habits during my tenure as her research assistant (1997-1999). Dr. Peter Vinten-Johansen's research methodology course (Fall 1997) introduced me to practical strategies that always prove useful. Much gratitude is also due to the support staff in the Department of History and Urban Affairs Programs; especially, Fran Fowler who always looked out for me. History, UAP, and the College of Arts and Letters provided ever-important funding throughout the semesters in the form of graduate assistantships, summer, and conference fellowships.

Several individuals were patient and efficient as they offered critical assistance in the production of the thesis. Fedo Boyer of CreoleTrans in Miami, Florida completed transcriptions of interviews in Haitian Creole. MSU's Office Services began English transcriptions; but, dear friend and colleague Cecilia Samonte transcribed the so-called "inaudible" tapes. Beth Linker was my writing and editing partner during the drafty-drafts. And, Joshua Woods lent his professional services as I worked on polishing the final draft.

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Colleagues and friends provided the type of comfort that keeps one sane, spirited and on a very productive track. Special thanks goes to: Joshua Woodfork, Rose Thevenin, Mary Mwiandi, Jacqueline Mcleod, Pamela Martin, Getahun Benti, Vera Benedito, Charmagne Andrews, Amy Hereford, Judy Cassamajor, Millery Polyne, Odalys Collazo, Regine Rigal, Sandra Marc-Charles and friends from Amka Africa and the Sound Tribe, as well as the Djembejam Studio.

Finally, all thanks and appreciation is due to my interviewees. Haitians living in the three study cities, opened their doors, extended the warmest hospitality, and shared their stories and contacts with me. This is their story; I am honored that they trusted me to tell it.

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the world's first transnational Against Nation: Monthly Review States: National Economy: Class Westview Press, States: The Psy Press, 1992); States with Haiti Carolina, 194; Revolution, 175

<sup>2</sup> Michel Laguerre (New York: Press, 1998) argues that the United States and Haiti are interconnected. He discusses how Haitians living in the diaspora in the United States supports the in politics may in efforts. Though Laguerre also discusses the presence in early Citizenship, 70 address the same Romanticism, and 1778-1848 (Baton Rouge: and Kimberly S. Society in Colonial University Press

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The modern relationship between Haiti and the United States is deeply rooted in the making of the Atlantic World; the two republics interfaced in the areas of trade, politics, civil upheavals, and migration in both directions.<sup>1</sup> These interactions constitute the basis of shared histories among the two nations.<sup>2</sup> In a modest

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the relationship between the Atlantic world's first two republics see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); Michael Dash, Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and Literary Imagination (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, 1997); Alex Dupuy, Haiti in the World Economy: Class, Race, and Underdevelopment Since 1700 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); Brenda Gayle Plummer, Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Rayford Logan, Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 194); and Lester D. Langely, Americans in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Laguerre's Diasporic Citizenship (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) argues for the transnational relationship that the United States and Haiti have by emphasizing the interconnectedness between the nations and the lifestyles of Haitians living in the U.S. While Laguerre places an emphasis on the diasporic citizenship that Haitians have, his work also supports the interwoven nature of the two societies. For example, he discusses how the interests of Haitian immigrants in Haitian politics may influence U.S. foreign policy, given their lobbying efforts. Though heavily focused on the twentieth century, Laguerre also draws from primary sources, as well as numerous scholarly writings to account for the Saint Dominguan/ Haitian presence in early America. For sources, see Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 70-74. Sources not mentioned by Laguerre that address the same topic include: Caryn Cosse Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), and Kimberly S. Hanger, Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

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attempt to investigate this shared history, this research focuses on the processes of immigration<sup>3</sup> and community formation of Haitians in Michigan between 1966 and 1998.

During this period, Haitian-born residents in Michigan made up less than one percent of the total U.S.-based Haitian population. In 1997, official population statistics indicated that there were 735 Haitian-born persons living in Michigan.<sup>4</sup> This was a gradual increase from the 110 Haitians accounted for between 1966 and 1977.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, this essay will draw attention to this small and dispersed population of Haitians, and the nature of its communal

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<sup>3</sup> Although the term "immigration" will be used throughout the essay, the reader should be conscious of the fact that much of this movement may be better understood as "migration." That is, for many individuals, immigration to another country was one point along a broader migration history.

<sup>4</sup> The statistics for 1997 were drawn from cross-tabulations of first and second-generation immigrants, prepared by Ruben G. Rumbaut, Professor of Sociology, Michigan State University. The Current Population Survey, United States Bureau of Census collected the data, 1996 and 1997. CPS numbers were weighted estimates based on a sample (in this case, a sample of 50,000, of which less than 500 were Haitians). For these years, 3,459 second-generation Haitians (U.S.-born) are estimated to reside in Michigan. 4,212 were Haitians estimated as living in Michigan. As a starting point for future research, this essay will be primarily concerned with the first-generation (foreign-born). By 1997, the total number of Haitians in the United States was estimated to be 645,355 persons (421,927-first generation and 223,428-second generation).

<sup>5</sup> Michel S. Laguerre, "Haitian Immigrants in the United States; a historical overview" in Arnaud F. Marks and Hebe M.C. Vessuri, White Collar Migrants in the Americas and the Caribbean (Leiden, Netherlands: Department of Caribbean Studies, Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 1983), 144. Laguerre's calculations are from the Immigration and Naturalization Service Annual Reports, 1966-1977. Total Haitians in the United States during these years are noted as 5,550 persons.

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activities as a means of encouraging scholars to value the experiences of immigrants outside their primary destinations and enclaves ("centers"). By focusing on resettlement cities that are not migration centers, the research asks: *what was the nature of Haitian community life in American cities with small, dispersed Haitian populations? and how does knowledge about these communities inform us about the processes of community building among Haitians in the United States?* In addition to expanding scholarly knowledge about the experiences of U.S.-based Haitian immigrants, these findings highlight sites for shared history. That is, the essay identifies institutions where the U.S. and Haitian populations interfaced, furthering the shared history between the two countries. These findings can also be suggestive for studies on other immigrant group histories, as well as their relationships with the United States as a host society. The practice of recognizing these linkages between immigrant communities and the United States reflects the development of this field of research.

Inquiries about immigrant communities in the urban United States began with a focus on the matter of assimilation and acculturation—themes articulating a vision of the Americanization of immigrant groups. Attention was

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not necessarily paid to the immigrants' unique contributions to the society, but rather on the manner in which they expedited their process of incorporation. These questions were initiated by sociologists from the University of Chicago and subsequently reconsidered by historians. Following these classical arguments, there were critiques and additional research that began to see these groups as rising ethnicities; thus, there was an attempt by the mid-1960s to account for the untold ethnic histories.<sup>6</sup>

Recent scholarship on immigration is valuable because it challenges the paradigms of assimilation and acculturation. More specifically, narratives are becoming more inclusive by considering the significance of immigrant groups and how their presence plays a role in the shaping of American society. Within this body of literature, scholars lent the most attention to the two groups that constituted the largest numbers of recent immigrants—Asians

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<sup>6</sup> For classical scholarship, see Louis Wirth, The Ghetto (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928); Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, Introduction to the Science of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921); Marcus Lee Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860; A History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1940); Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted; The Epic Story of Great Migration that Made American People, 2d. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown), 1973, 1951. For critiques, see Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted," Journal of American History 51:3 (December 1964), 404-71, and "Ethnicity: A Neglected Dimension of American History," ed.,

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and Mexicans. Research on these groups led to new and exciting questions in the field. Scholars produced numerous ethnographies, studies on migration and geographic mobilization, and theories emphasizing a global versus American lens of inquiry. Questions were shaped by ideas on transnationalism, comparative studies, Diaspora studies, Atlantic and Pacific World perspectives, and global markets.<sup>7</sup>

Several authors expanded the discussion by presenting synthetic works or overviews of Immigrant America that presented studies on a wider range of immigrant groups. As noted by historian Donna Gabaccia, sociologists,

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Herbet J. Bass, The State of American History (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 70-88.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the most important sources include: John Bodnar, The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America (Bloomington: Indiana, 1985); Reed Ueeda, Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin Press, 1994); David Reimers, Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Donna Gabaccia, From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990; Franklin Ng, ed., The History and Immigration of Asian Americans (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998); Ronald Takaki, A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993); George Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Irma Watkins-Owen, Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Marilyn Halter, Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); and, Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, eds. Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Gabaccia  
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anthropologists, and scholars of cultural and ethnic studies have been the main contributors of this type of scholarship. The historian's perspective, however, has been absent. The historian could enrich the literature and theoretical conceptions by offering further understanding about continuity and change in the meaning of ethnicity, providing generational overviews, teasing out the broad categories of ethnic groups to enhance questions of race and racial ideology, considering cultural studies as a means of exploring the exchange taking place, and pushing forward in the few areas which viewed migration as a process of world history.<sup>8</sup> Each of these areas, particularly the last two, emphasizes the importance of focusing on interaction of people from different backgrounds as a step towards understanding American pluralism.

Scholarship on Haitians in the United States, much like the study of immigrants from other countries—in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia—has fallen into this trend of being heavily studied in the social sciences. In fact, the only historical overview of Haitians in the United States is the aforementioned writing of anthropologist Michel Laguerre. Debunking the more popular

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<sup>8</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "Do We Still Need Immigration History?," Polish American Studies 55, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 45-68.

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Laguerre, American Odyssey, University Press of the United States, Immigrants in the Marks and Hebe M. Studies, Royal In 119-169.  
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belief that the arrival of Haitians in the United States began with a rickety boat that landed on South Florida's shores in 1971, Laguerre accounts for the presence of individuals from the island well before the late-twentieth century. In fact, immigration from the Caribbean island was in progress prior to its emergence as the Atlantic World's first Black republic. Hence, since the emigration of San Domingue's own political refugees (colonists, free Blacks, and several slaves) up to the current arrival of political refugees from a recently-Democratic Haiti, individuals from the island incorporated into U.S. society.<sup>9</sup>

Immigration between the two territories can be categorized in four distinct waves: **Pre-20<sup>th</sup> century** (1526-1900), peaking during the Haitian Revolution (1789-1804); **Era of Nation Building** (1900-1956), peaking during the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934); the two **Duvalier Regimes** (1957-1986), and the current **Era of Democratization** (1986-present).<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that there was political and

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship; Michel Laguerre, American Odyssey: Haitians in New York City (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Michel Laguerre, "Haitian Immigrants in the United States: A Historical Overview" in White Collar Immigrants in the Americas and the Caribbean, eds. Arnaud F. Marks and Hebe M.C. Vessuri (Netherlands: Department of Caribbean Studies, Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 1983), 119- 169.

<sup>10</sup> For information on immigration by colonists, free Blacks, and slaves to places like South Carolina, Philadelphia, New York, Massachusetts, and the French territory of Louisiana, see

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social turbulence in all of these periods. However, the majority of Haitians immigrated to the United States during the twentieth-century. According to Laguerre:

X Most Haitian immigrants who came to the United States in the twentieth century have done so in response to a periodic but sustained crisis in their homeland caused by the transformation from traditional to modern society, from a succession of ruthless and kleptocratic dictatorial regimes to democratic government that is nonetheless corrupt, from the prominence of French culture among its elite to an incremental process of Americanization, from an economy based on agricultural production and tourism to one

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Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 21-30; American Odyssey, 160-76. For a more extensive discussion of immigration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 31-74. A political economic analysis of the influence of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the Duvalier Regime for Haitian immigration to the United States is well-discussed in Carolle Charles, "A Transnational Dialectic of Race, Class, and Ethnicity: Patterns of Identities and Forms of Consciousness Among Haitian Migrants in New York City" Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990, 125-40. For a treatment of this population movement as an element of the larger migratory events in the Caribbean Basin, as well as in the US, see Rose-Marie Cassagnol Chierici, Demele: "Making It" Migration and Adaptation Among Haitian Boat People in the United States (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 86-111; Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 147-98. Insightful discussions on the most recent immigrants can be found in Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 75-93; Alex Stepick, Pride Against Prejudice: Haitians in the United States (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998); Jake C. Miller, The Plight of the Haitian Refugees (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984).

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dependent on offshore industry and remittances, from a country in which the army served as the sole arbiter of national politics to one with no army and a civilian-led police force, from a country in which the rural population constituted the majority to a country with a majority of urban residents, from a country with a stable sedentary population to one in a constant migratory motion.<sup>11</sup>

Laguerre discusses the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-34) which began a modernization process and the shift ✓ from French to American hegemony on the Caribbean island. Attempts were made to democratize Haiti by reorganizing the society. The changes were strictly implemented under the surveillance of several American structures and institutions. Those most prominent were the U.S. Marines, Protestant churches, and centralized government. During this period, tensions and ideological divisions induced the exodus of businessmen to places like Harlem, New York, as well as the positive response of rural and urban workers recruited to Cuba's sugar fields.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 21.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 24-  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26

Following the United States' departure in 1934, a crisis arose, as the U.S. institutions, especially the Marines, were no longer present to hold together the implemented structures. Eventually, a "revolution" took place in 1946, whereby Black middle class leaders replaced the mulatto elite, who enjoyed preference and status during the American presence. This "revolution" facilitated the beginnings of the "dynastic Duvalier Regime."<sup>13</sup>

Noted as the period during which the "vast majority of Haitians in the United States emigrated," the regime—first led by Francois ("Papa Doc") Duvalier and subsequently inherited by his son, Jean Claude ("Baby Doc") Duvalier—brought major changes to the society's social structure. Under the dictatorial rule, Haiti experienced "massive rural-urban migration and emigration to the U.S., the downgrading of the military, the paramilitarization of the system, a sustained effort at controlling dissidents through state violence, the primacy of the capital city, the burgeoning of slums in the margins of the city, and the diaspora's disbursement of remittances all over the country."<sup>14</sup> In response to the repressive nature of the regime there was widespread opposition.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 24-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26-9.

The fall of the regime in 1986 opened the floodgates for attempts at national renewal characterized by increased activism and input from the diaspora population, particularly those that returned home. Yet, despite continual attempts to re-stabilize the nation's politics, economy, and society, vestiges of previous tension and turmoil continued to encourage further emigration. Instigated by the lack of opportunities and the widespread presence of all types of political and social violence the process of Haitian migration continued. Unfortunately, even attempts to make positive contributions to avoid both internal and external migration placed the country in a Catch-22. For example, migration to the capital city (Port-au-Prince) for access to information and resources, and U.S.-based care programs (many of which were initiated by the Diaspora), facilitated knowledge about migration to the United States.<sup>15</sup>

During each of these eras, there were several motives for emigration, not solely economic pressures. As Laguerre notes in the preface of Demele: "[H]istorically the country has always been poor and poverty alone has never generated such a mass movement of illegal migration. Political repression was the additional ingredient—for some

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26-9.

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immigrants, it was the most critical factor forcing them to leave the island."<sup>16</sup> Thus, a combination of pressures—political repression, social instability and insecurity, and economic hardships—must be accounted for when considering the factors pushing people out of Haiti. Most recently, such dynamics resulted in the mass exodus of more than 40,000 people fleeing to the United States' shores after President-elect Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by a military coup d'etat. The upheaval of the country's first democratically elected administration signaled an array of sentiments and realities for those who fled. For example, the political gesture could be seen as a rejection of the principles and platform of Aristide's party: "land reform, redistribution of wealth, and eradication of illiteracy;" continued insecurity for those affiliated with or affirming the ousted government's views; and, lost hope for a stable and secure future.<sup>17</sup>

#### **The Immigration Centers: New York and South Florida**

In the twentieth-century, the majority of Haitians migrating to the United States moved to New York and South Florida. In 1997, an estimated 216,123 Haitians (33.5% of the total U.S.-based Haitian population) were counted as

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<sup>16</sup> Laguerre, "Preface," in Chierici, Demele, xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Kate DeSmet, "Aristide: Exiled by Beliefs," The Detroit News, 29 November 1992, sec. B.

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residents of metropolitan New York and an estimated 213,941 Haitians resided in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach (33.1% of the total U.S. based population).<sup>18</sup> These urban areas became immigration centers for Haitians because they served as central locations of entry and of primary or secondary resettlement for Haitians coming to the United States. These locations and their respective Haitian populations have been the major focus of scholarship on Haitians in the United States; especially, New York whose history is much older for overall trends in immigration. Beyond pure numbers, there were several reasons for the heavy attention paid to Haitians in New York. First, New York was a preferred site for studies given that it had the largest concentration of Haitians and other West Indian, in comparison to other American localities. Moreover, New York was the leading target and port of entry for Caribbean peoples in the United States. Haitians in New York represented a wide range of immigrant status—legal,

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<sup>18</sup> "Metros18: Metropolitan areas (recorded)," Current Population Survey, combined estimates for 1996 and 1997. After New Jersey MSAs, which had an estimated 9.1% total Haitian population (first and second generation), all other metropolitan areas were estimated to have 2.3% or less. Detroit is listed as having .3% of the total US Haitian population. When looking at the numbers statewide, Table "States5," New York and New Jersey combined plus Florida account for about 90% of the total US based Haitian population. Among this population of 557,524 people, 367,123 are first generation and 190,401 are second generation. Michigan

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Major themes explored in the literature on Haitians in New York looked at how newcomers recreated social and economic patterns of living within a new setting, and how race, class and ethnicity inform their identity and formation of consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Anthropologist Michel Laguerre and Sociologist Carolle Charles provided useful guidance on these matters. Laguerre conducted a study of

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accounts for .7% of the population (753 first generation and 3,459 second generation).

<sup>19</sup> Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 85-92, 98; Laguerre, American Odyssey, 24, 30-1; Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 200. Alejandro Portes' and Ruben G. Rumbaut's Immigrant America (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996, 43-49) discusses the issue of "preferred places" of immigration. For locations like New York City, which continues to top the list of favored destinations (followed by Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami) the authors attribute the attraction to the urban center to processes of rapid economic growth, self-perpetuating ethnic networks, and the presence of large established ethnic communities. These last two factors of ethnic ties are argued to be essential in New York City, where population and employment declines began to occur between 1970 and 1980. Additionally, Portes and Rumbaut identify the emergence of significant economic growth spurred by the service and construction industry. They argue that this restructuring of the economy has offered immigrants from low-wage countries an expanding supply of low-wage jobs.

<sup>20</sup> This research has depended upon the writings of Laguerre and Charles for information on New York. Other scholars who have contributed to this field of knowledge, include but are not limited to the following: Susan Buchanan, "Scattered Seeds: The Meaning of the Migration for Haitians in New York City," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1980; George Fournon, "Patterns of Adaptation of Haitian Immigrants of the 1970s in New York City," Ph.D. diss, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1985; Nancy Glick, "The Formation of an Ethnic Group," Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 1975; Flore Zephir, Haitian Immigrants in Black America: A Sociological and Sociolinguistic Portrait, (Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1996).

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Haitians residing in New York City's three most-heavily-populated boroughs—Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Using a sample of 65 residents, Laguerre explored the character and dynamics of community by considering how immigrants adapt themselves socially and economically. Moreover, he argued that ethnicity influences and is shaped by many of the factors involved in the processes of migration, resettlement, economic, health and political adaptation. In this case, ethnicity as self-defined and as ascribed to individuals must be considered.<sup>21</sup>

This internal and external concept of ethnicity was expounded upon and further considered in relation to more specific definitions of race and class by Charles' 1990 study. Considering patterns of identity and formation of consciousness, as influenced by these aforementioned factors, Charles emphasized the relationships among ethnic identity, adaptation processes and social relations.<sup>22</sup> Illustrative of this relationship, Charles investigated the idea of "double blackness" which she said had different meanings, yet consistently served as "a strategy of resistance to the perception of the fixed and inferior place ascribed to Blacks in the U.S."<sup>23</sup> These conclusions

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<sup>21</sup> Laguerre, American Odyssey, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 258.

were the result of a review of literature that considers the patterns and dynamics of race, class, and ethnic relation in the United States, Caribbean, and Haiti, as well as literature on the sociology and history of international migration. Additionally, data collected from interviews with leaders and prominent members of 91 Haitian and 50 U.S. organizations in metropolitan New York allowed for consideration of these patterns, as well as a brief historical outline of community formation and development of Haitian associations in New York City.

