

**Forgotten Voices:  
The Untold Stories of Caribbean Migration to  
Vancouver**

by  
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## **Abstract**

The role of oral history in Caribbean culture promotes the use of narrative in order to retrieve missing histories not found in literature. It examines the power of narrative in reconstructing memories through counterstorytelling in order to increase the visibility of a community that has been pushed to the margins of Vancouver's history. Though this work primarily focuses on the story of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, their highlighted experiences force the need for others to acknowledge their colour first, and their culture second. This forceful recognition of their colour neglects cultural identity, their story and more importantly, their humanity. As such, the objective of this thesis is to spotlight stories of Caribbean narrative and provide space for knowledge sharing amongst eight participants conducted over the course of 2019. Through storytelling, participants provided a historical record of their experiences where no record previously existed and expressed moments of success, triumph but also of discrimination and anti-black racism. Findings reveal that their race impacts the way in which they move through society and with that they sought actionable change in their communities or moved through their reality with constant reminders of their difference.

**Keywords:** Narrative Inquiry; Storytelling; Caribbean; Resistance; Vancouver

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my family, friends, but most importantly, my late grandmothers Lilieth Monica Senior and Myrtle Adina Quest. Thank you for dreaming bigger than what you knew was possible. This work would not be possible without my tribe (special big ups to mom and dad), you all have encouraged me every step of the way and I am forever in your debt. There are truly no words to express my gratitude, I'm eternally grateful. Raisha, thank you for being my second pair of eyes. Adjua, thank you for your unwavering support. Joy, I would not be in this position without you. Nawal, thank you for taking me under your academic wing. Shawayne, thank you for your continuous encouragement. This experience would not have been nearly as fulfilling, if it was not for you all.

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# Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee.....	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Preface – Living With Grief.....	xi
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. This Place Hides Stuff.....	1
1.2. The Power of the Popular.....	4
1.3. Caribbean Invisibility.....	5
1.4. Historical Recognition of the West Indies & Caribbean Redress.....	7
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. Tracing Narrative and Performance.....	10
2.2. Oral History in Communities of Colour: Colonized Versus the Colonizer.....	11
2.3. Oral History Theory.....	12
2.4. Placing Black Canadian Identity in British Columbia.....	14
2.5. What Does Black Look Like In BC?.....	15
2.6. Salt Spring Settlers.....	17
2.7. Race, Roots and Relocation—What about we just be Canadian?.....	18
<b>Chapter 3. Theoretical and Methodological Considerations.....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1. Methodology.....	26
3.2. Interviews: Collaborative Life Experience Narratives and Discussion.....	27
3.3. Exploring Narrative: Narrative Inquiry.....	28
3.4. Outsider Within: Theoretical Considerations.....	32
3.5. Race Matters.....	33
<b>Chapter 4. Thematic Autobiographical Sketches.....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1. “These things stick”: Hardship, Resistance and Resilience.....	36
4.2. Maureen – Tangible Connections.....	39
4.3. Peter - “We work twice as hard”: Culture and Education.....	40
4.4. Cathy: “I’m here but, I’m everywhere”: Family and maintaining cultural connections.....	42
4.5. Annabelle: “I just need a better life”: Survival to Success.....	44
4.6. Matthew: Education, Access and Mobility.....	45
4.7. Janet and Greg: "Appreciating our own culture": Education, Culture and Community.....	47

<b>Chapter 5. Collective Themes .....</b>	<b>51</b>
5.1. Community, Identity and Immigration.....	51
5.2. Overcoming Adversity .....	54
5.3. They are Risk Takers and Dreamers .....	58
<b>Chapter 6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>60</b>
6.1. Limitations and Opportunities.....	61
6.2. Justice sounds like oppression to the privileged - BLM .....	62
6.3. The popularization of the BLM movement - <i>#blackouttuesday</i> .....	63
6.4. For Us By Us.....	64
<b>References.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Appendix A. Interview.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix B. Informed Consent Form .....</b>	<b>70</b>