The history of community building was encapsulated in five phases. Beginning in 1957 until 1964, Haitians mobilized for issues of religion and politics centered on Haiti. Then, between 1965 and 1972, they engaged in the ethnic competition for War on Poverty monies. Following in, 1972 until 1982, they applied the strategy of assimilation, given the inflow of undocumented immigrants and "entrants," accompanied by a rise of Protestant churches. From 1982-1986, a period of renewal and self-defense followed the fall of Duvalier and the labeling of Haiti as "a nation of AIDS carriers." And, finally after 1986, there existed a period of intense political mobilization.<sup>24</sup> Charles and

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<sup>24</sup> This data analysis is part of a larger study found in Nancy Glick-Shiller, Carolle Charles, et. al, "All in the Same Boat: Unity and Diversity in Haitian Organizing in New York City,"

Laguerre provided useful insight into the characteristics of New York City's Haitian population, as well as the many questions to be raised when considering the dynamic complexity of their experiences.

South Florida was another site of Haitian presence where similar and alternative contexts of immigration, adaptation and incorporation were visible. As post-1965 immigration trends marked the beginning of a new history (one with alternative types of migrants and experiences), locations such as Miami also increased in scholarly prominence. Argued to be "the most international American city," Miami has been a bustling port of entry and resettlement for newcomers, which allowed immigration to drive the region's most-recent history. In fact, the 1990 U.S. Census indicated Miami as having "the highest proportion of foreign-born residents of any U.S. city." As a port city with linkages to the world economy, particularly between the Caribbean and Latin America, the opportunities for immigrants to gain familiarity with and entry into Miami became quite prominent during the past thirty years.<sup>25</sup>

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Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney, eds. Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions, (Staten Island: New York Center for Migration Studies, 1987).

<sup>25</sup>Guillermo J. Grenier and Lisandro Perez, "Miami Spice: The Ethnic Cauldron Simmers," Origins and Destinies, eds. Pedraza,

Miami's increasing presence in the literature on Haitians in the United States related primarily to issues on immigration policies and subsequent incorporation of newcomers. The focus on policy reflected concerns about the discriminatory treatment extended to Haitians, especially in comparison to the reception offered to Cuban refugees. In these studies, the focus was more specifically concerned with the "plight of Haitian refugees" (mainly those traveling by boat to South Florida) as opposed to other groups of Haitians who may have come via other means or on secondary migrations from cities like New York.<sup>26</sup>

This focus in the literature was due to a significant percentage of the refugee population entering through South Florida, and the disparities in the reception given to these newcomers.<sup>27</sup> Alex Stepick's 1998 publication Pride Against Prejudice attempted to explore the dynamics of the Haitian community in South Florida. More specifically, he undertook a presentation of the community's challenging struggle between "pride" and "prejudice" in an attempt to dispel American mythological views of this community. While mentioning briefly the diverse presence of Haitians, Stepick focused primarily on the migration and adaptation

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Sylvia and Ruben Rumbaut (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), 360-372.

<sup>26</sup> Stepick, Pride Against Prejudice; Miller, Plight.

processes of the working poor, many of whom resided in the concentrated location of Little Haiti, Miami. The study highlighted the mixed realities of Haitian immigration to the U.S., with a focus on the most recent immigration trends. His extensive discussion of youth adaptation processes also lent insight on the dynamics of future community, and some of its most important issues, such as balancing Haitian and American culture. In summary, sheer numbers and scholarly interests elevated the importance of New York City and South Florida in the literature on Haitian in the United States.

In addition, these cities are perceptual centers for many Haitians themselves—both those living in the U.S. and Haiti. Indeed, the sense that these locations are central locations for U.S.-based Haitians facilitated not only by the number of people living in the areas, but also by newspapers circulated in the States, abroad, and in Haiti. Moreover, organizations based in these areas contribute to this center-status. New York City and South Florida, serve as the main headquarters for organizations, and thereby become the most visible representatives of the Haitians in the U.S.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Stepick, Pride Against Prejudice, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter 6 of Laguerre's Diasporic Citizenship "Community Media: Newspaper, Radio, and Television") provides an interesting

However, there were other sites of immigration and migration that led to alternative experiences from those in the immigration centers. This allowed some Haitians to think of other locations when they referred to life in the United States. Thus, despite the relatively smaller population numbers outside the immigration centers, places like New York and South Florida did not always constitute main points of reference. In many instances, the processes of immigration and quality of life for Haitians in these settings often varied from that known-to-exist in the centers. Herein lies the importance of moving beyond the centers to garner further knowledge of the Haitian immigrant experience, as well as to suggest areas for future query on Immigrant America.

**Moving Beyond the Immigration Centers: Evanston, IL,  
Rochester, NY, and Boston, MA**

Knowledge about the Haitian experience in the United States is truly expanded by studies shattering the invisibility of Haitians outside the popular communities of New York City and Miami, Florida. Two studies and one commentary considered the presence of Haitian immigrants in other U.S. cities, specifically, Evanston, Illinois,

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discussion of some of the most prominent forms of communication for Haitians in the diaspora and at home. Those receiving the

Rochester, NY and Boston, MA. The Rochester, NY study also provided insight on a rural (migrant camp) community—a topic featured in a few other articles.<sup>29</sup> Continuing with the scholarly interest in issues of identity and adaptation, Tekle Woldemikael identified the process of second generation Haitians "becoming Black American" in Evanston, Illinois. This sociological study of a small mid-western community took an ethnographic approach. It found that while Haitian immigrants strive to maintain their Haitian identity, their children change and become part of African American society in the U.S.<sup>30</sup>

Breaking from this focus in order to take a closer look at the processes of migration and adaptation, Rose Marie Chierici's study identified the culturally guided process of "demele" (making it) by studying Haitians in Rochester, NY. Chierici focused on the processes of migration and adaptation by Haitians traveling via boat first to South Florida, followed by a secondary migration

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most widespread coverage are noted as being based in New York and Miami.

<sup>29</sup> Decker, Phil, "'I Never Knew They Existed:' The Invisible Haitian Migrant Worker," Migration World XV, no.2 (1987) 17-21; Decker, Phil, "Clesselia," Migration Today XIII, no.2 (1985): 18-29; Craige, Tito, "Boat People Tough it Out: Haitian Immigrants Struggle to Survive in North Carolina," Migration Today XIII, no. 2 (1985).

<sup>30</sup> Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, Becoming Black American: Haitians and American Institutions in Evanston, Illinois (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

to Rochester, NY. This study of illegal refugees (from rural and low-income urban origins), who migrated between 1978-1982, examined and compared this population's resettlement in both rural and urban areas. Chierici's study helped to demonstrate that these centers are relative to individual Haitians, based on their social status and resources.<sup>31</sup> This affirms and encourages the need to move beyond the central focus of past scholarly attention and recognize that centers are truly variable (based on individual experiences), continually shifting (based on temporal factors), and overlapping (informing each other).

Finally, Pierre Michel Fontaine made a brief commentary that touched upon some of the major themes of this research project. Fontaine discussed the early years of Boston's Haitian community, which in 1997 hosted approximately 12,291 first- and second-generation Haitians (almost 2% of the total Haitian U.S. based population).<sup>32</sup> In general, the essay described Boston's early Haitian community life, emphasizing the city as a location for secondary migration. Fontaine also mentioned the

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<sup>31</sup> Chierici, Demele.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Michel Fontaine, "Haitian Immigrants in Boston: A Commentary," In Caribbean Migration to the United States eds. R.S. Bryce-Laporte and D.M. Mortimer, Research Institute for Ethnic Studies, Occasional Papers, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 111-129. "Metropolitan area of

population's dependency on the Haitian communities of New York and Montreal for social activities.<sup>33</sup>

Moving Beyond the Immigration Centers: Detroit, Grand Rapids and Lansing, MI

Within these studies were discussions related to the main research questions of this thesis, including: the migration process, nature of communal life, strategies for survival and success, resources for survival and success, challenges to survival and success, incorporation into the society and response from the society to the Haitian presence. Each of the scholars related the significance of ties to individuals and institutions based in the United States as important and central factors in the migration process. In addition to the well-cited example of family members as links in the migration chain, the studies of Woldemikael and Chierici were useful for pointing out how Haitians were directly recruited to the States, and to specific locations.<sup>34</sup> Again, Fontaine's work was unique in that it provided commentary on the physical environment and other perceived amenities about the migration location,

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residence, Immigrant generation Crosstabulation," Current Population Survey combined estimates for 1996 and 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Woldemikael, Becoming Black American, 24-5; Chierici, Demele, 124-35.

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which were also mentioned by this research's informants.<sup>35</sup> These are key points that this research expounds upon by responding to the question of "why Michigan?" as a choice for resettlement.

Scholars also related the importance of Haitian networks for the processes of adaptation, incorporation and community formation. Here again, familial ties and institutional contacts were familiar resources noted in previous literature and relayed in this history. However, for community formation, this research will highlight the importance of paying closer attention to organizing that is not simply Haitian-centered. While most of the authors paid attention to the institutional links organizers made use of, Charles was most explicit in her discussion of various organizing strategies. These strategies related to working both within and outside the Haitian center.<sup>36</sup> While Haitian-born organizers tactfully employed these strategies, the dynamics of such organizing among youth occur differently to provide yet another communal goal or experience.

Variations became evident from scholarly exploration of the many meanings and roles of identity and ethnicity among community members. Paying attention to identity

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<sup>35</sup> Fontaine, "Haitian Immigrants," 111-29.

<sup>36</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 262-80

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markers among adults has been a major point of analysis for scholars. And, as the studies by Charles and Chierici move beyond the fixed categories of class and color, our complicated understandings begin to reflect reality more closely.<sup>37</sup> Also, scholars began considering that the second generation becomes Black American, moves towards Pan-ethnic identities, that youth embrace their Haitian identity at different stages and in different ways. Certainly, these varied contexts may be attributed to the varied interpretations of what is becoming of both the first and second generations, as well as our conceptualization and understanding of ethnic categories.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, two concepts seem to relate best to the overall discussion, and this research extends the conversation by raising insights on how looking at multiple locations and linkages among locations contributes to our understanding. These concepts, "demele" and "diasporic citizenship," respectively relay how individuals manage their goals, resources, and opportunities for self-betterment and how one's relationship to the native and/or adopted country guides and is guided by one's actions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 218-224, Chierici, Demele, 19, 24-5.

<sup>38</sup> Woldemikael, Becoming Black American; Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 110; Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 232; Stepick, Pride Against Prejudice, 71-3.

Relating these concepts to the different groups of immigrants (the earliest arrivals to the most recent) who occupy different social spaces prompts consideration of their applicability and usefulness in understanding specific histories, as well as how they inform one another.

Thus, previous scholarship on Haitians in the United States were valuable sources that informed this study via the theoretical frameworks they suggested—such as “demele,” and “diasporic citizenship,” as well as offering findings to be considered in relation to the evidence from the Michigan case study.

This research focuses on Haitian immigration to and community formation in Michigan during the Duvalier Regimes (1947-1986) and the Era of Democratization (1986-present). Reflecting the availability of public records and private sources, the narrative relays a history of Haitians in three Michigan cities between 1966 and 1998. In the study of this smaller, less concentrated and somewhat isolated urban setting, community refers to the social and/or spatial network among individuals residing in the state of Michigan, as opposed to any type of visible ethnic enclave.

As supported by the scholarship of Woldemiakel, Cheirici, and Fontaine the significance of this less-

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<sup>39</sup> Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship; Chierici, Demele.

familiar element of the U.S.-based community—Haitians in Michigan—can inform the current literature on Haitian immigration to the U.S. and the history of Immigrant America. Scholarly queries on areas outside the centers emphasize the diversity of experiences for both newcomers and host during the processes of immigration. While scholars may mention the presence of and ties with Haitians in other U.S. cities, there is little to no exploration of how and why Haitians resettled in these areas, and what their experiences were. Considering these alternative stories further complicates our understanding of the experiences of Haitians in the United States. It also adds depth to our knowledge of the immigrant experience.

Again, this study has contributed by asking the following questions: *What was the nature of Haitian community life in American cities with small, dispersed Haitian populations? How does knowledge about these communities inform us about the processes of community building among Haitians in the United States? And, what are the implications of immigration and immigrant experiences for other ethnic groups, both in and outside of their immigration centers?*

Using three Michigan cities (Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing) as case studies, the research found that

Haitians migrated to Michigan continuously since the 1960s. This population movement was induced by political, social and economic instability/insecurity in Haiti, educational and employment opportunities abroad, efforts to establish or re-establish familial ties, and the profound search for a satisfying quality of life. This growing presence facilitated a gradual building of community—one that became visible to and engaged both Haitians and non-Haitians. Knowledge about the nature of Haitian community outside the migration centers of the U.S.-based Haitian Diaspora (i.e., New York and South Florida) encourages consideration of some understudied implications of a U.S. Haitian presence.

The centers were not the only destinations of migration. They often served only as transitional cities on the road to resettlement elsewhere. Furthermore, in these off-center destinations, the development of cross-cultural communities and the challenges presented by social differentiation, particularly based on mixed political opinions made the possibility of bringing Haitians into a single, unified community all the more elusive.<sup>40</sup> From this introductory history, one can see the importance of identifying the multiple ports of entry and sites of

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<sup>40</sup> The comments of several interviewees in the forthcoming narrative will illustrate this desire to have a unified and supportive community.

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resettlement for Haitians migrating to the United States. This also allows for the broadening of the definition and origin of Haitian community.

The primary sources for these findings were oral histories gathered from a snowball sample of 40 participants via an in-depth interview process conducted primarily during July and August 1998, with additional conversations taking place with several interviewees the following year. Interviews were conducted in the interviewee's language of choice (English, Haitian Creole, or French). Referrals from two refugee centers, a culture and arts organization, an educational outreach mission, a professional/social club, several religious communities, various "elders" and several Michigan State University affiliates initiated contact with interviewees. The interviewees' years of residence in Michigan ranged between (4) four and (30) thirty years. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences illustrate and guide the following narrative, and are documented in further detail in the appendices.

Finally, though there are a few areas in the narrative that discuss women and U.S.-born Haitians, future research is needed on these topics of analysis. Also, individual Haitians who are disconnected from the Haitian community

could also contribute further to the breadth and texture of the project's discussion. Time and resources prevented the researcher from giving further consideration to these factors.

Several public and private documents were collected to supplement the stories told by interviewees. These documents included records from local Haitian residents, local Haitian organizations, local voluntary agencies, statistics from the State of Michigan Office of Refugee Resettlement, and national population statistics from the United States Census Bureau, and the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services.

#### **A Survey of Population Statistics**

Records accounting for the presence of Haitian immigrants to the United States, and to U.S. cities with a small Caribbean immigrant presence, are quite scarce. The paucity of public documents on this population makes it difficult to paint a picture of an early presence of Haitians in Michigan. Nonetheless, the writings of several scholars who compiled an array of statistics allow for a rough sketch of what things in Michigan may have looked like prior to the 1990s. At this time, following the 1990 U.S. Census and subsequently via the inter-decennial Current Population Survey, some more explicit numbers

regarding Haiti-born and U.S.-born persons became available.

The number of Haitians migrating to the United States and, specifically, Michigan prior to the twentieth-century remains unaccounted for. Somewhat suggestive of a possible Haitian presence in Michigan are statistics for the population of foreign-born Black immigrants to Michigan. In 1880, the total of the foreign-born Black population was 1,758. In fact, this total represents the second largest presence of foreign-born Blacks in the United States during that time. Florida (2,1184) and New York (1,692) were the first and third chief areas of Black immigration, respectively.<sup>41</sup> While the number of Haitians among these immigrants remains unknown, this research suggests future consideration of connections between African-American residents who emigrated to Haiti during the late nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Additional avenues for considering what the

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<sup>41</sup> Reid, Ira De A, The Negro Immigrant (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 86.

<sup>42</sup> This research can account for at least two Haitian-born Michigan residents during this pre-twentieth century era. Nicholas and James Morgan, the sons of Zachariah and Mary Nevitt Morgan, were born in then-Hayti on July 28, 1865 and October 30, 1867, respectively. They were a generation of children born in Hayti of African American families that emigrated there from the United States in 1860. The family returned to the United States in 1870, following a dissatisfying experience in Hayti, and eventually moved to Boyne City, Michigan in February 1871. They would join Zachariah's sister Louisa Swan who previously migrated from elsewhere in the United States with her husband. The

Haitian population and perhaps, even community, looked like during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century includes Michigan's past as a French territory. Michigan's proximity to Chicago, Illinois can illustrate. In example, Chicago, founded by San Dominguan Jean Pointe Baptist DuSable, should be the focus of future scholarship that considers how Michigan may have been a point along a journey taken by many Saint Dominguans and future Haitians: from the Caribbean island, to Louisiana's port and up the Mississippi River.<sup>43</sup>

Following a gap in numbers for the early twentieth-century, the period between 1920 and 1930 marked an

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presence of these individuals, both those born on the Caribbean island, direct our attention to an early Haitian presence in Michigan. Moreover, by considering the added influence of American-born Blacks who resided in Hayti briefly, it also suggests possibilities by which other Haitians might become familiar with the area through contacts with other Michigan residents. A small amount of information on the Morgan family, their experience in Haiti, and more extensively their resettlement in Michigan is found in the Morgan Family Collection, "Clippings" folder and "Family History" folder at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. The sources used here are a written manuscript with an autobiographical account by Mary Nevitt and "The Story of Two Pioneers of Chrelevoix County, Michigan: Zacharia and Mary Nevitt Morgan" a typed manuscript signed by Mrs. Sarah L. Jones McNeal, Boyne City, Michigan, March 1951.

Also, papers on Alexander Proctor's family, African American emigrants to Haiti in 1861 who eventually returned to the United States and settled in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1865, may be another insightful source for this period. Proctor was a Baptist minister, whose history is traced back to North Carolina, died in Haiti in 1865. The unprocessed collection is available at Duke University Library.

<sup>43</sup> Information on DuSable can be found in Shirley Graham, Jean Baptist Point Du Sable: Founder of Chicago (New York: Julien Messner), 1953.

absolute loss in the foreign-born Black population nationwide. During this time, most Midwestern and mountainous states declined in importance, as mobility elsewhere opened up the options for newcomers. Michigan and Illinois were the exceptions and remained favored areas of migration due to the availability of skilled industrial work opportunities. Otherwise, this period saw a prominent rise of New York as the "New World Mecca of Negro peoples." Immigrants from countries such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti were scarcely represented. This may be primarily due to the fact that most of these French-speaking emigrants were more likely to resettle in francophone locations like Montreal, West African countries and France.

/ Exploring the actual types of contacts in these destinations provided another example of how the historical connection of Haitians to France and its former colonies influenced the immigrants' location of resettlement.

In the mid-twentieth century, the changing international relationship between Haiti and the United States made the U.S. a more prominent destination for Haitian immigrants. The first occupation of Haiti by the United States (1915-1934), introduced American institutions and culture to Haitian society. Following this American infusion, there were many linkages that made passage of

Haitians to the United States more appealing and accessible. One key example was the hosting of international students by American universities. While statistical evidence is once again limited for this time period, information from the 1990 Census report, Foreign-born Population, indicates that among the 225,393 Haitians currently residing in the United States, approximately 2% (4,508 persons) immigrated prior to 1960.<sup>44</sup>

The year 1965 marked a turning point for Haitian immigration to the United States. Similar to other Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, and African countries which had been denied entry in the past, the abolition of a national origins quota system and the change to a preference system that gave priority to family reunification over occupational skills. These were two major factors that led to an increased Haiti presence in the United States. This facilitated the Hart-Cellar Act's unintentional removal of entry barriers for migrants from previously underrepresented countries. However, given that these countries had multiple and varied historical relationships with the United States their migration pathways were created by the military, political, economic,

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<sup>44</sup> Rumbaut and Pedraza, Origins and Destinies, 29.

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and cultural presence of America in other countries.<sup>45</sup> The increasing numbers among previously unaccounted for immigrant groups seems to have encouraged closer assessment of the population's entry, as population statistics are more readily available following the 1965 Act. From this new source of information, anthropologist Michel Laguerre calculated statistics from 1966-1977, allowing us to know that Haitians migrating to Michigan only accounted for .18% (110) of all Haitian immigrants (5,550) to the U.S. during this period.<sup>46</sup>

For the year 1990, U.S. Census data accounts for 238 Haitians residing in Michigan. Of those residents, 197 lived in urban areas and 41 in rural areas (perhaps primarily as migrant camp workers). The counties with the largest Haitian population include Ingham (20), Oakland (41), and Wayne (115). The most recent numbers are available from the inter-decennial Current Population Survey (CPS) that documents weighted estimated numbers for foreign-born and U.S.-born children of immigrants during the years 1996 and 1997 combined. The CPS accounts for 753 first-generation Haitians and 3,459 second-generation

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<sup>45</sup> Ruben G. Rumbaut, "Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in Contemporary America," Origins and Destinies, eds. Pedraza, Sylvia and Ruben Rumbaut (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), 23-4.

<sup>46</sup> Laguerre, "Haitian Immigrants in the United States," 144.

Haitians, a total of 4,212 estimated to live in Michigan. These numbers reflect the fact that Michigan is home to less than 1% of the national Haitian population (645,354), with a greater presence among second-generation Haitians (5 to 1 ratio of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> generation).<sup>47</sup> The larger number of children of immigrants outside of the migration centers, a matter demanding closer examination in the future, may be explained by the increased mobility among this generation especially as these younger individuals pursue educational and employment opportunities open to them nationwide.

Finally, it is important to identify the limits of statistical records. To begin, only since 1996 have the CPS estimates accounted for gap of information on Haitians in the Census records. Moreover, many Haitians may have gone completely uncounted, particularly illegal entrants and those born-outside of Haiti or whose place of residence prior to immigration to the U.S. was outside of Haiti. This point is well illustrated when considering gendered patterns of immigration to Michigan. For example, scholars such as Charles and Woldemikael showed that women led the migration processes to cities like New York and Evanston..

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<sup>47</sup> Cross-tabulations of first and second-generation immigrants were prepared by Ruben G. Rumbaut, Professor of Sociology, Michigan State University. The data are from the Current Population Survey, United States Bureau of Census, 1996 and 1997.

While Woldemikael simply observed that female domestic jobs facilitated the earliest migration to Evanston, Charles based her argument on detailed analysis conducted by numerous scholars. Charles found that the overall pattern of U.S. migration since 1945 has been such that women outnumbered men, approximately more than 50% of the foreign-born population, in comparison to the older European migration.

The pattern of female dominated migration was not immediately evident in this study of Haitians in Michigan. A few individuals mentioned mothers, sisters, and aunts who came for education, professional training or family (e.g. marriage) and many more mentioned women who were first elsewhere in places like New York or Montreal. However, to Michigan, there was not "an unusual pattern where single women tend to migrate or where they often precede spouses in the process," as Charles noted about New York, particularly among Haitians, Dominicans, and Jamaicans. While varying patterns in Michigan are most likely due to different employment opportunities, they may also reflect those less visible patterns oftentimes due to those who often remain uncounted. This may be especially true for the

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CPS numbers are weighted estimates based on a sample (in this case, a sample of 50,000, of which less than 500 were Haitians).

second generation, or those coming through unofficial ports of entry.

### **A History of Haitian Community in Three Michigan Cities**

Despite the fragmented nature of these numbers, the following narrative will rely heavily on information gathered from the oral interviews to fill some gaps, add some depth and lead us in new directions for exploring a social history of Haitians in Michigan from 1966 to 1998. Though the study is primarily interested in Haitians living in Michigan, the narrative includes some comparisons of this group to Haitians living in other U.S. cities. This study will also explore implications for broader immigration historiography.

The following narrative will discuss who these Haitian immigrants are and why they came to Michigan. In response to several working questions that helped to organize and analyze the information gathered, the chapters are outlined as follows: Chapter Two will identify the various contexts of exit and entry for the immigrants. In other words, it will explain the factors that led to their migration from Haiti to the U.S. Due to the limited time and resources for the project, attention is directed towards the foreign-born Haitians. Chapter Three provides added commentary on the context of entry, as well as highlights the processes of

incorporation relating to the role of social networks and kinship ties among local Haitians. Offering knowledge about what newcomers found upon their arrival and how that affected their adaptive experiences, this chapter begins to suggest the basic meanings of community in the local area. Chapter Four presents how these informal ties to other Haitians in Michigan developed into the creation of formal organizations and activities drawing attention to the challenges, as well as some exciting implications for the Haitian presence in the cities researched by this project. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the major conclusions of the preceding chapters. Having explored these major topics—the processes of immigration and migration, the creation of social support networks and the continued establishment of formal organizations and activities within a location that lacks any visible ethnic enclave—our knowledge of Haitians in the United States is revisited. These final thoughts also allow for some comments on the role of immigrants and immigration in the telling of histories.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The researcher was guided by a reading of Portes and Rumbaut's Immigrant America. Portes and Rumbaut frame their discussion by asking the questions: who are the immigrants, where did they come from, and what was their adaptive process and experience in American society? As a comprehensive text, the authors also reflect on the historical dynamics and factors of immigration as a process, and review policies and their implications to pinpoint potential means of redressing ineffective policy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **DESTINATION MICHIGAN: WHO ARE THEY? AND WHY DID THEY COME?**

Haitians continuously migrated to Michigan since the 1960s. Their movement was induced by political, social and economic insecurity in their homeland, educational and employment opportunities abroad, efforts to establish or re-establish familial ties, and the search for a satisfying quality of life. Like the overall flow of immigrants to the United States, Michigan's newcomers included professionals, entrepreneurs, laborers and refugees.<sup>49</sup> In several instances, these immigrant types overlapped; for example, many professionals initially traveled for studies and ultimately immigrated as political refugees.

Scholars writing on the flow of immigrants in and out of countries used various groupings to categorize and illustrate the patterns of population movement. These typologies, while inevitably simplistic (given the array of experiences), are useful in that they aid in the articulation of findings. The immigrant types (professionals, entrepreneurs, laborers, and refugees) presented in Alejandro Portes' and Ruben G. Rumbaut's

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of these types of immigrants, see Portes and Rumbaut, Immigrant America, 1-25.

Immigrant America serve as an example. The four types represent individuals who inconspicuously incorporate themselves in the host society by dispersing in their respective institutions (professionals), individuals who may or may not attract attention, as they are recruited by industries within the host society (laborers), individuals who are quite visible, most often situated within ethnic enclaves (entrepreneurs), and individuals who are sponsored by state and humanitarian institutions (refugees/asylees). Despite the potential for overlap, these categories allow recognition of the population's diversity. They also direct our attention to various factors and contexts that create the immigrant experience for the entrants, host and sending countries. By placing the population in manageable and easily identifiable categories, Portes and Rumbaut are able to explore the complexity of Immigrant America.

However, to organize a discussion of Haitians in Michigan an alternative typology may be more useful. As suggested by the comments of numerous interviewees, Haitians in Michigan came in three waves. Thus, this narrative will refer to the Haitian population and community as a group of people who fall into one of the three subsequent categories:

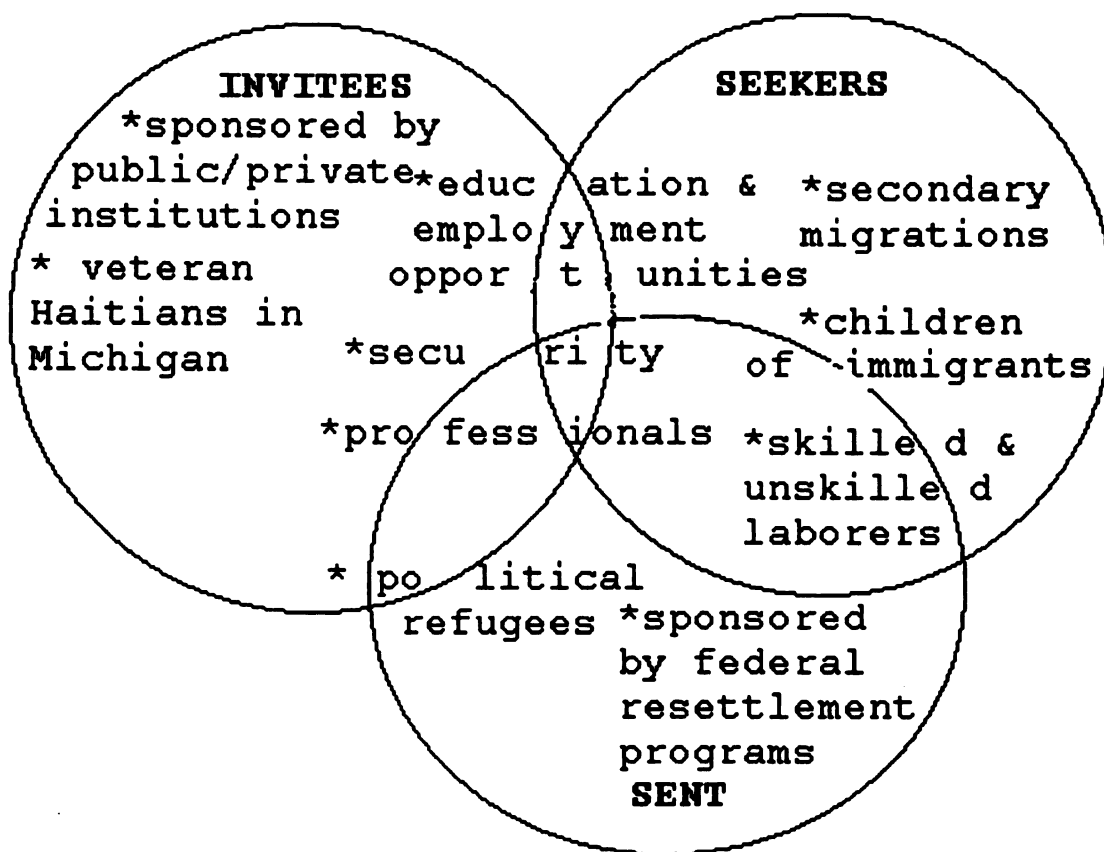
- those who were invited: invitees (individuals offered educational and/or employment opportunities, 1960-70s),

- those who were seeking: *seekers* (individuals who sought out/recognized the potential for opportunities, 1970s-80s), and
- those who were sent: *those sent* (individuals who were directed to their place of refuge, 1980s-90s).<sup>50</sup>

As with the previously discussed typology, and any other, these categories oversimplify the actual population and its experiences. However, the groupings aid in organizing and make possible the discussion of such dynamic experiences.

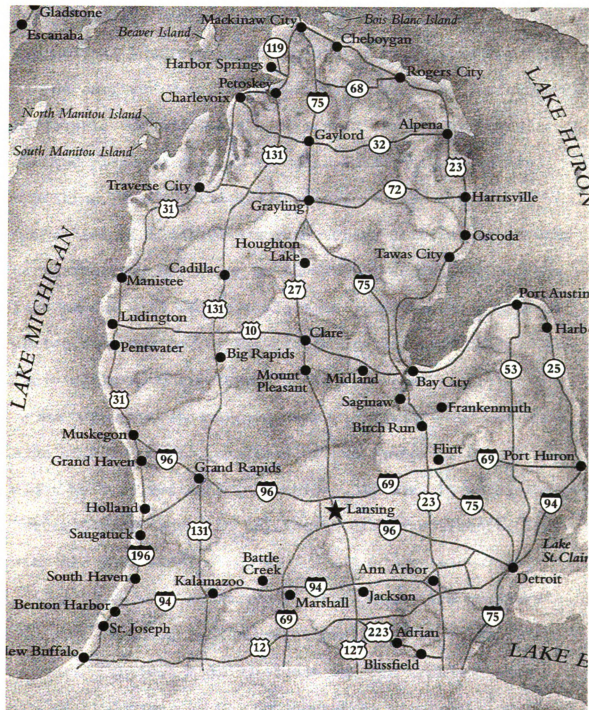
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<sup>50</sup> This typology is modeled after that used by Sylvia Pedraza, "Cuba's Refugees: Manifold Migrations," Origins and Destinies, eds. Pedraza, Sylvia and Ruben Rumbaut (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), 263-79. Pedraza's typology is an extension of the different migration phases presented by Nelson Amaro and Alejandro Portes in "Una Sociologia del Exilio: Situacion de los Grupos Cubanos en los Estados Unidos," Aportes 23:6-24. The typology describes the flow of Cuban immigrants into the United States using the categories of: "those who wait," "those who escape," "those who search." Pedraza has added: "those who hope," and "those who despair."



# **HAITIAN MIGRATION WAVES TO MICHIGAN, 1966-1998**

(Prepared by the Author)



MAP OF LOWER MICHIGAN

(Courtesy of the State of Michigan)

### Those who were invited (Invitees)

The "veterans" of today's Haitian community in Michigan came primarily under the invitation of a hosting educational institution or employer. As was true for many of the earliest Haitian immigrants to the U.S., unfavorable political, economic, and social conditions back home altered plans to return, or made permanent immigration appealing. This period was characterized by a large emigration of middle and working class Haitians who sought to escape the repression of Duvalier's dictatorship. Thus, just as the more recent immigrants were fleeing political persecution during the Era of Democratization, these individuals sought refuge in a foreign land.

Now addressed by many newcomers as "Pere" (Father) as a sign of respect for the years of experience he has as an elder Haitian resident in Michigan, Gilbert is an exemplary "veteran" who began the telling of his resettlement history with the year 1966:

My original purpose was to undertake graduate studies . . . at Michigan State University. And in fact I did graduate in 1968 with a Master's degree. . . . Subsequent to my graduation, I found that I could not really return to Haiti [due to the worsening political situation, where

many family members and friends were being murdered]. [Therefore], I [sought] and found employment with the State of Michigan. . . .

After finding employment, I was able to have my family join me [in 1972].<sup>51</sup>

While this history of events does in fact trace the continuous process of Gilbert's permanent residence in Michigan, his migration history to the United States actually began in 1949. This date marks the beginning of his experiences as an international student who pursued undergraduate training at Michigan State University (MSU). As valedictorian of his school in Haiti, Gilbert attracted the attention of the United States' cultural attaché who invited the young scholar to interview for an academic scholarship to study abroad. Upon acceptance, Gilbert made a week-long visit to Washington, D.C. where he was informed that based on his field of interest, he would attend MSU, one of the nation's top universities. Returning to Haiti upon graduation in 1951, Gilbert would spend the next 15 years as a Haitian government employee and five years working with different cooperative programs between the United States and Haiti. Through these academic and

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with the author, July 29, 1998. Pseudonyms will be used for all interviewees in compliance with Michigan State



professional endeavors, Gilbert established many contacts with the United States while in Haiti, as well as in Michigan. These contacts were key factors guiding Gilbert's future.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some of the earliest Haitian immigrants to the United States were documented as individuals guided by invitations from the United States government or institutions whose presence were established in Haiti during the U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-34). Ira Reid, writing on the increasingly visible presence of Haitians in New York City, stated: "Before the American occupation of Haiti, there were only a few graduates of American institutions. Since then, more than fifty students have been sent over by the government." Reid highlighted Columbia University, various philanthropic foundations and religious groups as the hosts of various student programs.<sup>52</sup> This institutional and organizational support made migration and immigration to Michigan feasible.

Pere Gilbert recalled the presence of about three professional families who "were almost [in] identical

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University's Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects, protecting the identity of informants (IRB#98474).

<sup>52</sup> Reid, The Negro Immigrant, 98. Future researchers may want to consider numbers available from Open Doors, a publication from the Institute of International Education (New York, N.Y.) that references statistical information on international students in the United States beginning in 1954.

situations" as his.<sup>53</sup> Maxim, who came with his family after being recruited by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), immigrated to the United States in 1962. However, unlike those who came temporarily for educational ventures, his migration was driven by a long-term employment opportunity. Initially resettled in New York City, future circumstances encouraged him to make a secondary migration to Detroit and then Lansing, Michigan.

Maxim recalls:

I was with [the] USAID program, which is the State department giv[ing] help to underdeveloped countries and I was [working] as an engineer in public works department. So, when the program ended or [rather] they had to leave, since I work with the "technicien" American people, . . . they say, 'Why don't you come . . . come over. So, I move[d] to the States, in 1962 . . . I think there was a little political problem between America and Haiti . . . things were not working too good . . . there was kind of a political squabble between [Francois] Duvalier (that was president) and the State Department. So Duvalier

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with the author, July 29, 1998.

asked them to leave. And they say, well, they are going to leave. So, they packed and at the same time, they . . . pick[ed] up people they wanted.

So I came to New York City, start[ed] working.<sup>54</sup>

Maxim explained that this recruitment was the result of changes in Haiti's political climate. More specifically, changing relations between the United States and Haiti demanded that American institutions leave the Caribbean island. In the process of doing so, USAID enticed Haitians working with the organizations to take their acquired skills and their families to the United States. These families were among those from the larger flow of immigrants who fled the Duvalier Regimes, either as political refugees or as families unable to secure economic and social stability within the patron society.

For most of these families, professional, educational and/or employment opportunities made resettlement in Michigan cities attractive and feasible. Additionally, opportunities for their children made such a move all the more enticing. Gilbert's experiences as an international student in Lansing, and subsequent opportunities to be employed by the State, made Michigan a location that eased the process of incorporating his wife and children.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with the author, August 14, 1998.

Similarly, familiarity with the area made prospects for a stable future seem more apparent. Both Gilbert and Maxim's children, like many others, would each pursue professional degrees and launch successful careers in the future, fulfilling the promise of Michigan as a place for those seeking refuge.

Such gains certainly were not limited to Michigan. Newcomers, however, emphasized that the specific quality of life in Michigan was especially alluring. Families found Michigan to be a comfortable place for pursuing a life in explicit contrast to the cramped living quarters, crowded streets and subways in New York City. Boston's early Haitian community shared the desire to escape an overwhelming and congested living environment; many were former residents of New York City.<sup>55</sup> Maxim recounts how refreshed he was by a visit to Michigan in 1965. Visiting his sister-in-law who migrated with her husband for employment several years earlier, he said:

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<sup>55</sup> The comments raised in Fontaine ("Haitian Immigrants in Boston," 116) are echoed by Michigan residents. Fontaine writes: "Haitians have been moving to Boston in significant numbers only over the past decade or so. They were attracted primarily by the prospect of a quieter life than New York City, as well as by access to better-paying jobs, and better and cheaper housing. Those who had children expected also that the schools would be better there. These hopes have not always been fulfilled, but once the critical number of newcomers was settled, the process acquired a high momentum and continued unabated."

I was not asking for too much, for just the way to balance the budget and raise my children, my family and . . . I found out that Lansing, Michigan was a good place for that. There was no big thing, just a kind of a college town. . . . And I like[d] Detroit because I see things that I would never see in New York, such as trees and grass, you know, I was living in a hotel for six months so I never seen anything like that so I say, wow! I better move. Then from Detroit, for job-related things I moved to Lansing [in 1967].<sup>56</sup>

By highlighting a few factors that guided his resettlement choices--economic security, stability for the family, and an environment conducive to child rearing (i.e. open air and grassy surroundings), Maxim illustrates the dynamic process of deciding to move and resettle. Capable of finding employment within his area of specialization, Maxim, like other early immigrants, was able to meet the needs of his family.

In several Michigan cities, professionals from Haiti took advantage of invitations from educational and employment opportunities to seek refuge from the political, economic, and social constraints of the Duvalier Regimes

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with the author, August 14, 1998.

(1957-86).<sup>57</sup> Despite the pressing manner in which they were required to depart their beloved homeland, these newcomers entered the U.S. within a favorable context of reception. Many were sponsored by public and private institutions. This, however, does not mean that they did not face difficulties during their migration and adjustment processes. The stigma of being a foreigner challenged their attempts to conduct their lives peacefully and successfully. In fact, Carole (Maxim's wife) recounted the greeting she and her family received when passing through INS upon arrival: "[Remember, you are] not coming here for trouble," the officer told them. This set the tone for the coming years during which they worked toward overcoming unfamiliar work environments, language settings, and cultural habits. These were experiences to be faced by all the waves of immigrants (i.e., *those who were invited, seeking, and sent*). However, the migration experience unique to this first wave of newcomers was that they were the pioneers, those whom subsequent immigrants called "Veterans." These early immigrants did not have the benefit of an already established Haitian presence. This made, for

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<sup>57</sup> Woldemikael (Becoming Black American, 24-5) also notes that several immigrants to Evanston were invited by Americans who had worked and/or vacationed in Haiti. In this instance, many women came as domestic servants, initiating the migration chain that

a few, family members the only link to home. The experiences of *invitees* offered some personal guidance to future immigrants, which aided in the latter's resettlement process.