## List of Tables

Table 1.	Barbara Morgan-Fleming, Sandra Riegle & Wesley Fryer 2007 .....	29
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## List of Figures

Figure 1.	\$20 Reward, Quebec Gazette May 1785, Canadian Museum for Human Rights .....	2
Figure 2.	Gentlemen for Sale, Nova Scotia Archives 15 March 1794, Canadian Museum for Human Rights .....	2
Figure 3.	The Caribbean Before Colonialism. Retrieved from web, Anbanet .....	9
Figure 4.	Construction of Georgia viaduct (1971), Vancouver Heritage Foundation .....	23
Figure 5.	Hogan's Alley Protest June 2020 .....	24

## Preface – Living With Grief

*Happiness is gone; the feeling I used to get when I saw her. It was love, gratitude, satisfaction, and contentment. And it's gone. Leaving me to pick up the pieces of what's been left behind, searching for happiness again. It still hurts. No worse, but no less; it's the same. I'm uncertain of whether I'm handling grief well. To be honest, I have yet to truly face my reality. It looks at me in the mirror every morning and every morning I want to turn and run. But I don't. I stare at my grief and it stares back until one of us dissipates (usually the grief). I see it, but do not acknowledge it; more a matter of defiance than denial. Yes, she's gone, but I continue my search for any sign that she may still live in me - that she gave me something to hold on to in her absence.*

*Gaps fill our timeline as we try to remember stories of our mother's mother and the lessons that came with them. We try to make sense of their passing and convince ourselves that we're okay with the time we had, but the heaviness and emptiness are feelings no soul can ever truly shake - no matter how much we try and reconcile our new reality. These are the thoughts that roam my mind and put me to sleep as I beg the universe to let me see her again in my dreams, to send me a message so I know she's okay, to validate the path I walk and help me to walk it again with pride.*

*I search for her now, trying to find anything to reaffirm my existence, validate that I came from her. Our family has fragmented itself like a shattered glass, not completely out of form yet, but close; fragile and strained under the pressure of her physical absence. She held us together, molded and shaped our unit into its original, authentic form. Our house no longer looks like the home she built. There is no us without her. Heartbreak has changed the shape of our unit and we've been left with only her traces. There isn't much that can soothe or pacify our pain other than our memories of her essence, her words, her gestures, her stories. Our memories. The impact of her passing hits straight to the DNA strain that connects us all together. Her family was her prized possession, the ultimate accomplishment of her life's work. Days, months and now years pass and with every passing moment, I think only of the natural, inherent efforts she made to connect every member of her family—a true matriarch, with a beautiful story to share. This is for her.*

# Chapter 1.

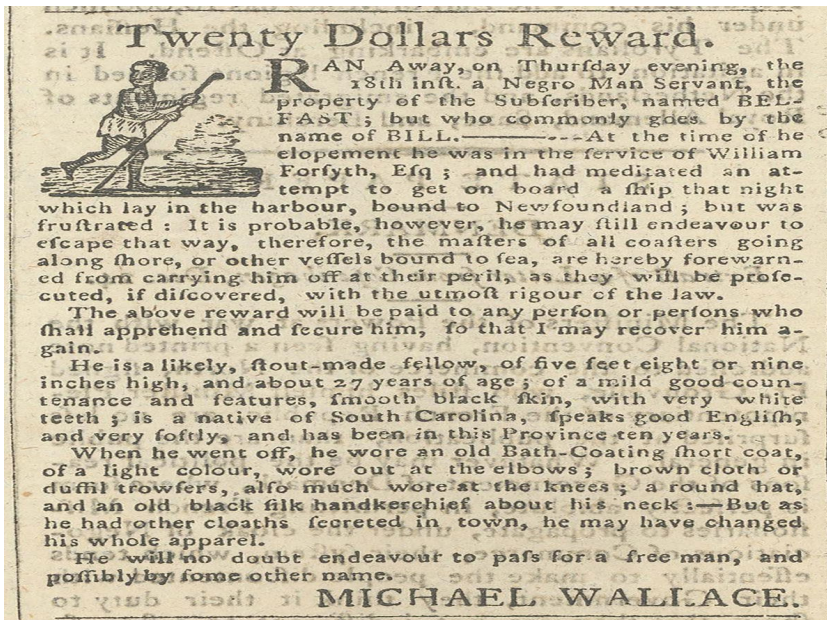
## Introduction

### 1.1. This Place Hides Stuff

*There's no domain in Canadian life that racism and anti-black racism doesn't exist. We focus on what happens in the US and then say, "it allows us to say that as long as we're not as bad as them, we don't have to talk about what happens in our own country The Skin We're In, CBC Docs POV, 2017)*