**Those who were seeking (Seekers)**

Individuals who migrated to Michigan during the 1970s tended to be Haitians whose settlement in Michigan was a second, if not third or fourth point along a dynamic migration journey. Some were individuals whose departure from Haiti took them to Africa, Europe, Canada, Mexico, and/or South America to pursue education and employment opportunities. Others were children of immigrants undertaking self-initiated migration histories for similar pursuits. In addition, some were seeking to establish/re-establish families, or did so along the way. Large numbers were attracted by the quality of urban living in Michigan cities.

Like Maxim's family, many Haitians who first immigrated to major cities such as New York found themselves looking elsewhere for a different quality of life. Moving from Haiti, these immigrants expected to establish a safe, secure and promising future. New York

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would bring others to the area. A few other areas cited were Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington, DC.

left many Haitians unfulfilled. Among the alternative locations, Michigan was highly regarded. The perceived benefits were clear: In Michigan, families could find a place "pour faire l'éducation de ses enfants" (to educate one's children) since "New York est devenue incontrôlable," (since New York came to be out of control), <sup>58</sup> commented a *seeker* whose family most certainly valued education. This *seeker* originally left Haiti to pursue studies in Europe. Prior to his move to Michigan, he and his wife were accustomed to visiting his family who had moved from New York to Detroit. At that time, the *seeker* was studying in Europe and subsequently worked in South America. Another *seeker* wanted a place that was not "too crowded," and where individuals did not have to be hassled by long commutes to work or other activities, such as evening socials.<sup>59</sup> These factors encouraged a young doctor who had studied and worked in Mexico, Canada and New York City to begin looking elsewhere for employment. Through his life experiences, he realized that he had the option of living in a different setting.

This appreciation for a quieter and more manageable manner of living was an often-stated sentiment; several

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.

migrants "took a chance" and responded to the comments of associates and colleagues who suggested that Michigan offered a "quieter, better . . . more friendly"<sup>60</sup> type of living. In fact, most interviewees expressed an appreciation for the satisfactory housing and educational opportunities offered locally.

Another *seeker* reflected on the benefits of living in Michigan:

[What] I like about Michigan is [what it offers] if you want to raise a family. I like small towns. I mean, I could have gone to Long Island, but it was expensive. And Lansing, was really quiet, they had schools . . . didn't have the problems, that New York City had. Not that they [the problems] wouldn't come here . . . we're starting to inherit the things that are happening in big cities, but it took . . . quite a long time . . . since it's a small town it's not as bad . . . [Lansing is] a good family town.<sup>61</sup>

These secondary (and in some cases, tertiary, or greater) migrations may be best understood by considering the process of "demele"—making it to the center. As

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with the author, August 7, 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with the author, August 14, 1998.

described by Chierici, "all Haitians recognize a social center and a periphery." More specifically, the center is:

a metaphor to describe the goals Haitians strive to achieve, and a place in society that they aspire to occupy. . . . The center is not identical for all Haitians; it is relative to their position in the social hierarchy. . . . Depending on their place . . . center can mean economic stability, social advancement, or even political freedom.

Two key elements to this adaptive strategy are goals and resources, where immigrants are social actors who make plans to change their situations by creating and taking advantage of opportunities. The manner and level at which these goals were defined and attained, as suggested by Chierici varied with social status and available resources and opportunities.<sup>62</sup> Thus, future research could investigate the actual standards of living experienced by Haitians residing in varied locations, prompting the following question: Are the perceived gains real, to the degree that they could be measured? Some standards of evaluation, as suggested by informants, include access to affordable and

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<sup>62</sup> Chierici, Demele, 11-13.

satisfactory housing, educational standards, social and cultural activities.

Yet, to avoid making Michigan an anomaly, it is important to consider other factors that made Michigan an attractive location for resettlement for *seekers* during the 1970s and 1980s. Some migrants were simply pursuing personal and professional interests, and found enticing opportunities in Michigan. For example, prestigious educational programs and professional positions brought Haitians to the Michigan area. Individuals were informed by their mentors, colleagues, and by perusing job listings.

Three *seekers* illustrate how professional and personal interests attracted Haitians to Michigan. Christophe recalled seeing a *New York Times* listing for a position with a prestigious medical institute in Detroit, on his way to Chicago for another job interview,. Responding with a phone call, he was invited to make a stop in Michigan on his return home. Following the successful meeting, he was immediately offered a position.<sup>63</sup> For the *seeker* whose scholarly migrations consisted of years spent in France, West Africa, New York and Haiti, an academic position in Detroit would be the chance to pursue professional and personal interests. Having read the writings of Franklin E.

Frazier on the Black Church, residing and working in this predominately African American community seemed appealing to the *seeker*.<sup>64</sup> Finally, another *seeker's* migration experience in Canada directed the next professional move. Traveling from Haiti for Bible school in 1993, Pastor Bertrand's value of maintaining close relationships with the population he was preparing to work with enhanced his interest in working in Michigan. He said:

[W]hen I went to Canada . . . there were no Haitians there. I really missed speaking Creole. My accent was really very English-like, American accent. And I missed the Haitian people. When I went back to Haiti and I said, [for the next mission abroad,] 'I really want to be where the Haitians are,' where I could practice my Creole so that when I go back to Haiti, I wouldn't lose any accent and I would be just like the people down there. So, when I came to Reform Bible College [in 1995], the first question I asked was, 'Are there any Haitians here?' and I was led across a couple that was working with some Haitian people . . . they took me to [their]

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with the author, August 7, 1998.

house; I talked with them and I was invited [to the Nazarene church]. When I went there, they were in critical need for a leader to help them. [The former Creole-speaking pastor had moved to Oklahoma].<sup>65</sup>

For some, being around other Haitians was still an appeal; in this case, the interest was more than a personal attachment to fellow nationals. Instead, Pastor Bertrand had a professional concern about his preparedness to conduct future missionary work in Haiti. Professional choices, and the circumstantial presence of Haitians, facilitated the migration of other Haitians to Michigan.

For other *seekers*, the presence of other Haitians in the area was a central and guiding factor in their decisions to move. Oftentimes, however, the presence of other Haitians was truly related to the presence of family. Family members who had already established themselves after securing educational and employment opportunities and their own chance for such pursuits encouraged newcomers to take advantage of what they recognized as the value of life in Michigan. For example, Alfred's brother, who was married and living in Michigan, invited him during a visit in New York. Alfred recalled:

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

[My brother] came for that summer and asked: 'Why don't you go back with me and then spend the summer over in Michigan . . . let's hang out a little bit.' . . . I had just graduated from college...and was curious—I didn't know Michigan then . . . knew nothing about Michigan, or very little. I said, 'oh, what the heck, . . . I'll check it out see what's going over there.'

Agreeing to drive back to Michigan with his brother, the recent college grad soon became restless. He told himself: "'I cannot be sitting down doing nothing here. I should probably look for a job or something,' you know, since I just graduated." After a bit of searching, Alfred found a waged position in the service industry. "So I say, 'this is just for the summer, work for the summer and then see what happens.' So, yup, this is the summer that I was working, I'm still here [laughs]." Having left the service sector after realizing his trainees were being promoted above him, Alfred soon pursued a college training program that led him to his current international operations executive position with a major U.S. corporation.<sup>66</sup>

Driven by curiosity and initiative, Alfred's summer visit turned into relocation. In other instances,

encouragement from family members to come to Michigan was directly linked to the chance for employment in Michigan. Another *seeker* recounted the explicit lure his supportive brother offered him:

M te nan travay grasadye depi m antre an [19]67 m pa janm chita m toujou ap travay. Rive fen ane [19]74, se apre Vietnam m vin sispan ke vin genyen yon sot de . . . *recession* an [19]75. Te gen anpil travay nan Brooklyn ke te fèrme *because of that*. Donk e koz resesyon an m te vin pèdi djob mwen fen lane [19]74 m ale nan *unemployment* pou 1 an . . . fen [19]74 pou fen [19]75 . . . frè m nan te antre vin vizite nou Brooklyn . . . se de la etan li di mwen ke pa gen pwoblèm li nan Detroit ke si m vle vin jwen li . . . avèk plesir ke l ap tann mwen. Vreman sa m fè m wè ke m pat gen espwa ditou nan Brooklyn ke frè m nan ofri m vin jwenn li, m di OK m ap vin jwen li . . . m ale avèk tout rès *unemployment* mwen, . . . nan Detroit, m ale chèche travay.

I had been employed, thanks to God, ever since I entered [the United States] in [1967]. I never

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

sat down, always working. Come the end of [19]74, it was after Vietnam, I came to a halt, there was a sort of recession in [19]75. There were a lot of jobs in Brooklyn [(place of residence)] that were closed because of that. So, because of this recession I lost my job at the end of [19]74, I went into unemployment . . . from the end of [19]74 to the end of [19]75. My brother came in to visit us in Brooklyn. It was from this time on that he told me, 'no problem;' he was in Detroit, if I wanted to come: his pleasure, he'd be waiting for me. Truly, that made me see that I didn't have hope in Brooklyn, that my brother had offered me to join him, so I said 'ok, I'm coming.' . . . I took the rest of my unemployment monies . . . and off to Detroit, I went to find work.

It may not be surprising that Saint Lyr's brother encouraged him to visit. The brother moved to Detroit several years earlier after being impressed by the auto industry and the opportunities he found.<sup>67</sup> In addition to opportunities at universities, and with the State of

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.

Michigan, both professional and laboring positions with Michigan's auto industries attracted Haitians to local cities.

Other *seekers* came to Michigan because they were starting or re-establishing ties as newlyweds, long-distance couples, or as the previous accounts began to reflect, with immediate family members. One such family was re-united by a grandmother who resided on the East Coast. Based on the satisfactory experience of one son, the migration chain began. He encouraged his brother, and later his mother and accompanying nieces to make the move to Michigan. One niece reflected:

I moved here in 1990 . . . to Detroit . . . And it was simply because my grandmother wanted to be near her children . . . two of her sons who were here . . . . My uncle was the first to come. He loved Detroit. He's been here for ages [actually, 20 years] . . . he was the one who really got us to come to Michigan, he loves it here, he wouldn't go anywhere else.

I: Why did he come to Detroit in the first place, what was it about Detroit that attracted him?

R: Actually, I think he was a student and I think he was just trying different places. I think it was a job offered in the field of computer programming. He was supposed to start on Monday, so I think he just left that weekend [coming from Toronto] . . . He knew no one here. . . . So he had to look for a place and so he has been here ever since.

Satisfaction on the part of one person often meant that other family members often were persuaded to move to Michigan, a completely new place for many. Some were high school sweethearts from Haiti or elsewhere in the States. Others were married or single couples who had been in long-distance relationships. Camila was involved in one such relationship. She began dating her future-husband in high school. Having graduated a year earlier, her boyfriend pursued employment opportunities in Michigan while Camila continued her schooling. Upon her completion, he returned home and the two wed prior to making the final move to Michigan. Though the move was difficult in terms of distance from family, Camila felt comfortable given that she could make the transition to the workforce easily given her professional training. In many cases, this desire to be together and the satisfaction of finding secure employment

(in places like the medical field or public sector) overrode the move to an unfamiliar place.

Among the immigrants who were *seeking* during the 1970s and 1980s, a familiarity with resettlement outside of Haiti allowed for the migration and adaptation process unlike that of *those who were invited*. For many, this would not be a first move. Many were the children of immigrants who constituted that earlier wave: parents or elders who would leave their children "waiting" in Haiti for their "name to be called." Others were young immigrants who had traveled to various nations, aside from the U.S., pursuing professional degrees and employment in Europe, Africa, South America, Canada, Mexico, and other parts of the Caribbean. Some were like *those who were invited*: making plans to contribute to Haiti's development (based on their affiliations) either by returning or from abroad. Secondly, many were individuals who had family and/or friends who awaited their arrival in Michigan, offering a sense of familiarity and easing the adaptation process by serving as a buffer to the new experience.

#### **Those who were sent**

Perhaps what truly sets Michigan's Haitian population apart from the migration centers is its designation as a site for resettlement of recent political refugees.

"Resettlement" is a federal program overseen by the Offices of Refugee Resettlement located under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This program "selects refugees from outside the United States whose status has already been determined and offers them the possibility of full incorporation into U.S. society." Following World War II, "resettlement was the mainstay of national and international refugee programs." The program was closely linked with Cold War tactics; it offered refuge to individuals fleeing Fascist, communist states. In 1980, the Refugee Act of that year shifted the program's rationale from political to legal and humanitarian concerns. Therefore, the program emphasizes the United States' obligations to share responsibility for the protection of those fearing persecution in their homeland. Working with local voluntary agencies, refugees from countries facing political turmoil, like Haiti, are sent to an array of cities in the U.S., particularly major cities with a small presence of the immigrant group. One example is Des Moines, Iowa; a place that has few refugees living in the area.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Newland, U.S. Refugee Policy: Dilemmas and Directions (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1995), 9-11; Ruben G. Rumbaut, "The Structure of Refuge: Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States, 1975-1985," International Review of Comparative Public Policy 1: (1989), 97-129. According to the director of a local voluntary agency (refugee services office), voluntary agencies in various states

The State of Michigan has been a site for such resettlement processes for Haitians since 1993. Accounting for those who applied for assistance from the State's Family Independence Agency (MFIA), approximately 195 Haitians were documented as resettled refugees in Michigan. The three main cities of resettlement, based on the size of the cities and the presence of capable voluntary agencies, are Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing. Among these cities, Ingham County, Lansing has hosted the largest number of refugees recently sent (145), followed by Kent County, Grand Rapids (40), Berrien (6), and counties in metropolitan Detroit (1-Macomb, 3-Wayne). These numbers do not include persons who may have resettled after being sent to another state, and they may not include certain family members (e.g., children and elders). In fact, 390 unaccompanied minors were documented as having resettled under the foster care services of Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids.<sup>69</sup> Further research is needed to

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apply to become host for the refugee resettlement program. For example, the United Catholic Conference has agencies in 110 cities across the nation. Based on their capacity to meet basic resettlement services (e.g., facilitate application for public assistance to eligible refugees, enroll newcomers in English-as-a-Second-Language or job training classes, coordinate the attainment of shelter, food, and healthcare), they apply to become hosts and affiliate with the program. Telephone conversation with the author, August 26, 1999.

<sup>69</sup> Statewide statistics compiled for the author from Michigan Family Independence Agency, Refugee Assistance Program, in

complete the documentation of *those who were sent*,  
Michigan's most recent wave of Haitian newcomers.

Some of the experiences of *those who were sent* were similar to the experiences of previous generations, especially *the invited* that came without a sense of what lay ahead. The major difference between the two groups was that *the invited* had already established educational and/or employment opportunities, while *those sent* came only to find refuge. One *sent* newcomer said:

Objektif mwen pa t pou te desann nan Grand Rapids paske mwen se yon mounn ki te abitye nan Florida. Ke nan ane [19]86, [19]87 kote m te gen tan fè anviwon 5 vwayaj nan Florida. M gen paran m la tomnton m frè mwen kouzen m kouzin mwen abite la. M te santi m te pi alèz pou m te vin la. Men . . . akòz travay bondye pa mache menm jan avèk travay lezòm. Sa tw pran tan jiskaske Bondye te di se isi nan Grand Rapids m ap desann.

My objective was not to come to Grand Rapids because I was a person who was accustomed to Florida. Since 1986, [19]87, I had already made

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author's files; Statistics for unaccompanied minors in Grand Rapids provided by Bethany Christian Services, Grand Rapids, MI.

about five (5) trips to Florida. My parents are there, my uncle's there, my brother and cousins (male and female) live there. I felt more comfortable to live there. But . . . since *travay Bondye* [God's plan] doesn't always work with *travay lezòm* [man's plan] it took until God said that it was here in Grand Rapids, that I would resettle.<sup>70</sup>

Another said: [T]out lè m Ayiti m pa t ko konn ki kote m ta p vini, se lè m rive Miami yo di mwen selon jan dosye m ye so m pap ka rete nan gran vil sa yo vil sa yo on ti jan twò cho yo pa, yo tankou m ta di yo pa cool.

I: Ki vil sa yo?

R: Vil tankou Miami, New York ou wè yo pa t vle m ret ladan yo se . . . . So yo voye, mwen menm avèk yon lòt kanmarad ankò yo voye nou vin . . .<sup>71</sup>

All the while I was in Haiti, I did not know where I would be going. It is when I arrived in Miami that they [U.S.Department of Immigration

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998.

and Naturalization Services] told me, that given my file I cannot live in the large cities because they are a bit "too hot," they are not, I could say, they are not "cool".

I: What cities are those?

R: Cities like Miami, New York. You see, they did not really want me to stay in them. . . So they sent us, me and another guy, here . . .

Again, those who were sent were resettled outside the migration centers. This newcomer indicates that the selection of locations outside the "hot" spots— U.S. cities where intense political organizing may easily be facilitated given the population size—was to deter involvement with local politics. Thus, he and the other refugee were resettled in "cool" Michigan cities, places where organizing was assumed less likely to take place.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998. In the event that this idea of deterring political activism from the U.S. is true, the accounts of a few interviewees indicated that some individuals maintained contacts in Haiti and the United States. In this way, they were able to stay abreast of and involved with political events. According to the director of a local voluntary agency, those sent are queried by INS officials on where they would like to resettle upon arrival at Miami International Airport. This is done to offer individuals and families the opportunity to be reunited with other family members, given that the destination city is approved. Anonymous telephone conversation with the author, August 26, 1999.

Major cities like New York and Miami would not host this wave of newcomers. Rather, those who were sent would be dispersed across the United States away from locations that they had become familiar either from news accounts, New York based newspapers that circulate heavily in Haiti, or familial contacts who had migrated years before. Away from the politically active areas (those that were most visible), it would be less possible to recreate the type of organizing that took place in New York, particularly during the Duvalier Regime. Scholars of the New York community mention that as the central site of exile, strong opposition was coordinated in the area, with several attempts at overthrowing the existing government.<sup>73</sup>

However, being near other Haitians was not necessarily related to an interest in political organizing. For some, it was at minimum the desire for a sense of familiarity. Some had that chance. One family, which INS sent to Seattle, Washington, continued on a secondary migration, as other individuals and families did. Given a family member who was resettled in the Grand Rapids area, they expressed

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<sup>73</sup> Laguerre, American Odyssey, 141-154. Charles' A Transnational Dialectic (244-50) discusses the role of politics in the NYC community, and also notes that "it was almost impossible for the Duvalier regime to organize support groups in the various communities of the diaspora. The opposition really control[led] all political activities. Anyone with official ties with the

their preference and made another move. Despite the fact that they found many other Haitians in similar circumstances in Seattle, there was a desire to be near kin.<sup>74</sup>

To understand the experience and willingness to be sent, it is important to know that most of these refugees consider themselves contemporary maroons. The term *maroon* is typically used to refer to slaves who fled plantations and made the decision to "run wild;" that is, free and clandestinely from the social law and in some instances disrupt the daily plantation system. However, under the contemporary circumstances, individuals were politically persecuted because of their affiliation with the Aristide administration. In response to the constraints placed on their lives by the opposition's surveillance and attacks they fled the immediate social scene. This was a critical action that protected them activists and their families. In

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Haitian government was systematically denounced and scorned," (note 15).

<sup>74</sup> According to a director of a local voluntary agency, under the circumstances whereby families are resettled to one city and later determine that they are interested in making a secondary migration, they are entitled to do so; there are no formal restrictions. There is, however, the risk of losing financial and service support from the host agency. Secondary migrations done within the first 24 hours generally secure monies offered; however, there are no guarantees. Supportive services are determined by the voluntary agencies, which have their own policies. Some agencies coordinate efforts to facilitate the

their own words, they went *maroon*. In some instances, these activists continued to place pressure on the political scene by vocalizing their dissent to the government's 1990 upheaval through radio broadcasts and letters to newspaper editors.<sup>75</sup> A local election candidate, Pierronville, represented a major political party. His experience illustrates the circumstances of these contemporary maroons who became targets for suppressing the Aristide party:

[A]prè . . . eleksyon te fèt desanm, an septanm yo te vin bay yon koudeta. Yo pat pèmèt gouvènman te pran menm yon ennan. Kounye e nou menm ki te fè pati gouvènman an, gen anpil pami nou ki te resevwa lamò. E nou di ke gras a bondye ki fè moun tankou mwen yo egziste toujou, m kwè se kache nou te oblije kache nan seten andwa. Ki ve di ke yo fin ranvèse gouvènman an, yo te touye anpil moun, nou menm menm nou te oblije antre nan nati pou nou te kapab gen lavi sof. E m kapab di w pou anpil nan nou mawonaj la li te . . . li on ti jan di anpil. Paseke, li difisil

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interests of the refugee. Anonymous telephone conversation with the author, August 26, 1999.

<sup>75</sup> For an introduction to marronage as applied to slave societies, see Richard Price Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in

pou fanmi te reyini, gen moun ki abandone fanmi.  
 . . . E pou mwen menm pyès moun pat oblije konnen  
 ki kote ke m ap domi paske dapre la politik,  
 dapre jan bagay la te ye nan moman an, ou pa ta  
 ka konfyè kikonk nan adrès kote ou ye, paske pa  
 gen moun ki konnen ki jou y ap pran ou e jou yo  
 pran tèl ou tèl moun si l konnen?! . . . tout  
 moun oblije gen sekrè. Moun pa revele moun kote w  
 ap pase lanui. Ebyen sa te kòmanse pou mwen depi  
 nan lane 90 li te vin pran yon ti chanjman rive  
 nan 91 men lè l vin atake 93 bon mesye yo pase a  
 yon vitès siperyè, . . .<sup>76</sup>

After . . . elections were done in December, in  
 September there was a coup d'état. They [the  
 military] did not allow the government to  
 stabilize for even a year. So now . . . we who  
 were affiliated with the [overthrown] government  
 party, there were many of us who were killed. And  
 we said, thanks to God that people like me are  
 still alive, [to do so] we had to hide in certain  
 locations. In other words, they overthrew the

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the Americas, 2d. ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 1979.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

government, killed lots of people, and we had to go into the woods so that we would stay life.

I can tell you, that for many of us, maroonage was very difficult. Because, it was difficult for families to reunite, people abandoned their families. And for me, not a single person was to know where I was sleeping because according to the politics, to the way things were at that moment, you couldn't trust anyone to know your location. Because no one knows when they [the military] will come get you. And, the day they get this or that person, and they know?! . . . that is why everyone had to be secretive. No one revealed to another where they spent the night. That began in 1990, with a few changes in 1991, but intensified in 1993.

People with similar political affiliations were constantly moving underground. They had to sneak visits to see spouses and family. The circumstances were particularly difficult during the asylum application process, at which time those seeking asylum might certainly be found out and murdered by the opposition.

Of the many stories told, all were men, who served as political party members and fled with their families for

security. The stories of women who served in a similar capacity remain untold, suggesting the need for further investigation. Yet, despite the verbal silence, statistics from the State of Michigan Office of Refugee Resettlement accounts for 86 women registered with local voluntary agencies.<sup>77</sup> As noted before, these numbers suggest just a minimum presence. However, even the women who simply accompanied their families shared in the experience of being sent, perhaps with an even greater degree of unawareness. One young woman came with her father. Recalling the experience, she said that she did not know where she was going or why her father took her along. One of many siblings, the young child of divorce left her mother and life behind to join her father's family in their move to Michigan.

Despite these tragic experiences of being pressured into emigration, separated from familiar surroundings, and offered new life circumstances with limited knowledge of what those circumstances might entail, many of the sent were comforted by the opportunity for a family reunion.<sup>78</sup> In

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<sup>77</sup> Statewide statistics compiled for the author from Michigan Family Independence Agency, Refugee Assistance Program, in author's files.

<sup>78</sup> Some persons who were invited and seeking, particularly those entering the US as children, had similar experiences of uncertainty as the elders initiated the migration processes. Perhaps one unique aspect of the experience of those sent was

this life of asylum, the services of local resettlement agencies, the support of local residents, and the refugee's determination to succeed in this new land with numerous gains such as reunited families, purchases of homes and education for children, offer additional hope for the future. This sent political refugee said:

Sa te pran tan jiskaske bondye te di se isi nan Grand Rapids m ap desann. Ebyen se kon sa le 5 out 1993, mwen te wè se mwen ki nan avyon m ap vin isi nan Grand Rapid. Bon sa a te on jan atriste nou anpil paske n ap vini an yon andwa kote nou pa konnen si n ap kontre avèk yon moun ki pale Ayisyen. Men sa te rekonfòte nou on bò tou, paske premyèman nou te jwenn posiblite nou tout nou reyini. . .nou pral abite nan yon sèl kote bagay ke nou te gen lontan nou pa t ka fè li paske timoun mwen yo te abite lakay grann yo . . . epi madanm mwen . . . l oblije ap dòmi lakay tant li. Li gen plizyè tant l oblije pa ka dòmi kay yon sèl moun l oblije . . . menm jan m ap fè

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that there move was done much more spontaneously, or appeared as such to those not involved in the decision making processes of migrating.

a, dòmi chak sware nan yon lòt kay . . . fason  
pou moun pa konnen ki kote nou pyès nou dòmi. <sup>79</sup>

It took until God said that it was here in Grand Rapids that we'd resettle. Well, it was like this on the fifth of August 1993 I saw that it was me on the plane coming here. It made us very sad because we were coming to a place where we did not know if we would interact with any persons speaking Haitian [language]. On the other hand, we were comforted, because first of all we found the possibility to reunite . . . live in a single place, something that we could not do for some time because [maroonage demanded that] the kids stay in grandmother's house . . . my wife . . . obliged to sleep at her aunt's house. She had several aunts . . . because she could not sleep just at one person's house . . . just the same as I had to do, sleeping each night in a different house . . . so people don't know where we sleep at all.

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

Thus, *sent* families came to these places of resettlement to avoid the life of secrecy, separation, and seclusion. From merchants to skilled laborers and professionals, *those who were sent* represent immigrants forced to leave because of their involvement in the campaign for democracy in Haiti during the 1990s. A key difference between these political refugees and the earlier wave of migrants (especially political refugees fleeing the Duvalier Regime) is the fact that they were dispersed to cities in the United States where the Haitian population was small and unconcentrated. They were sent to "cool" spots to ensure a low level of political organizing from the U.S., and to relieve

↓ population pressures on major port cities. For this reason, newcomers were ignorant or limited in their familiarity with the location of resettlement and new surroundings. Local refugee services and linkages with a few already-established Haitians would offer some assistance in the process. For some the distance from "hot" spots was welcomed. One interviewee commented that he wanted to maintain a certain distance from other Haitians to have a fresh start and "pure lifestyle." While this distance may dictate the environment he expresses satisfaction with, it does not deter him from working with Haitians and other

newcomers at a local voluntary agency.<sup>80</sup> For others, it was a bit of a shock initially as they made attempts to adjust, welcoming any sense of familiarity, as the previously cited family expressed when they were greeted by fellow Creole-speaking Haitians at the airport.<sup>81</sup>

In this sense, Michigan and the opportunities available in Michigan offered a move toward the goal-oriented "center" for each type of immigrant—*those invited, those seeking, and those sent*. The circumstances under which and the manner by which they each migrated and adjusted reflected the historical context in which they left their former places of residence and made the move to Michigan. Overall, these Haitian immigrants pursued their interests and made efforts to meet their goals: whether it be a "way to balance the budget and raise . . . children," reside in a place where long commutes did not interfere with balancing a social life and employment or family responsibilities, initiate familial ties or "jwen posibilite . . . reyini . . . abite nan yon sel kote bagay

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with the author, July 27, 1998. Chierici discusses urban resettlement as movement toward the center, and illustrates the practice of moving away from other Haitians as one of the processes' dynamics. For example, she tells the story of a man named Jacques who considered himself a *moun eklere* (educated person) and in order to signal his status he moved out of an apartment with persons he considered *moun sot* (stupid, uneducated) and to the other side of town (Chierici, Demele, 250-1.)

ke nou te gen lontan" (find the possibility to reunite . .  
. live in a single place, something we could not do for  
some time). During the process, the support of fellow  
Haitians was one of the resources available to and utilized  
by several newcomers. This allowed for the fostering of  
social networks that offered concrete assistance in central  
activities like obtaining employment and securing shelter.  
Also, they led to opportunities for informal gatherings,  
and eventually formal community building.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **KINSHIP TIES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF COMMUNITY**

For those residing in Michigan, the process of meeting other Haitians varied from one person to the next. Given the absence of highly visible ethnic enclaves where communal interaction and organizing take place, this process was not necessarily an immediate occurrence. In fact, most introductions took place within familial settings. Since many newcomers focused on family-related activities, such as home life, school, work, and given that familial ties are valued by Haitian culture, social interactions usually began with and were limited to kinship relations. This was especially true during the settling period. These contacts fostered a social support network that facilitated the meeting of other Haitians in the local area. This network extended support for individual, and later, community needs. It allowed for recognition of shared interests and opportunities to gather. When an individual was without family, or if familial resources were limited, some families reached out—extending their kinship ties—facilitating the adoption of fictive kin.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> In discussing the concept of community, Chierici states that "Haitians organize their social space and their relationship around the extended family (fanmi), and informal networks (moun

The role of kinship ties in community building has been discussed in the existing scholarship on Haitians in the United States, as well as the broader literature on immigrant communities. From her study on Haitians in Rochester, New York, Chierici found that in the absence of formal and organized sites for community family is closely linked to the concept of community.<sup>83</sup> In the context of New York City, Laguerre emphasizes the role of the family as an institution that makes possible the development of Haitian enclaves.<sup>84</sup> According to Laguerre, the family functions as the bond between Haiti and the U.S. mainland. The family facilitates the migration chain by extending family resettlement, and maintains kinship relations through such activities as rotating credit associations, sharing news, social gatherings, remittances, and offering educational opportunities for children in the U.S. These practices were mentioned in chapter two in the discussion of the factors

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pa: one of mine), whose ties may extend across class lines." She observed recreation of such structures in Rochester, Chierici, Demele, 279. For an understanding of the concept of fictive kin, see Carol B. Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 58-61. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that there are many Haitians who are not connected to or interested in connecting to other Haitians in the area. Among the potential reasons for such distancing may be the high level of attachment individuals have to their families. Also, others may have highly desired to assimilate and lose their distinctiveness.

<sup>83</sup>Chierici, Demele, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Laguerre, American Odyssey, 66.

that influenced the processes of migration to the U.S. and to Michigan. In addition to illustrating this relationship of wide-ranging family ties, Charles attributes the importance and significance (size) of social activities like sacred gatherings to the fact that it is a family-centered activity.<sup>85</sup> This last point becomes evident later in this narrative, as we discover church (a place families visit together regularly) as a key site of meeting and interacting with other Haitians. We see these processes of kinship and social support networks among the earliest immigrants to Michigan. Also, the manner in which they develop over time becomes evident with the increase in immigrant presence and changes in circumstances, such as the types of immigrants, nature of the migration experience, and the current events.

For *those who were invited and those who sought*, being welcomed by other Haitians, adopted as fictive kin, the creation of friendship networks, and the provision of social support usually took place on an informal and/or individual basis. However, these experiences although less formal than the collective organizing that greeted later immigrant waves, still offered some valuable aids that

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<sup>85</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 213, 238; Other citations for family and social support networks: Stepick, Pride Against

newcomers had in an unfamiliar location. For example, as a graduate student at Michigan State University, one *seeker* recalls his invitation to a fellow Haitian colleague's home for Sunday dinner after he began to express his craving for "di ri ak sauce pois" (Haitian rice with bean sauce).<sup>86</sup> Not only did this one dinner satisfy his palette with a familiar flavor, but it also introduced him to several other families. This event created a snowball effect where he soon met the few other families in the area and began to establish, once again, ties with a Haitian milieu. The invited graduate student of the late 1960s also recalls visiting fellow Haitian families, establishing a social circle of Haitians who would frequent each others homes and social gatherings.

Early immigrants also supported one another while they worked toward establishing themselves independently. Saint Lyr recalls how his brother and many friends helped him search for a new job, once his unemployment benefits from New York began to dwindle. Others were given a home to reside in while they searched for work and/or completed degrees that would offer them more advanced employment opportunities. Thus, kinship networks and institutional

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Prejudice, 20-1, Chierici, Demele, 279, Francis 1984:12 cited in Chierici, Demele, 279.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998.

settings facilitated a "meeting process" for Haitians in Michigan. Later discussion will explore the role of the migration centers in this process. Under each of these circumstances, individuals and families engaged in Haitian social and cultural practices. In these settings, individuals became more familiar with the other faces of Michigan's Haitian population offering reason and opportunity for formal community building. This type of networking and support was offered more collectively upon the arrival of *those sent*, initiating a more organized approach to greeting newcomers.

When the first Haitian was officially resettled in Lansing, members of the Lansing Catholic Refugee Services greeted him. In addition to the formal services, hospitality was extended by a group of "veterans" who informally organized a *system de parrainage* (god-parenting system/sponsorship system). One of the main organizers said:

[W]henever [Refugee Services] would establish Haitian houses, . . . one of us would be the godfather and godmother of the house and another responsibility would be to take care of it, to guide them and provide for them, etc... The first group that came to Lansing received the best

possible welcome ever. Everybody came, we brought them food, [toiletries, household accessories, and opened up [our] homes].<sup>87</sup>

In addition to this group effort, individual efforts to support and mentor newcomers were also present, and continue to this day. Some were voluntary:

Starting in 1992 [and until 1997], I volunteer to help out with the religious refugee services and the displaced individuals born in Haiti. To help them cope with adaptation in the new country...the language...I was not making money, not making profit, just helping for humanitarian reasons, and [providing] advice, counseling, and enticement to go to school and study. . . . I could say I helped them quite a lot...25-50 families.<sup>88</sup>

Although not formally volunteering on a regular basis, this invitee remains available to those he helped to "swim" on their own: adjusting to "climate...how to find housing, how to find transportation, how to fill an application for work, how to get medical care."

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with the author, July 29, 1998.

A husband and wife, both *seekers*, also extended their support by volunteering to greet refugee families upon arrival at the local airport. This couple migrated to Grand Rapids, on their own and without any concrete knowledge of who or what they would find upon arrival. Their familiarity with Michigan began with a tip given to the husband by some Haitians<sup>89</sup> whom he met during a transitional stay in South Florida. Commenting on the husband and wife's gesture towards recent newcomers, the husband said: "We wanted to help out and let them know that...they have their own people here. They don't have to be afraid. We are here to help them."<sup>90</sup> Indeed the efforts were recognized. Many of the families in the Grand Rapids area recounted the warm and welcoming greeting they received from this couple upon their arrival from Haiti. Through their volunteerism, this couple offered Haitians and many other international refugees reassurance that they would not be alone in their new lives in a very distant land.

Others provided similar support as staff persons of local refugee services or professional service providers

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<sup>89</sup> The interviewee stated that upon arrival in Michigan, he discovered that the contacts were migrant laborers in the Michigan area.

<sup>90</sup> Interviews with the author, July 18, 1999.

for city officials.<sup>91</sup> Under these circumstances, individuals also extend their services beyond the workplace by opening up their homes, making themselves available, and in one instance, initiating informational sessions through the church.<sup>92</sup> Speaking of the sessions she organized, Miriam said that the programs are directed at " . . . addressing their [recent refugees'] needs, if they needed help with immigration issues, buying a house, any type of need for something they don't know about, I try to get a speaker to come out and make a presentation." Past topics included: social security, income tax, insurance, and safety: "how to protect yourself from being a victim . . . if someone snatched your purse, a fire, how to get out . . . poison control . . . anything to avoid being victimized [from crime or ignorance]."

These individual commitments to helping newcomers endured much longer than the *system de parrainage*, which began to deteriorate after the first "Haitian house." The most articulate reason for the deterioration of this voluntary network was described by one *seeker* as a "cultural clash" among the waves (i.e., *those invited* and

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<sup>91</sup> Interviews with the author, July 27, 1998, July 28, 1998, and July 28, 1999.

<sup>92</sup> Similar types of informational gatherings were coordinated by a formal organization in Evanston, Illinois (Information Center for

*those seeking* versus *those sent*). Individuals across the waves called it a "*mank de respet*" (lack of respect). Many of *those who were sent* (in Lansing) were perceived as abusive of the charity offered for actions like hoarding supplies, running up \$1,000 telephone bills, and speaking in ill terms towards others. While the *sent* interviewees concurred with the opinions of *invited* and *seeking* interviewees, it is likely that alternative perspectives exist. For example, as one *seeker* (involved in the *system de parrainage*) suggested, the charitable actions could have been perceived as patronizing and stimulated backlash. Also, this *seeker* noted that coming from different regions meant that immigrant groups may have had limited interactions with one another prior to migrating. Thus, individuals were unfamiliar with each other's interpersonal communication style; and, in this case, the styles clashed. Ultimately, it appears that the expectation levels were not met; that is, there were differing interpretations of how *those invited* and *those seeking* should receive newcomers and how *those sent* should respond to this greeting.<sup>93</sup>

Still, the realization of the *system de parrainage*, the commitment of individuals who volunteer and also of

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Haitians), supported by white American institutions, (Woldemikael, *Becoming Black American*, 123-137).

<sup>93</sup>Interview with author, July 28, 1999.

those serving as Refugee Service staff members all illustrate the maturing of kinship ties (real or fictive) and social networks that were developing since the earliest immigrants had linked with each other informally. Now joining their efforts to welcome and support newcomers together, individuals from the first two waves (*invited and seeking*) planned and participated response to the great need for support in the Haitian community. This next wave of Haitians in Michigan had greater social and financial needs than the wave of immigrants who came before them. Once people began to meet many created and re-created ties with others, facilitating the creation of informal networks for support and social interaction. Church and church-related events were a site for these informal gatherings.

#### **Church-Related Activities as a Site and Stimulus for Interaction**

Church related events were key factors that brought many Haitians together in Michigan. Having lived in Detroit for two years, Rose Marie was still unaware of a Haitian presence. In the midst of preparing for her daughter's first communion, she was uncertain that it would be the festive occasion it usually is among Haitian families. However, during an unrelated trip to New York she bumped into a former colleague who put her in touch with a friend

and former employee at her former job. Unbeknownst to them, this was the first step in the development of their own network of Haitians in Michigan.

Back in Detroit, Rose Marie mentioned the upcoming First Communion to her renewed contact:

She said, 'Oh, I invite people for you.' And I said, 'Do you see any Haitian?'. . . She said, 'Oh yeah! Not too many like, you know, in New York. But we do have, you know, some Haitian here' and then on my daughter's first communion I met a lot, around 50 Haitians. Some of them that I knew before I came, in Haiti, before I came to Michigan.<sup>94</sup>

And so the networking process began and the community developed as other individuals and families made similar ties with other Haitians in Michigan. The process consisted of referrals by Haitians outside the Michigan area, re-introductions to former classmates, neighbors, and family friends, keeping in touch via telephone calls and occasional visits, frequenting the same church services and attending the same social events. Each of these encounters allowed Haitians in Michigan to establish a sense of

familiarity and a social support network. A meeting process was facilitated, support networks were expanded, and cultural traditions were retained.

Rose Marie reflected on the nature of this occurrence by remembering her ties to many other Haitians several years later when her mother died: "On my mother's funeral, *all Haitian came*, ...give me their support and things. . . . They cook for me, and they bring food almost every day...they were good people." <sup>94</sup> Another *seeker*, Nicolette organized church services in honor, celebration, and memory of numerous events and people. Describing the nature of those masses, she said:

In Haitian culture, whenever . . . you are happy about what happen[s], you want to give thanks to God . . . so you go to church and have a special mass and you give donation to the church if you want to . . . or whatever you want to do. And then after the church ceremony, you invite people over for food . . . and sometimes they also have that for a family member, then they call that "messe des mort" . . . but the other one is thanksgiving mass, for example, if somebody have

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with the author, August 7, 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with the author, August 7, 1998.

a surgery and they thought they were dying and they made it, then they have a thanksgiving mass. If you think you weren't going to have a baby then you have a baby then you give a thanksgiving mass. Some people do it in big scale and some people do it very quiet, they just give the money to the priest and tell the priest they want it done and they don't even have to participate. But I like to participate and invite people.<sup>96</sup>

Aside from personal contacts and gatherings for sacred engagements, attending the same church service also facilitated social interaction among Haitians. Speaking of St. Gerard Parish's 11:00 am service in Detroit, a *seeker* said:

I believe mostly, that's where the Haitian community, that's where they go to church. So, we meet every Sunday, you know, we kind of see everyone on every Sunday. Not everyone, but most of us I can say, . . . I've done it a couple of times, . . . after church we would go meet over at this person's house . . . for coffee and then pate [(Haitian meat-or-fish filled pastries).] .