Desmond Cole's award winning book and documentary *The Skin We're In* details the realities of being Black in Canada. Cole offers firsthand accounts of his and others' experiences of being Black in Toronto as they seek to navigate various systems, such as, education, legal, child welfare and immigration. Cole points out that many of these experiences are rooted in Canada's colonial past that privileged whiteness and systematically discriminated against others, especially Black people. The official historical accounts of Black people's presence in Canada have long ignored racism and the atrocities of slavery in this country. Black Canadian experience has been a navigation through a society where people often say, "*we don't see colour*", a sensibility that not only renders the Black experience invisible but further perpetuates instances of racism and discrimination.

Of course, denying or ignoring systemic racism in Canada does not erase it. Canada has been able to remain under the radar by adopting the narrative that slavery and discrimination did not exist in Canada. Canadians point to the pride of being the final destination, the path to freedom for runaway slaves but fail to acknowledge the history of slavery prior to the mid-1800s. We have developed a savior complex that fails to teach or provide an exhaustive understanding of African and Indigenous enslavement by European settlers which leads to a misunderstanding of our history and impact on perpetuating racism and more specifically anti-blackness.



**Figure 1. \$20 Reward, Quebec Gazette May 1785, Canadian Museum for Human Rights**

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**A** Gentleman going to England has for sale, a Negro-wench, with her child, about 26 years of age, who understands thoroughly every kind of house-work, particularly washing and cookery: And a stout Negro-boy, 13 years old: Also a good horse, cariole and harness.—For particulars enquire at Mr. William Roxburgh's, Upper-town. †||  
*Quebec, 10th May, 1785.*

**U**N Monsieur, qui va partir pour Angleterre, a pour vendre, une NÈGRESSE avec son Enfant. Elle est âgée d'environ 26 ans, entend parfaitement tous les ouvrages du ménage, surtout le blanchissage et la cuisine; aussi un Nègre robuste de 13 ans: Deplus un bon cheval avec la carriole et le harnois. Pour information on s'adressera à Mr. William Roxburgh, à la Haute-ville.  
*Québec, 10 Mai, 1785.*

**Figure 2. Gentlemen for Sale, Nova Scotia Archives 15 March 1794, Canadian Museum for Human Rights**

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Awards and sale announcements were widely dispersed and commonly overlooked when addressing the impact of slavery (as seen above in the Quebec Gazette). Canada has perpetuated misinformation through deflection and distraction with little accountability or recognition of its past.

An additional factor that has perpetuated this misconception is the reform of Canadian Immigration Act of 1967 which introduced regulations that abolished

discrimination based on race and nationality and introduced the integration of the merit-based point system. The reform of the act gave Canadians a sense of pride and accomplishment promoting a sense of enlightenment and less discriminatory approach to immigration, but also served to obscure the previous history of racism. Although legislation has been reformed it does not reform the hearts and minds of the public. Canada has spared itself a full encounter with, and recognition of its own history of racism, but with the recent events of violence and murder of Black people especially in the U.S., the voices of Black Lives Matter has alerted, provoked and challenged racism in Canada as well, and around the globe.