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.

. . And we are talking and . . . we go home at about maybe 2:00p.m. or so. <sup>97</sup>

While several different factors attracted Haitians to certain churches, one key attraction was missionary projects to Haiti and/or the church leadership's familiarity with Haiti and Haitian culture.

I: Why do you think a lot of Haitians go to that church?

R: That particular church is involved in doing work for Haiti also . . . fundraising and things of that nature, and they usually have speakers and we usually have somebody from Haiti and they really appreciate us over there . . . glad we are a part of that family. So, it is just like a little family over there.<sup>98</sup>

Missionary work in Haiti attracts many Haitians to several different churches in Michigan. In these instances, the church's familiarity with the culture facilitated a welcoming environment. Another *seeker*, who attended the aforementioned church since 1975, recognized that many Haitians attended the same parish. They said: "some go at 11:00 [am], and some go at 8:00 [am]. And some only go on

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

Saturday [in the] afternoon, 6:00 [pm] . . . Most of them come at 11:00 [am]" <sup>99</sup>

I: How did you come to attend that church?

R: Ah, we knew a preacher there. He seemed to be so nice to the Haitian people. . . . [B]ut he passed away a couple of years ago. . . . [H]e really so nice. . . . [W]e got close to him because he, knew some French word[s] and he tried to, you know, learn French, so in talking all the time [we became well acquainted]. I think he . . . [presided over] our wedding. He used to be in Montreal and so he knows . . . He was trying to please us, you know, by talking French.<sup>100</sup>

In the Grand Rapids area, one pastor had been involved with missions to Haiti for at least 30 years. This facilitated the attendance of some of the area's immigrants (*those who were sent*), who could appreciate a Haitian-centered communal gathering. Church missionary activities also facilitated networking between different cities. Members of the Grand Rapids church traveled to Detroit for cooperative efforts among churches.<sup>101</sup> To further emphasize how unique these religious and social opportunities were to the latter

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

waves, consider the experience of an invitee. Lamenting his own experience with churches in Michigan as one of the most difficult parts of his adjustment process, the invitee said:

You know, being from a different place, there's not (pause) . . . let's take religion, for instance. You cannot integrate yourself in that church either because of the different language. I mean you know . . . they not talk[ing] to you, you [are] . . . kind of isolated . . . [there is a] language barrier during the sermon." He said that while he was "agreeable" with fellow parishioners, "at the same time, you keep your distance." <sup>102</sup>

Pre-occupied with other aspects of the adjustment process (e.g. work, family, social interaction), this invitee did not have the benefit of engaging in a church setting that offered him additional support. However, this experience was not always the case. Another invited Haitian (despite his expressed disappointment in the racial segregation of his church—predominately white) explained how he became fully engaged. He involved himself in the Knights of

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<sup>101</sup> Interviews with the author, August 9, 1998.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with the author, August 14, 1998.

Columbus. "I'm a Knight!" he declared, prefacing his volunteering activities with the men's club.<sup>103</sup>

With increased numbers and opportunity, newcomers to the Grand Rapids area had the chance to avoid such isolation and solitude with the establishment of church services directed by a Haitian pastor. A recently sent resident of the area acknowledged his appreciation for the church services. At the First Church of the Nazarene, he said, "We see we have more of a chance to meet with other Haitians and along with the spiritual teachings, we see we gain teachings to advance ourselves spiritually and materially."<sup>104</sup> Thus, church has been a central site for social interaction and for community building within the Haitian community. An important example of this is the interaction between those who were sent to Grand Rapids and other immigrant waves across Michigan, especially in Detroit. Activities related to Twining Projects, missions that match U.S.-based churches with those in Haiti, facilitated an opportunity for this cross-wave interaction. This interaction is significant, because unlike the *system de parrainage*, mission-planning and preparation activities like learning Haitian Creole offered chances for a shared-

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<sup>103</sup>Interview with the author, July 29, 1998.

type of interaction, where the immigrants worked together towards a similar goal.

Otherwise, Haitians in Michigan gathered informally for numerous activities: to play board games, cards (e.g. Bezik, 3-7, Casino), dominoes, sports (especially soccer), birthday and holiday parties, and meetings of rotating credit associations (Sol and Sang). Mentioned in most scholarship, these activities are documented as being very popular among many Haitian families and communities.

In each of these instances, personal interests and activities facilitated the meeting process among Haitians and those linked to Haitian culture. The development of social support networks was encouraged by more than the simple commonality of being Haitian. This informal system of networking and associating often links to shared backgrounds and experiences. Thus, a process of social differentiation may be said to have taken place, whereby certain factors generate various groupings of individuals who interact along particular lines. The exact nature of this social process is more accurately left for future study.

In general, however, the social differentiation that took place locally seems similar to that which occurred in

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

other areas. For example, Charles discusses the importance of more extensive studies to identify the diverse population flows and social mobility among Haitians in New York City; thus, she encourages consideration beyond explicit separation on the basis of class, color and regional background.<sup>105</sup> A useful model of Haiti's class structure is provided by Chierici. She accounts for four classes: Class I (small and elite), Class II (small, includes provincial aristocracy, government employees, and urban merchants), Class III ("people's elite," who are most dynamic in mediating between other classes, they are artisans, shop keepers, factory workers, small town officials, and traders), Class IV (very large, poor and uneducated). Across these classes, Chierici emphasizes the dichotomies of urban and rural, moun sot (the ignorant) and moun eklere (the educated), and observes that the U.S.-based Haitian communities seem to organize along these lines, as they attempt to recreate a familiar socio-cultural universe.<sup>106</sup>

While such structures and dichotomies have not been studied and modeled for Michigan, the wave categorization may be considered as a parallel basis for differentiation.

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<sup>105</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 218-224.

<sup>106</sup> Chierici, Demele, 19, 24-5.

Meaning, we can begin to discern some of the local processes of social differentiation through the stories illustrating clustering of activities and interactions among individuals of similar waves and generations. Certainly, as in each of these models, overlap takes place but interaction seems to predominate along wave/generation lines. Thus, social interactions appear to take place primarily amongst persons of the same wave group and even more so of the same social, economic and regional backgrounds. Under these circumstances, *those who were seeking* seem, to be the group with the most exposure to multiple waves, since they fall in the middle of *those invited* and *those sent*. For this wave group and the others, closer study on these social interactions is warranted, so that we might better understand the dynamics of this immigrant community.

Moreover, the quality of life in the United States shaped the type of interaction taking place. The issue of "time" was often mentioned as a major challenge to socializing and activities outside the home and main activity (e.g. school or work). The invitee, Gilbert said:

There's not much interaction that I've seen between the two groups, and I think I know the reason why. First of all, there were

differentials culturally . . . since the Haitian community back in Haiti itself, is divided. And, the American way of life is such requires that you go on your own . . . individualistic: . . . working rules, schedules to meet, deadlines to meet, and everybody is trying to make a living. So that takes most of the time of both professional and the one [that] comes without much education. And there is no time for them to meet and interact, not that they don't visit each other once in a while but . . . they don't integrate; they don't have social get-togethers, except superficial [interactions]—somebody might ask them for translation [services] but it is not a unified, solid thing.<sup>107</sup>

Given these realities, what persevered and was most visible were common ties. These were the building blocks of community, they set the opportunities and suggested some of the limits to the nature, development and future of Haitian community in Michigan. Indeed, the subsequent chapter on formal organizing demonstrates how time, resources—human and capital—and motive guided the development of formal groups. Thus, informal gatherings and interactions were the

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with the author, July 29, 1998.

baseline along which Haitians in the area have and continue to associate with each other and newcomers. This process of greeting newcomers, establishing social circles, extending kinship ties, and creating support networks introduced and re-introduced Haitians to each other, offering a meeting ground and a space for interaction, and facilitating the development of relationships that have and continue to evolve in a manner that meets the needs and interests of local residents. With the dedication of time and resources, a few Haitians—primarily *seekers*, with *those invited* and *those sent* participating marginally—extended themselves to organizing and participating in formal activities. For the majority, however, disassociation with informal networking and/or formal community building, among other factors was the result of unawareness of the Haitian presence, a greater focus on familial concerns, involvement with other social groupings, or mere disinterest.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **GOING BEYOND AND REACHING WITHIN HAITIAN CIRCLES TO BUILD COMMUNITY: FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES<sup>108</sup>**

Inspired by an array of interests and motives, Haitians in Michigan created formal organizations and activities that fortified the structure of communal gatherings. This process, which took place primarily among the population of *seekers*, reflects a generation's eagerness to preserve their native culture. Moreover, it speaks to the opportunities afforded, given the time, capital, and personal contacts immediately available to those who organize. Under the auspices of several organizations, Haitians in Michigan created groups to maintain a vibrant social scene, promote the cultural heritage of the Diaspora, support political events taking place in Haiti, and encourage a sustained presence by promoting youth-centered activities. The challenges and successes of these formalities were based in gaining the support of other Haitians, and in some cases, non-Haitians as well. To establish and sustain formal organizations and

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<sup>108</sup> The title was inspired by a seeker who commented that one must go beyond the Haitian community to understand it and in turn, allow it to reach its aspirations. This comment pertained to the study of history and the need to understand the experiences of Haiti and Haitians within a global context. Interview with the author, August 9, 1998.

activities, Haitians went beyond and reached within Haitian circles to build community.

Beginning in 1978, several Haitians residing in the Lansing area began informal discussions and planning for the creation of a formal organization that convened community meetings on a regular basis and with a specified purpose. Led by a *seeker* who once lived in New York City, the idea of formal and regular gatherings sought to redress the sense of isolation felt by newcomers to Michigan. Taking some time to generate interest and support, the eventual increase of Haitians, as well as the support of other native speakers of French in the area facilitated the creation of **Le Baobab** in 1982. Le Baobab was a "literary group" that sought to preserve the culture and history of its members' native countries, engage in the news developments back home, and maintain their French.

Leaders of the club reached within their Haitian networks to attract fellow country persons. They also went beyond the small circle of Haitians and engaged the interests of fellow francophones from Senegal and Martinique. The organization's name represented the African roots of the cultural group.<sup>109</sup> This organization was the

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<sup>109</sup> Among the Haitian seekers who organized and participated in Le Baobab, two are known to have spent time working in Africa. These experiences may have facilitated their interest in and

only formal group outside of Detroit brought to my attention. However, like the Detroit groups, support from Haitians in Michigan depended on networks across city lines. For Le Baobab, this support came primarily from the Lansing area, though people from Detroit and Ann Arbor occasionally participated. Adults attended, often bringing their children who also participated in many of the presentations. Held in the basements of various member homes, meetings included cultural presentations, professional commentaries on Haitian issues (e.g., medical, engineering issues), and the planning of family excursions to local recreational facilities.

This early organization was founded with the qualities that would exist in several future groups—a cultural focus and multi-national/ethnic involvement, as a result of shared interests, as well as opportune circumstances. Similarly, the gatherings sought to keep members aware of the “real” events taking place in their homelands, in counteraction to “misguided” accounts or lack of coverage

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appreciation for the participation of West Africans in the group. This point seemed evident after another individual ceased participating after a first meeting where they were disappointed that the group seemed to lack direction. This informant critiqued the fact that there were Africans, and African imagery (Le Baobab) associated with what was supposed to be a Haitian group.

in the media.<sup>110</sup> These were efforts that would be carried out by future organizations that extended their audience to citywide and nationwide communities.

Responding primarily to the social needs of the local Haitian population, **Haitian Community Organization of Michigan (H.C.O.M.)**, was "founded on October 15, 1984 as a non-profit organization in an effort to settle a solid base for present and future generations of Haitians living in Michigan. H.C.O.M. [proposed to] by all possible means, promote Haitian Culture and Art in Michigan."<sup>111</sup> According to an addendum to the organizations' by-laws, the group could "pursue its objectives through social, cultural, and educational channels" via the plans and organizing efforts of respective committees.<sup>112</sup> Documents on past H.C.O.M. events and commentaries by Haitians who were familiar with the organizations' activities emphasized the social function of the organization. Key events were "picnics, raffles, dinner-dances, beauty pageants, [and]

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998, August 26, 1999.

<sup>111</sup> Untitled document on H.C.O.M. letterhead stating the "History, Aims, and Purpose" of H.C.O.M, as well as providing an outline of "Membership Information" and "Member Privileges," undated, copy in author's files.

<sup>112</sup> "Addendum to H.C.O.M. By-laws," undated, copy in author's files.

carnivals."<sup>113</sup> Indeed, Haitians developed their sense of community through social gatherings and events such as birthdays, baptisms, first communions, weddings, Mother's day, and other holiday events.

An "Independence Day Celebration" (July Fourth) originally hosted at the private residence of a H.C.O.M. board member was by far the most widely recognized and remembered activity. According to interviewees from the Detroit and Lansing areas, the annual picnic was considered the one event that "everyone" came out to, even those who usually did not participate. The picnic also attracted visitors from outside the state (e.g., people from Chicago). When questioned on why the Fourth of July attracted such an enthusiastic crowd, an invitee responded: "Even though [it is an] American holiday we figure it was Independence Day for everybody."<sup>114</sup> Whether or not all individuals are in consensus with the invitee's comment, the enticements of a long weekend, the summer temperatures, and the attraction of outdoor activities—boating, fishing,

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<sup>113</sup> Reflecting the main functions proposed for the Committee on Social Affairs, "Addendum to H.C.O.M. By-laws," undated, copy in author's files.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with the author, July 29, 1998.

swimming, playing, dancing and eating—most likely contributed to making the gathering a success.<sup>115</sup>

Social events were an essential element of Michigan's Haitian community, a place where people affirmed their feeling: "its good to see everybody together." At a few of these social events, other Americans—people linked to Haiti and its culture through missionary activities, educational or employment experiences, friendships and acquaintances, as well as curious onlookers—also participated in some parties.

Other activities sponsored by H.C.O.M., though categorized as "social," reflected characteristics of educational and cultural activities. These events promoted greater interaction with the larger society. Two examples were the Caribbean Carnival and a fundraiser for Dollie Bennett, a missionary to Haiti. Praising its membership for continued participation in an annual event coordinated by Detroit's Caribbean Community Cultural Organization, H.C.O.M.'s executive committee wrote on August 22, 1989:

Dear friends and fellow supporters of H.C.O.M.:

This year as in previous years, our participation in the Caribbean Carnival was a

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<sup>115</sup> Announcement and registration form for H.C.O.M.'s "Picnic 89," copy in author's files.

great success. This happy occasion was due mainly thanks to the remarkable efforts of two of the most devoted members of our H.C.O.M. Executive Committee namely Mrs. Rosemary Compere and Mrs. Marie L. Balmir and you the people who supported us. Without your help and their relentless drive, our presence in the parade would not have been possible. . . .

We, at H.C.O.M. believe firmly that the Haitian presence in the Michigan community of Caribbean immigrants must manifest its self-worth and integrity by upholding the traditional values and cultural practices that affirm one's identity, pride, and self-determination.<sup>116</sup>

This self-affirming and culturally preserving activity was important given the time when these activities took place. During the 1980s, Haitians in the United States were barraged with negative media coverage of their native country and people. Poverty levels and stricken-areas of the country were frequently presented in the media. And, the most striking blow was the blame on Haitians as the source of AIDS. This period of ill representation was one

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<sup>116</sup> Letter to "friends and fellow supporters of H.C.O.M." from "the Executive Committee," August 22, 1989, copy in author's files.

moment in North America's historical practice of stigmatizing Haiti and Haitians, primarily by attacking their culture and making the "illogical and racist correlation" to disease.<sup>117</sup>

In light of such attacks, the "coming together" of Haitians was essential to challenging and overcoming such discrimination.<sup>118</sup> In fulfilling its most basic interest of engaging in social functions, the H.C.O.M. also participated in a multicultural event that offered members an opportunity to celebrate, take pride in, and share elements of their cultural heritage with the local community. Facilitated by Mrs. Compere and Mrs. Balmir, the success of the project was self-affirming for the organization and its membership.

The act of promoting a self-sufficient image, making contributions to the larger community, and hosting multi-

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<sup>117</sup> Laurent Dubois, "A Spoonful of Blood: Haitians, Racism, and AIDS," Science as Culture, 6:26 (1996), 11. Dubois ("A Spoonful of Blood," 7-43) begins to reconstruct this history of North America's production and promotion of stigmas by examining such practices in literature, personal accounts, policy-making, and scientific theories. To cite two examples: Prior to the claims that Haiti was the source of AIDS, exists the history of blaming refugees from Saint Domingue for the 1790s yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia. Also, "[I]n sixteenth-century Europe, some had pegged Saint Domingue as the source of syphilis, suggesting that members of Christopher Columbus' crew brought the venereal disease back from the New World" (24).

<sup>118</sup> Dubois ("A Spoonful of Blood") also discusses demonstrations by Haitian Americans in New York City who protested Federal Health policy that recommended a ban on all Haitian blood. The

purpose social events was exemplified by H.C.O.M.'s fundraising support of a local missionary to Haiti. On December 17, 1988, an "Evening with Ms. Dollie Bennett" was hosted at the Southfield Hilton. Dollie Bennet was a 40-year-old, Detroit nurse, who led a mission to provide free medical aid in a Haitian village that had no physicians, electricity or running water. Responding to a feature on Bennett in Ebony magazine, the organization's Board chairman wrote to the Editor:

Thank you for your article on Dollie Bennett (Nov. 1998). It has served as an inspiration to the members of my organization who for months have been undecided about what to do to honor [her]. A fund-raising campaign has been launched on her behalf, and the proceeds as well as a plaque will be presented to her.<sup>119</sup>

The event raised nearly \$2,000.<sup>120</sup> This support was one of numerous efforts by the local community to support the "Good Samaritan" with monetary, material, and spiritual offerings.

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protests are described as a "quick and massive" response to the "climax of a long series of acts of stigmatization" (35-9).

<sup>119</sup> "An Evening with Ms. Dollie Bennett," program booklet; Brown, Roxanne, "Dollie Bennett: Haiti's Good Samaritan," Ebony, November 1998, 64,66-7,71; "Letters," Ebony, February 1989, all copies in author's files.

Haitians, as well as fellow Michiganders, also contributed to the well-being of Haiti through **Espoir** (Hope): A Haitian American Organization. Initiated in the summer of 1986, the non-profit entity was founded by a "group of metro Detroit citizens, both Haitian and American, [who] grew increasingly concerned about the quality of life in Haiti [following the coup of Baby Doc]." The group provided "direct relief to the people of Haiti, while sensitizing the local community to their plight." Originally led by an African American woman from Detroit, Espoir would soon evolve into Detroit's most prominent and enduring Haitian American organization.<sup>121</sup>

During the early years (1986-1990) of Espoir, efforts to collaborate and cooperate with H.C.O.M. were quite extensive. The two organizations supported each other's events, and created an ad hoc committee. This "coordinating committee," represented by the two groups and general members of the community, held several meetings "in order to strengthen [the] effort in the existence of the two organizations" and facilitate "better dialogue and

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<sup>120</sup> To "friends" of H.C.O.M. from the Committee for Social Affairs, January 10, 1989, copy in author's files.

<sup>121</sup> Press Release in announcement of the Second Annual Fund-raising dinner, November 1987, copy in author's files; Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.



cooperation."<sup>122</sup> The organizations were to retain their autonomous status, and "strive at establishing a better working relationship that would include mutual support in implementing their individual activities." Correspondence through the end of 1990 attests to sustained efforts; however, at some point in the immediate future, H.C.O.M. ceased its activities.

The decline of H.C.O.M. and the continued existence of Espoir indicated that Haitians in Michigan struggled with the issue of organizational support. Dependent on a Haitian-membership and organizational focus, H.C.O.M.'s support was diluted by the creation of Espoir. The support Espoir generated may be best attributed to dependence on its leaders, organizers, and audience of both Haitians and non-Haitians.<sup>123</sup> This organizational structure offered a more secure base for existence in a location where the Haitian population (the primary base of support) was not especially large.

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<sup>122</sup> Correspondence between H.C.O.M., Espoir, and the Coordinating committee, all copies in author's files.

<sup>123</sup> Numbers for these organizations and the background of their active members are not concrete. Executive members estimate mailing lists of approximately 80 (H.C.O.M.) to 200 (Espoir) persons, with fluctuation in active membership. For H.C.O.M., the number of active members, those attending general meetings, is about 40 persons. For Espoir, approximately 60 persons are considered active Haitians. These numbers can be further explored, perhaps by careful review of meeting minutes, documents

Although not prominent in the literature, a few studies mentioned collaborating efforts similar to that, which took place in Detroit. For example, in New York, Haitians worked with African Americans and other Caribbean groups in response to the political crises occurring with the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier's administration. Organizing as "blacks" helped other groups sustain funding from American institutions.<sup>124</sup> In Evanston, Illinois however, Haitians were noted as receiving supplemental support from American institutions (predominately white) by organizing as an ethnic group (not as "blacks").<sup>125</sup> As demonstrated by Charles' overview of community formation in NYC, alternative issues and circumstances facilitate varied organizing strategies. Groups organized as Haitians, Blacks, and along class lines.<sup>126</sup> Again, the access to such institutions and ability to seek out such affiliations may be quite central to the potential and actual organizing. The contacts and the resources that individual members (primarily seekers) in Michigan organizations had at their disposal helped facilitate such linkages.

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referencing key organizers, and accounts that may suggest the level of support at events and activities.

<sup>124</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 262-280

<sup>125</sup> Woldemikael, Becoming Black American, 123-4, 61.

<sup>126</sup> Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 262-278.

Those most visible in local organizing were individuals who had the time, contacts, and resources to initiate, facilitate and sustain a formal structure of support and promotion for Haitians and Haitian culture. The resource of time reflected central organizers' economic stability and security, relative to those whose work hours did not leave much time for matters unrelated to the family. Indeed, many individuals who were *invited* or *sent*, attributed their distance from local activities and affiliations to the demands of their family lives. Thus, allowing themselves the time to pursue interests in community organizing, many *seekers* also capitalized on what was immediately available to them from their personal resources, and local institutions. Linkages with local churches, educational institutions, politicians, and corporations, to name a few, bolstered overall support for local organizations, and expanded the range of activities.

Working with an array of individuals and institutions, Espoir focused on cultural organizing as its main activity. The events were held to fund-raise for its early involvement with medical missions to Haiti and later to celebrate Haitian culture, as well as celebrate its ties to Africa, its Diaspora, and the United States. As stated by an executive board member:

In a city like Detroit, where Haitians are not really well known and television only portray[s] [us as] poor . . . non educated . . . we are able to change the image . . . [to show that] were are educated, very rich culturally, and we have made a historical contribution to the Afro-American community, we also contribute to [the larger] community, with culture, arts, dance . . . we are able to participate and contribute in a different way.<sup>127</sup>

Espoir organized annual dinners that revolved around themes like the "African Roots of Haitian Culture" and "It Takes a Village." The organization was also very involved in the local art scene, hosting art exhibits at galleries, festivals, the Museum of African American History (MAAH in Detroit), Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Smithsonian.

The valued presence of this type of involvement was reflected in the letters of support the organization received over the years. A letter from Charles H. Wright, M.D., Founder and Chairman of the Museum of African American History (MAAH) demonstrated the importance of such organizing in his invitation for their participation in Michigan's Sesquicentennial celebration:

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with the author, July 31, 1998.

Since next year is the State's Sesquicentennial celebration, I would like to prepare exhibits and offer a symposium that will reflect the contributions of various groupings of blacks in Michigan for the period of its statehood. By looking at immigrants from specific points of origin, Caribbean, [L]atin America, Canada, Africa . . . , as well as non-immigrant blacks, we may be able to tell a different story from what is usually reported.<sup>128</sup>

Espoir's newsletter, Krik, Krak,<sup>129</sup> published between one and four times a year (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall) highlighted the diversity of Espoir's projects, interests, and support, indicating the appeal both within and outside of the Haitian population. Between 1993 and 1998, Krik, Krak, featured articles about, the aforementioned activities, and local festivals like the African World Festival, Caribbean Carnival, Festival of the Arts, and "Christmas in the Caribbean" for the City's Noel Night.

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<sup>128</sup> Letter from Charles H. Wright to Espoir, dated Novembr 12, 1986, copy in author's files.

<sup>129</sup> The practice of story telling in Haiti always begins with Krik? Krak! To illustrate, imagine: "An old granny smokes her pipe, surrounded by her village children . . . 'We tell the stories so that the young ones will know what came before them. They ask Krik? we say Krak! Our stories are kept in our hearts" (Sal Scalora, "White Darkness/Black Dreamings," Haiti: Feeding

Krik, Krak also contained news and announcements from around the nation, including educational materials for sale, relief programs, research projects, travel groups, and visits by prominent individuals like Katherine Dunham. The newsletter also featured poetry, web sites, book reviews, and interviews.

Espoir's activities often went beyond its cultural emphasis and included educational, professional and civic events. Here again, the organization drew participation from local Haitians and non-Haitians. For example, Espoir supported an academic gathering which consisted of a four-week long excursion to the West African country of Benin. Coordinated by a Wayne State University faculty member, who also served on the board of Espoir, the trip has taken place biennially since 1984. Also, in 1997, the organization played a central role in hosting the annual Haitian Studies Association (based in Boston) meeting in Detroit, in conjunction with "The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou" exhibit hosted by the MAAH. Espoir's most recent project, in the works since 1986, was the development of a Center for Caribbean Arts and Cultural within the Arts District in Detroit. Collaborating with several entities,

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the Spirit, cited in Edwidge Daniticat, Krik? Krak!, New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1995, epigraph.)

including local banks, the City of Detroit, and the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the group obtained ownership of property in a neighborhood currently under redevelopment. The property was rehabilitated and renovated to serve as a multi-purpose space for the Detroit community offering information on different countries, a meeting space, art exhibits, and lectures, among other services.

Local Haitians recognized Espoir as the most active Haitian organization in Michigan. A key to the continued strides made by Espoir was the support and involvement of non-Haitians that complemented the sometimes-waning Haitian presence. One challenge to sustaining support was the tension invoked by politics in Haiti. Although not mentioned by name (i.e., Espoir or H.C.O.M.), the accounts of several informants suggested that tensions related to politics caused fissures within local community organizing.

### **Politics and Community Organizing**

Differing political opinions divided the local community and led to a decline in overall support for community organizations. An invited informant said: "I believe that the . . . political situation [in Haiti] affected the unification of the Diaspora." This informant lamented the difficulty of choosing the "right" side to take. "We know that we have refugees . . . but I did not

guarantee to go help them because you have family in Haiti . . . so you don't know which side to take. . . . You have to be careful [with whose cause you are supporting] . . . sort of conflict and confusion with politics."

A few interviewees attributed the sense of "conflict and confusion" to generational issues. One *seeker* said: "You know, the elders . . . the older generation, they really hold it [difference of political opinions] personally. . . . But us guys [the *seeking* or younger generations] here we deal with Republicans, Democrats. . . ." Some saw the matter as intrinsically personal, whereby matters relating to family in Haiti necessarily guided their political choices. Others saw the matter as more generational in nature. That is, familiarity with multi-party processes within a democratic political system eased the personal attachment one had to political choices. Thus, politics, familial ties, and generational perspectives all challenged the unity of the Haitian community.<sup>130</sup> Overall, passionate political sentiments regarding the developments in Haiti influenced the level of participation in all types of local organizing—social, cultural and political. While

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<sup>130</sup> Laguerre, American Odyssey, cites Louis Wirth, "The Problem of Minority Groups," The Ethnic Experience and the Racial Crisis, ed. Peter I. Rose, (New York: Random House, 1972), 147, to support the fact that ethnic groups are a heterogeneous people making unanimity an unrealistic goal.

sometimes fragmenting the community, in some cases politics brought Haitians together and bolstered organizational support.

Scholarship on New York communities by Michel Laguerre and Carolle Charles discussed politics as an impetus for organizing Haitians, and providing a means of adapting to the United States but also remaining connected to the homeland. Politics is presented as something that would become an issue for many organizations as it was placed on the groups' agendas. However, given the widespread presence of Haitians in New York, the reality of varied political opinions and agendas appeared to be less of a challenge. Instead, an array of organizations were able to meet the varied interests, opinions, and agendas set by New York's diverse Haitian population (e.g. religious base, student-run, politically-oriented, feminist). Limited attention is paid to the manner in which politics may have challenged an organization's existence. Focusing on the Duvalier era, Charles notes that the absence of any visible organizing in favor of the then-in-power government was attributed to the fact that any such affiliations would cause one to be ostracized.<sup>131</sup> However, what has been

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<sup>131</sup> Laguerre, American Odyssey, Chapter 5; Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, Chapter 8; Charles, Transnational Dialectic, 235-40, 244-50. Charles' Diasporic Citizenship (244) notes that among the

visible in Michigan, and most probable (although yet spoken of) in other cities is how people who used to come together in opposition of the Duvalier administrations now became a fragmented community with the demise of the dictatorial rule in 1986.

The reality of mixed opinions also stimulated activism, reflecting interest in political candidates during Haiti's first democratic elections in 1990. Informants and organizational documents explained how Haitians became more politically conscious by working with democratic movements and campaigns originating in Haiti, such as the **Movement pour la institution de la Democratie en haiti (MIDH)**, the **Dixieme Department**, and campaigns on behalf of political refugees, such as the **Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti**.

This political activism represents the practice that Michel Laguerre called "diasporic citizenship." As diasporic citizens, Haitians living outside of Haiti remain active in the events taking place in their homeland. Because of this behavior, Laguerre emphasizes the importance of recognizing how internal and external actors and political systems influence and affect each other. For

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earliest immigrants to NYC, organizing in favor of the Duvalier administration would cause one to be ostracized by the majority of the community; therefore, such organizing is not observed.

example, we can consider that the Haitian Diaspora's exposure to democratic processes (in the United States) may influence actions toward social change back home and support for campaigns and movements through human and capital resources. Therefore, the practice of diasporic citizenship encourages acknowledgement of the fact that transnational and global contexts may be useful for understanding both local and national events.<sup>132</sup>

The most visible political organizing in Michigan took place during the 1990 democratic elections. The election introduced local chapters of Haiti-based groups and the hosting of prominent politicians to Michigan. Originating in Haiti, the Movement pour la Institution de la Democratie en Haiti (MIDH) (party for presidential candidate Marc Bazin's) organized branches across the Diaspora in an effort to gain widespread support and membership for the party whose principle mission was to lead the institution of democracy in Haiti. A *seeker*, who was recruited by a long-time friend, spoke about his leadership over the local campaign for Marc Bazin. He said: "My main motive was [to] try to help. I don't aspire to [attain a] political office, but I always like to help whichever way I can."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 157-8.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

Dedicated to moving away from Haiti's dictatorial history, *Branche Michigan* (which officially met for the first time on May 12, 1990) served as a subsidiary to the National Counsel. Locals were charged with promoting the party ideas outside of Haiti, encouraging support among compatriots within Haiti, recruiting new members, undertaking diverse measures in an effort to contribute financially to the Party's activities, and establishing and managing the offices needed in order to ensure proper functioning of the Party.<sup>134</sup>

Led by a seeker and supported by those who shared similar social networks, Haitians in Michigan took on the role of "Diasporic citizens." Based in the Diaspora, they played an active role in their home-nation's politics. With linkages in New York (the branch model) as well as across the nation, members of MIDH worked towards their vision of a democratic Haiti. Even with tension within the local community, members at a June 10, 1990 meeting declared that "conflict between the two other Haitian organizations" would have to be put aside in preparation for Bazin's visit. "[T]he meeting with Bazin is for everyone, all are welcomed. No need to change location due

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<sup>134</sup> "Loi Organique du Movement Pour L'Instauration de la Democratie en Haiti: Section Internationale, Branche du

to personal conflicts. President wants members to put 100% effort into making the meeting with Bazin a success . . .

[A] list of all Haitians in the community . . . needed."<sup>135</sup>

Thus, individuals were encouraged to inform their local Haitian contacts, and promote the gathering that sought to support political progress in Haiti.

During the 1990 election campaign, individual association with particular candidates aroused some division; however, following the election another political campaign generated the coming together individuals of differing opinions. Marc Bazin was defeated by presidential candidate Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who upon taking office promoted a new element in the Haitian government, the **Dixieme Department** (Tenth Department). Representing Haitians in the Diaspora, the Dixieme Department was created as an informal extension of Haiti's formal regional governments (represented by Nine Departments) to accommodate the interests of those abroad in homeland politics. Many Haitians who supported Bazin's candidacy attended the meetings of the Dixieme Department, demonstrating that some of the community came to terms with the political differences and were receptive to efforts

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Michigan," 3-4; Meeting Minutes, May 12, 1990, all copies in author's files.

<sup>135</sup> Meeting Minutes, June 10, 1990, copy in author's files.

that supported the democratic vision of their native land.<sup>136</sup>

The solicitation for members to support the concept of a Dixieme Department articulates his sense of shared experience among those living in a democratic society (the United States). The announcement also emphasizes the role that these diasporic citizens have on Haiti's politics. The letter read:

Dear Fellow Citizens from the Haitian Community  
. . . Today, the diaspora constitutes a serious  
force to be reckoned with; through number[s] . .  
. economic . . . technical influences. . . . The  
idea of a "dixieme department" is an attempt to  
define a scenario to bridge the gap between the  
tremendous support being provided to the country  
by the Haitian community abroad, and their actual  
lack of involvement in the country's decision  
making process. This issue is becoming more  
meaningful and more urgent with the recent  
establishment of a democratic system in Haiti,  
and the massive Reconstruction currently

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<sup>136</sup> Meeting Minutes, June 15, 1991, copy in author's files.

underway. . . . Proposed meeting is scheduled for  
. . . St Gerard's church.<sup>137</sup>

The diasporic organization garnered the support of several individuals who did not support Aristide during the election campaign, perhaps in some instances due to the blatant challenge by the military to the democratically-established administration. This challenge to the principle of democratic processes encouraged many of these individuals to participate in their former opponents' organization. The attainment of democracy was the ultimate goal; the major challenge would be the strategies on reaching and maintaining this goal. One *seeker* stated in an open letter:

I am appalled by the recent petition issued and circulated by the tenth Department Bureau of Michigan urging people to sign-up in support for the imposition of sanctions and embargo against Haiti's current administration [(established by an "unwarranted [military] coup")]. . . . It connotes the notion that "power must be regained at all costs", even if it means starvation and

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<sup>137</sup> Letter to "fellow citizens from the Haitian Community," announcing a meeting of the Dixieme Department, undated, copy in author's files.

denial of basic humanitarian help to the people of Haiti.<sup>138</sup>

As existed back in Haiti, other Haitians in the diaspora shared the vision of democracy but embraced tactics contrary to those of the Dixieme Department.

The main activities of the Michigan Branch of the *Dixieme Department, Bureau du Mid-West*, with the states of Illinois, Ohio and Missouri kept Haitian political and refugee crises in the public eye. Key to this local activism, the Michigan branch Active met with political leaders such as U.S. Representative John Conyers and Senator Carl Levin.<sup>139</sup> They made public speeches on television and radio broadcasts, and organized with churches, and other organizations in an effort to return the overthrown President Aristide to power.<sup>140</sup>

Local political organizing for a democratic Haiti also made use of coalitions and cooperative efforts. Working with other Americans, local committees facilitated another

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<sup>138</sup> Letter to "friends and neighbors" from a local seeker, November 6, 1991, copy in author's files.

<sup>139</sup> Making political alliances in order to advance concerns has also taken place within other communities. Charles notes this for New York in Transnational Dialectic.

<sup>140</sup> "Activities Tenth Department Bureau Michigan," undated, copy in author's files. Laguerre notes that the strength of the Diaspora was such that it provided \$250,000 in funding for new government projects. This is in addition to other contributions made through human and physical capital, (Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 162-4.)

area in which Haitian community was grounded in ties with other individuals and organizations. The plight of refugees is one aspect of this intersection of communities:

When I came here in 1979, there was also a slew of refugees coming into Miami . . . being detained at various prisons in the United States . . . I and this other guy. . . . with some American colleagues . . . formed this Haitian Refugee Committee. Later, a woman replaced the guy because of his family's affiliations with Duvalier. . . . [We solicited] donations for many people, . . . we had so much clothing . . . collect[ed] some money. The money was used to bring the priest [(an activist based in Miami)] over here to talk . . . and then . . . we sent the remainder of the funds to the Haitian-center in Florida. [We also organized] lots of presentations about the political situation in Haiti.<sup>141</sup>

Co-sponsored by university organizations and departments, a host of events were held. Presentations, such as "an all day teach-in on Haiti" hosted at Wayne State University on September 29, 1994 and the formation of a "Speaker's

Bureau" dedicated to offering "educational lectures and presentations about the Haitian crisis," attracted a primarily American audience of scholars, civic groups, churches, and professional organizations concerned about the Caribbean island's fate.<sup>142</sup>

Strides made by these individuals and organizations demonstrated the effectiveness and importance of a cooperative movement for such democratic and humanitarian gains. Also, linkages with the Haitian communities outside of Michigan, like South Florida facilitated informative gatherings in the Michigan areas and also allowed surplus donations to be shared with others in need. Thus, we see that the interest of local Haitians to remain informed about issues back home motivated the participation and lack of participation of many individuals; change in issues also affected the nature of community, making it a dialectical process. Individuals organized and participated based on their interests and the opportunities to carryout formal activities with fellow Haitians and non-Haitians. Moreover, in response to some of the difficulties that politics presented, several individuals began organizing once more to bring together the vibrant social scene that once

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with the author, July 28, 1998.

<sup>142</sup> Announcements in Krik, Krak (Newsletter for Espoir, A Haitian American Organization, Detroit, MI), Fall and Spring 1994.

characterized the local community. In 1998, the Haitian Association of Michigan (H.A.M.) was established. Many informants described H.A.M. as the 1990's version of H.C.O.M. That is, a fresh face for an old association of Haitians living in Michigan interested in preserving a lively social scene.<sup>143</sup> A seeker who served on the executive committee of H.C.O.M. and now is associated with H.A.M. discussed the importance of such an organization:

Well, I think it is essential that it continues to exist in spite of controversy . . . because it does bring the people together and provide an opportunity for social gathering . . . a chance for people to release their feelings and their views of what's going on around them and within their own families.

H.A.M., a committee of 12 friends who joined in an effort to fund and coordinate social events for the community, worked to meet the social demands formerly met by H.C.O.M. One of the key challenges to H.C.O.M., articulated by informants' defensive posture regarding it's social focus, was the scope of the organization's agenda.

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<sup>143</sup> H.C.O.M. has never been formally dissolved; therefore, members of H.C.O.M. are currently discussing abolishing the H.C.O.M. charter and formally bringing that organization and it's members under the new HAM (Telephone conversation with the author, September 27, 1999.)

Nonetheless, a board member commented on how H.C.O.M.'s popularity would surge and re-sure after moving into hiatus. He said, "Whenever it disappeared, there was a demand for it." In an attempt to avoid some of these interrupted organizational life spans, H.A.M.'s 1998 president described changes in the organizational structure that he believes may prevent the past threats of weak support for coordinating formal activities. "Instead of depending on the community to make it move, we try to get a group of people . . . and then we invite the community to participate. Up till now, I see that it is working." <sup>144</sup>

H.C.O.M.'s main events were sold-out New Year's Eve parties that offered locals an exciting place to meet one another while enjoying Haitian music and cuisine.

### **Youth and Community Organizing**

While the issue of politics played a very important role in the history of local community building among Haitians, the future of this community depends on the level of involvement among the next generation of Haitians living in Michigan. As suggested by Laguerre, while older Haitians engaged in a diasporic political system, the next generation will emphasize ethnic versus diasporic politics

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

given their experiences.<sup>145</sup> That is, their politics may relate more to an African American or Pan African identity and concern than a Haitian-centered one.<sup>146</sup> Several active members in local organizing expressed their personal sentiments regarding the history of youth involvement within the local community. One *seeker* said:

As an elder person, I think I have an obligation to give you [members of the younger generation] a community that you can feel a part of. I think I have an obligation to you to provide you with an environment you can feel proud to belong to. . . . And in order to achieve that, I should bring out an effort to have that . . . I haven't seen any effort from the committee toward that goal.