There are vigorous calls to action for change and actionable reform and Canada must confront racism as a national priority. Clearly, the most recent killings of Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Ahmaud Aubrey and George Floyd in combination with the continuous news cycle and triggering imagery has stirred up trauma and has brought issues of racism to the forefront.<sup>1</sup> These events call into question the progress that was believed to have been achieved by multiple generations of Black people not only in the United States but across the world. The Black Lives Matter movement has ignited a dialogue that is urgent, critical, and challenges how racism has shaped systems and positions of power at local and national levels. We have heard city officials, premiers and members of parliament deny the existence of systemic racism in this country without questioning Canada's role in perpetuating oppression by remaining silent and failing to seek substantial change. People are now questioning their privilege and deciding how to be active allies in a fight that condemns silence. Systemic racism has become a key discourse in the public sphere as protests have come to dominate news and social media and as public figures from government to sports to entertainment and more have taken a knee in solidarity.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of victims will be substantially longer by the time of this publication.

## 1.2. The Power of the Popular

However, these protests are not new, neither are the conversations around the marginalization and subjugation of Black bodies.<sup>2</sup> Fueled by the pervasiveness of social media, these occurrences and images of injustices on the bodies of Black people have been brought into our living rooms and bedrooms, adding discomfort to our spaces of privacy and refuge. While nowhere near the level of inhumanity that we have witnessed in the past several months, these stories of displacement and mistreatment of Black people and their communities have ignited a larger conversation concerning the way racism functions in Canada. At a local level, this thesis examines the everyday life experiences of Caribbean people and spotlights their negotiation with race and cultural identity. This thesis provides tangible anecdotes that reveal a piece of British Columbia's history that has been underrepresented and seldom acknowledged. These collective narratives serve as a cultural artifact. They highlight the experiences of those in the African diaspora who have not yet been provided with a safe space to share. Their life experiences unveil a history of resistance to discrimination, racism and being pushed to the margins. In this sense, this thesis marks an early contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of a history that acknowledges the experiences, contributions and challenges faced by the Caribbean community in Vancouver.

For centuries, history has violently erased the Black experience and has only acknowledged Black people as property or indentured servants. Western history has misrepresented Black history, positioning Black people only in roles of subjugation and servitude rather than the recognition of pre-colonialism, rebellion and resistance. Black histories have been actively erased after multiple generations of subjection. For Black lives to matter, systems of oppression need to be critically and actively reconstructed with the understanding that race and racism are endemic to North American society. In the Canadian context, counterstorytelling is critical in examining past and current perceptions surrounding blackness while being conscious of who has been in control of

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the marginalization being discussed in this thesis refers to Black people who are faced with discrimination (or treated poorly) being pushed to the periphery of society. Though their experiences are notably different from the egregious cases commonly publicized, their lived experience qualify the use of this term.

the narrative surrounding Black people in Canada.<sup>3</sup> When approaching critical race theory, counterstorytelling calls for a reformation and restructuring of the dominant narrative in order to undo the process of white supremacy and dissemination of colonial propaganda.

### **1.3. Caribbean Invisibility**

There has been a dearth of historical accounts of Caribbean migration and experience in the west of Canada, and indeed, such Caribbean culture has not been adequately represented. The difficulty in locating this community draws recognition to the underrepresentation or loss of cultural identities. In order to regain an appropriate understanding of the cultural landscape of B.C., memory work and collection must be highlighted in its most accessible form—storytelling.

We must explore the integral role narrative plays in rebuilding historical recognition and place. The importance of Caribbean contributions must be given their rightful place in provincial history and allow for narrative to begin filling the gaps that have yet to be critically analyzed. The misconception that Vancouver is without a larger recognized Black history needs to be corrected and given full and proper account. This is why narrative allows us to take a step back in time and rethink the cultural shaping of Caribbean cultural identity in the twentieth century.

While storytelling is common to all cultures, the connective tissue it fosters within Trans-Caribbean culture should be engaged in order to rebuild and reconnect the West Indian and Caribbean community of B.C. When the familiarity of birth place/land is left behind much of the cultural artifacts that bear witness to familial connections to land and space are diminished. Narrative serves to engender and sustain critical reflection as the past and present are brought together to give account and validity to experience. To validate experiences as Caribbean immigrants not only means to begin sharing these conversations often held in private (or in isolation) to the public but also to begin translating these stories to text in order to preserve moments in history. Communication

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<sup>3</sup> Though counterstorytelling does refer to re-centering Black voices in Vancouver, stories of their history have yet to be highlighted. Counterstorytelling in this context is used to offer more diversified accounts of blackness in B.C. alternative to the dominant history of African immigration directly from the continent.



production is strengthened by the use of storytelling, empowering communities of colour to share their story with the respect and authority they deserve.