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Another said: I think the sad thing about the Haitian community is the fact that the youth and children growing up in the community, they grow

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<sup>145</sup> Laguerre, Diasporic Citizenship, 172-4.

<sup>146</sup> Woldmikaël presented the concept that the second and future generations of Haitian immigrants "become Black American". That is, unlike their elders who remain attached to Haitian culture and identity, and reject the ascription of belonging to the United States' "Black" category, subsequent generations accept and associate with African Americans (Becoming Black American.) Charles notes that the sense of attachment and affirmation of Haitian identity often takes place when the younger generations attend college (Transnational Dialectic, 232.)

up detached . . . because the adults [have issues due to politics]. I think that's a sad thing . . . because they grow up . . . not knowing . . . really some of their roots. Right now, they have been denied this opportunity because we failed to . . . do our duties, I think, as a group, and as a people. I think that's the saddest thing about it, [the political, and in turn, community divisions].<sup>148</sup>

These *seekers*, both middle-aged professionals lamented the limited involvement of youth in the Haitian community. They saw it as another challenge to the small and segmented Haitian population. At the same time, they mentioned their individual efforts to engage youth. For example, these *seekers* brought their children to family-oriented art exhibits and social gatherings. The impressions made upon the youth by these events should be considered in future research on the younger generation. Although the youth seem detached, these activities may have influenced their sense of identity and encouraged the introduction of Haitian elements of the youth's identity in other settings, such as school or university settings or social clubs. By looking

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<sup>147</sup> Interview with the author, August 6, 1998.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with the author, August 15, 1998.

outside of what is immediately recognized as "Haitian community," the activities of the younger Haitians may suggest new types of organizing to be considered.

Politics also presented itself as an obstacle to youth organizing. One organizer complained about some difficulties with coordinating a group targeting the 30 and under generation called Quisqueya (the Haitian island's indigenous name): "[W]e sent letters out to everyone . . . [but it was] hard to get donations . . . we are too divided. I feel that because the community is so small, there shouldn't be a reason for us to be divided."<sup>149</sup>

Despite the challenges, however, several female informants, who were most-visibly involved in youth organizing, mentioned a few formal efforts that took place to promote knowledge and pride of Haitian culture among youth. Working with H.C.O.M. and Espoir children were encouraged to participate in the annual Caribbean pageants. Espoir also hosted an annual essay contest, since 1993, encouraging youth to share their insights on Caribbean culture and heritage. Winning essays featured ideas on images of the Caribbean and Caribbean People. Most recently, some young women coordinated a networking meeting held on the last Saturday of each month, where Haitian

history, culture and current events are discussed. The continual effort made to maintain youth-centered organizing, despite the interruptions and challenges, articulated a sense of importance for both adults and the youth that participate.

The limited presence and involvement of the younger Haitian generations suggest that future research should explore the presence of this population in alternative settings. That is, one might consider the events and activities at local churches, youth clubs, schools and particularly universities to find out how young Haitians and Haitian Americans engaged in community. Again, while acknowledging that many may "become black American," a more profound understanding of the process might be considered. As culture is a fluid dynamic, location specific experiences might illustrate another meaning of what black American, ethnic, or even American culture has been and is becoming.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, by organizing cultural, social, educational, civic, and political activities, Haitians in Michigan developed formal organizations to meet the needs, interests, and concerns of local residents. Though the

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with author, August 15, 1998.

leadership, membership and support of Haitians was central to the initiation and successful activism of these groups, many events and structural processes benefited from reaching beyond the Haitian population to build community. This organizational strategy was at the root of two organizations, Le Baobab and Espoir: A Haitian American Organization. Le Baobab brought together French-speaking immigrants from Haiti and West Africa, who were interested in preserving literary and other intellectual traditions. Espoir was organized by Haitians, African Americans, and other Detroit residents, who were concerned about the plight of Haiti and its image in the local community. Linkages beyond the boundaries of the Haitian population were also central to establishing the agenda of proposed activities, and ensuring positive outcomes by rallying participants across cultures; this was most evident in the efforts of H.C.O.M. and Espoir. Members of these groups made themselves visible by participating in local festivals, hosting events to support the social needs of the community, as well as fundraising for crises in Haiti. Espoir also applied its cross-cultural organizing strategy to contribute to redevelopment processes in Detroit by

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<sup>150</sup> Chapter 4 of Stepick's Pride Against Prejudice explores how young Haitians in Little Haiti have struggled to find balance between their Haitian and American identities and culture.

creating a Caribbean cultural community center. Each of these organizations and activities were motivated by the opportunity for affirming a rich cultural heritage, self-preservation, and making contributions to the current-day society.

Efforts to impact social, political and economic changes in Haiti also came from those involved in political activities. Haitians in Michigan campaigned on behalf of presidential candidates (MIDH), and lobbied for aid for political interests and refugees (Tenth Department and Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti). Political organizing was important for its mobilizing potential, and the active role Haitians in Michigan played in Haiti's future. Unfortunately, political organizing also impacted the Haitian community negatively by challenging the support which individuals gave to non-political activities. With political opinions as a dividing line, the strength and support of Michigan's small circle of Haitians benefitted from the strategy of cross-cultural organizing. In these, and many other ways that might be explored in an organizational history, Haitians and non-Haitians developed formal organizations and activities that made the existence of Haitian communities in Michigan visible at local, national, and international levels.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION: HISTORY BEYOND THE IMMIGRATION CENTERS**

From the moment of arrival to the establishment of formal community organizations, the lives of Haitians in Michigan tell diverse stories that highlight the historical linkage between the United States and Haiti. Various individual relationships, organizations, and institutions facilitated their sojourns to Michigan, their processes of adaptation, incorporation, and socialization. The creation of organizations offered both Haitians and non-Haitians an opportunity to engage with the Haitian people and culture.

The migration of Haitians to Michigan is in many ways similar to the general trends of their counterparts in other U.S. cities; however, this case study also highlights some factors less-considered in the study of Haitians in major cities of resettlement. More specifically, this study re-affirms the fact that Haitian migration was the result of prosperous opportunities for education and employment, a search for political, economic, and social stability and security, and in other cases, efforts to reunite or establish families. However, Haitian migration to Michigan also directs our attention to alternative locations for resettlement. This added perspective debunks the popular

notion that Haitian immigration to the United States equals Haitian immigration to Miami, New York, or a few other cities that are increasingly cited, such as Boston or Chicago.

Drawing attention to less-familiar locations is not intended to detract from the study of the centers, but to provide a more textured understanding of the larger migration history. Migration to Michigan by many individuals, who once resided in New York City, allows us to find that the centers also served as a point of entry that enables further migration throughout the U.S.

Michigan proved to be an attractive destination for many immigrants. They responded favorably to the employment opportunities, quality of education, and living standards, such as the affordability of quality housing, and the natural environment. Those migrating directly to Michigan made general praise of this sort. While those with previous experience in other cities with concentrated immigrant populations praised Michigan in critical comparison to cities like New York. Future studies should consider how the quality of life for immigrants is different in highly concentrated populations, versus those cities with small and dispersed foreign-born populations.

Thus, understanding the presence of immigrants outside their migration centers allows for a more historically accurate picture of the process of immigration, incorporation and community formation in the United States. The migration process took many people outside the centers to new locations given an array of circumstances. This process acknowledges the historical events making cities outside the centers the primary destination for immigrants during each migration wave. This does not minimize the importance of the centers, because the linkages that other locations have with them are also a vital part of the overall process from migration, incorporation, adaptation and community formation.

The importance of considering destinations like Michigan also increases our knowledge about the processes of community building for Haitians in the United States. The number of Haitians that migrated to Michigan, small in comparison to several other U.S. states and cities, was a factor that both facilitated and hindered social interaction among fellow Haitians. On one hand, the novelty of meeting another Haitian outside the centers brought many individuals together. In some instances, this occurred among individuals of different social backgrounds. On the other hand, the realities of social differentiation in many

instances limited the process of meeting and interacting with other Haitians. This seems to be the result of individuals associating along wave lines and based on other factors such as regional and social background in Haiti, familial ties, or generation gaps. While social differentiation appears to exist, more accurate accounts of such interpersonal relationships should be considered more extensively to garner more conclusive and specific evidence on what the patterns may be. From this, the meaning(s) of living outside an ethnic enclave may become more visible.

Under these types of informal interactions and meeting processes, Haitians created social support networks and/or established extended ties of kin (both real and fictive) to facilitate their processes of adaptation, incorporation, and socialization. Such interactions were most limited among the earliest migrants as there were few fellow newcomers or persons already established who were living under similar circumstances. Those that followed may have found opportunities to benefit from their predecessors--the "veterans" of the immigrant experience. These lessons were learned, or support was extended. *Those who were invited* soon opened their homes to *those who were seeking* for meals, company and guidance in a quite informal manner. Reflecting the continuation of such customs, the two

"waves" collaborated in the future to offer a somewhat structured welcome to the next wave of newcomers, those who were sent. Changes reflected the current events, such as, the political turmoil that lead to increased emigration from Haiti and the formalization of U.S.-based support structures (in this case, local resettlement programs) that guided some of these interactions. Efforts to contribute to or enhance these official support services, whether by collaborating to collectively serve as "god parents" in a *system de parrainage*, or by an individual effort to dedicate either one's professional and/or one's personal time to the hosting of newcomers, illustrated that a gradual increase in numbers and diversity among the population facilitated opportunities for social support and interaction across the array of already settled migrants.

Formal organizing, an outcome of the associations made and interests shared during the "meeting processes" which took place because of networks and kinship ties, allowed the Haitian community to become increasingly visible to other Haitians, as well as non-Haitians. Though there were only a handful of formal organizations in the Lansing, Detroit, and Grand Rapids areas, their role in affirming the Haitian presence and concerns in the area facilitated increasing recognition of the population's existence and

the beginnings of a contemporary history of Haitian community in Michigan. This appears to be the preface to a dynamic future given the diversity of experiences, interests, and affiliations across waves and generations. The multi-faceted, organizational activities that contributed to the educational, cultural, humanitarian, political and civic realms of society attest to this.

Affirming the intersecting interests and affiliations taking place, not only across the waves but across the local cities, some organizations not only reached within the local Haitian population for support, but also benefited from going beyond nationalistic boundaries and engaging in cross-cultural organizing efforts. While certain activities may have been opportunistic, two organizations introduced in this narrative (LeBaobab and Espoir) celebrated multiculturalism, ethnicity, and shared history as an intrinsic component of their organizational history. Such organizing efforts proved valuable in a location where the elusiveness of unity could also prove to be a life-threatening challenge for an organization. This appears to be the case in the instance of garnering support between H.C.O.M. and Espoir, where pools of extended support offered longevity and added visibility for the latter. Moreover, linkages with local institutions proved

beneficial and offered added strength where basic organizing was challenged by mixed opinions on organizing strategies and techniques, as well as political issues.

Politics dampened the bonds among many Haitians in the local area. While not directly attributed to the tensions existing between organizations like H.C.O.M. and Espoir, participants and organizers expressed the indirect effects of such discord. Thus, if not organizationally-related, interpersonal factors may have indirectly hurt both groups, as well as other organizing efforts such as youth-related activities.

As difficult as it was, however, for these individuals to accept the results of diverging political opinion, the history of such passions did not leave the community solely with shattering tales. In fact, organizing efforts along political lines offered valuable contributions to the political processes taking place in Haiti, as well as those occurring in the United States on behalf of the homeland. The manner in which such organizing unfolded speaks to the realities of diversity, even within a seemingly common group of people. Politics led the immigrants to split apart and then come together. Individuals favored and campaigned for political candidates for an election that yielded Haiti's first democratically-elected president. Following

this, many of those who were previously opposed, came together in support of the elected-official and the principles of democracy. The principles offered hope for resurrecting Haiti.

The hope and future of the community was also driven by youth-centered activities. Though less visible and consistent, efforts to maintain Haitian history and culture through the younger generations did exist. From pageants to essay contests, cultural pageants, and study groups, local youth engaged in the social activities of their ethnic counterparts. This study encourages consideration of other settings within which other forms of organizing may take place (e.g. schools, universities, and social clubs).

Under each of these circumstances, linkages with U.S. institutions played a role in the unfolding of this history, and it is by further examining these linkages that one can get a better understanding of the processes of immigration and community-building, and some of their implications for the larger society. Educational, civic, and religious institutions played the largest role in these processes. As a part of the migration experience, universities attracted scholars, public offices made formal and informal invitations by offering stability through employment opportunities, and religious institutions played

a central role through their missionary work abroad and their social services in the United States. Even in the instances where individuals did not have actual opportunities with these institutions, their sense of familiarity with the American entities indirectly contributed to the processes.

As a part of the community building process, religious organizations played the most central role. Again, this occurred because of missionary and social service activities and due to shared religious beliefs that facilitated a meeting process, the eventual establishment of social ties, and recognition of shared interests among various immigrants. Through these interactions, interests, motives, and resources Haitian began creating formal organizations. Along with the church, other American institutions played a role, whether indirectly, as the entity that would bring people together (e.g. fellow university students), or directly, as the entity that offered a space for such organizing. For example, this is seen with human rights advocacy through both federal and state legislatures or an array of missions not only through churches, but also educational and professional institutions. Behind these institutional structures are individuals who facilitated such linkages and in some

instances became instrumental to the organizing processes of the Haitian community.

Linkages to communities outside of Michigan also contributed to the experiences of those Haitians residing in Michigan. During the migration process, contacts with those already resettled in the area facilitated a chain migration process primarily among family members, but also among acquaintances. Perhaps most importantly, the "meeting process" among Haitians in Michigan was not uncommonly the result of contacts made outside the state. The example given in the narrative was of a *seeker* who traveled to New York for a brief visit only to be referred to a woman who would invite 50 other Haitians to attend the *seekers'* daughter's First Communion gathering. This "New York connection" was an experience recounted by several *seekers*. Such connections aided newcomers not only in social regards, but also in the adaptation and incorporation processes—many found residence, employment, and ways to fulfill daily responsibilities under the guidance of other Haitians, if not through the institutions that hosted them, and its affiliates.

Connections with other members of the Haitian Diaspora were most certainly beneficial and visible in the activities of formal organizations. In some instances,

organizations were modeled directly after an organization in another state, such as MIDH that followed the model set by the New York branch. Others benefited from the resources of outside organizations or individuals. For example, the Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti sent excess resources to Miami; and, Espoir secured art collections and exhibits housed in Washington, D.C.. Similarly, shared interests and collaboration of resources facilitated cooperative efforts across communities like humanitarian initiatives or Detroit's hosting of the 1997 annual meeting of the Haitian Studies Association (based in Boston).

Thus, as scholars continue to examine the history and assess the future of the Haitian experience within the United States or as a part of the Diaspora, they should look at the linkages, influences, or lack thereof across populations, institutions and communities. The array of experiences at such sites (and how individual consciousness or connections with other locations may exist) can contribute to enhancing our understanding of various processes of population movements. These efforts can usher in a new wave of scholarship rooted in more interconnected historical accounts.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMATION ON USE OF ANONYMOUS INFORMANTS

Given the matter of authenticity, and the need to offer future scholars the opportunity to re-trace this author's steps or to pursue future research, the use of anonymous informants was, seemingly, one of the most challenging issues in the production of this essay. Nonetheless, consistent with the preferences of this study's valuable informants, as well as the approved procedures by Michigan State's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB# 98474), identities were withheld.

To attest that interviews were actually conducted and information was gathered as suggested by the narrative, it should be noted that documents for the entire process (contact lists, signed consent forms, interview notes and transcripts) were carefully preserved by the author and made available to the project's supervising faculty member.

Scholars interested in pursuing future research involving the individuals and information presented in the preceding pages, need only pursue contacts with visible individuals and organizations in the local area who affiliated with Haitians in Michigan. Key referrals for this project are cited in the list of sources. The range of

possibilities seems endless, given that, while the selected contacts for this project were quite expansive, they are by no means the whole.

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMATION ON THE SAMPLE POPULATION

Despite the anonymity of the informants, a few insights are in order and can be useful to further illustrate the diversity of the population of interviewees. Among the 40 interviewees, there were 13 Lansing residents, 15 Detroit residents, and 12 Grand Rapids residents. Men represented the greater portion of the informants, with only 16 female interviewees given the limited referrals to or availability of female interviewees. 9 couples were interviewed together, or in the presence of the spouse. The effect of the spouse's presence varied: 4 interview sessions were clearly hindered by the spouses' presence, and given the resources and time a re-interview might have yielded a different set of responses (from 3 wives and 1 husband, whose responses were clearly stifled). The remaining 5 interview sessions were dynamic sessions, with both husband and wife offering rich responses, oftentimes complementing each other and eliminating the need to gather the same information twice from separate sessions. To maintain the essential level of comfort with interviewees, it is best to allow informants the final decision on the interview setting.

Representing the categories applied in the narrative, *those who were invited* (individuals who came prior to the 1970s under the invitation of an educational or employment institution) were the least represented (3 interviewees, from Lansing). *Those who were seeking* (individuals who came after 1970, on their own or without the support of formal institutions) were the greatest in representation (27 interviewees, from Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing). Finally, *those who were sent* (individuals who came after 1980 under formal resettlement programs sponsored by the United States government and local voluntary agencies) were fairly represented (10 interviewees, from Lansing and Grand Rapids). While formal analysis remains to be done, this ratio of persons is considered to be fairly representative of the local population, specifically with regard to the three study cities.

These individuals originate from across the island of Haiti. Each of the country's geographic regions were represented with prominent presence from Port-au-Prince, Port-de-Paix, Aux Cayes, and the Central Plateau.

The level of education and employment status/careers of interviewees ranged, as expected, along the line of migration waves. However, as illustrated by the Venn Diagram (page 24), there was overlap. *Those who were*

invited were educated and trained-professionals or individuals that had pursued some post-secondary training. Those who were seeking also had a fair representation of professional training and college-education, though some did not and were in unskilled/service sector positions. Finally, those who were sent represented the spectrum of college-educated to uneducated, with most working in unskilled/service sector positions, in a few cases interviewees were formerly employed in professional positions in Haiti.

Future research should make explicit efforts to engage those persons less visible or vocal in this narrative. Certainly, a greater diversity among the informing population can enhance the findings of such studies.

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Churches and voluntary agencies that helped to initiate contact with informants were: Adventist Church (Lansing), Lansing Catholic Refugee Services, Lutheran Social Services, Refugee Division (Lansing), Bethany Christian Services (Grand Rapids), Catholic Human Development (Grand Rapids), First Church of the Nazarene (Grand Rapids), Sacred Heart Church (Detroit), St. John's (Lansing), St. Leo's (Detroit), Freedom House (Detroit), Caribbean Outreach Mission (Detroit).

Referring educational institutions, offices, and affiliates included: Haiti Summer Exchange Program, Aquinas College (Grand Rapids); African Diaspora Research Project, Michigan State University (Lansing); Dept. of Music, Michigan State University (Lansing).

Newspaper articles with references to Haitians and local persons affiliated with Haitians or Haiti were also useful. Future scholars could complete comprehensive perusal of local newspapers, and pursue contacts with the numerous institutions affiliated with Haiti and Haitians in the past. This project benefited from information found in Michigan State University's Special Collections, vertical file entitled "Haiti: File of Clippings and Misc." directed my attention to Liz Walters, local "peacekeeper" to Haiti, program coordinated by Washington Office on Haiti, cited in State News, November 11, 1993, 1 and Rev. Peter Dougherty, member of the Christian Peacemaker Team assuring ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's safe return to Haiti, cited in State News, November 1, 1994, B1.

While some of these informants did not provide immediate contacts or immediately relevant sources of information, they directed my attention to other individuals and local organizations that had contact with Haitians or in some cases affirmed the contacts that I had

already made. In addition to those cited, many people are knowledgeable about Haitians and/or Haiti-related activities in the local area. The matter of truth, however, is that such knowledge is not always forthcoming and obvious. Thus, it is in the future researcher's best interest to simply be vocal to everyone about the project they are pursuing so as to remain open to lesser-known/visible contacts and information. This should be in addition to the constant consideration of the various sites for interaction that individuals may have with Haitians and Haiti, as suggested by the narrative. Those cited included, public and private institutions, religious and non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. Those cited here should not be considered definitive; but rather a useful and extensive list by which future researchers might begin their investigation.

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