This thesis tackles Caribbean narrative by following the life stories of eight participants from various isles, taking an in-depth look into their lives as immigrants and the lives they have created for themselves in British Columbia. The purpose of this study is to examine a portion of the collective story of Caribbean people who have migrated to Vancouver; taking each story as a contributing piece to fit together a complete picture that has been intentionally ignored or erased throughout the years. I rely not upon traditional archival documents as a main source but rather on the words and stories of transmigrant families. The importance of storytelling and oral history is a channel through which stories of migration live freely, transcending generations and falling upon many ears. Highlighting these stories promotes a history that has become more difficult to trace in communities where immigrants have dispersed, such as Vancouver. The collection of these narratives assists in uncovering past and current perceptions of migration, the realities and outcomes that have altered family dynamics and the effects of transnationalism in asserting cultural identity and belonging.

Oral history is introduced with a review of how narrative functions in communities of colour, with a focus on the larger historical migration of Black people in B.C. in the early 1900s. To develop a context which examines the historical landscape of Black presence in B.C., the thesis provides an analysis of how Caribbean cultural landscape is shaped to date and how narrative aids in the deconstruction of traditional Eurocentric historical knowledge production. By analyzing the past and current climate surrounding Black experiences in B.C., it shows how race and space function in society. The history of displacement of Black communities in B.C. serves as the cornerstone for the analysis of the intentional erasure of Vancouver's Black community through urban development.

In order to examine this erasure, critical race theory functions as a means of examining the value of counterstorytelling through the application of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allows for the uncovering of multiple stories surrounding cultural identity. This section of the thesis details the scope, sample size and population of participants interviewed who migrated between 1965 to 1995. The life stories of eight participants are introduced in detailed sketches that establish collective themes. While each sketch offers depth to the collective Black experience, the racialization of

participants calls for closer attention to how current activism is informed by everyday instances of racism and labour discrimination. An assessment of the current BLM movement provides a platform for understanding how racial injustice homogenizes Black experiences to primarily strip the depths and diversification within the diaspora.

This thesis begins to fill the gap where academic literature regarding the story of Caribbean migration (to British Columbia) and contribution has failed. Creating an emphasis on Caribbean Vancouverites shines a spotlight on their experiences that have not received the attention and scholarly analysis they deserve. More apparently, there is a pressing need to capture the narratives of earlier settlers in attempts to preserve as much of their story before it is lost and forgotten. With a focused urgency to begin the collection of their life stories, this project serves as an initial step in reclaiming Caribbean experiences, fostering belonging in the Vancouver context.

## **1.4. Historical Recognition of the West Indies & Caribbean Redress**

Before moving forward, it is critical to acknowledge the complex history involved in the naming of the West Indies. The reality of Indigenous erasure and colonial influence must be acknowledged as a starting point in a historical account. The West Indies and the surrounding islands is the land of Indigenous populations whose stories, prior to and after settlement, may never be told in their entirety. Dangers of comparison resulted in the renaming of a people and place that geographically resulted in the misidentification of Indigenous populations in the West Indies. The naming of the West Indies speaks to how we understand the history of what actually took place at the time of European colonization. To understand the true nature of the colonization of the Caribbean, there must be a clear recognition concerning the impact comparison attributed to the discussion and formation of West Indian identity. In “East Indies and West Indies: Comparative Misapprehensions”, Aravamudan (2006) explains that comparison is not a neutral positioning, rooted out of territorial competition and colonial dominance:

The British Empire in America. Caribbean slavery enables a new form of acquisitive imperialism that points to a significant transition...unlike the Spanish, the English were ... predominantly concerned with securing rights

not over peoples but over lands', the West Indies becomes the test case for this new form of acquisition, as many of the sugar islands (p. 293).

It was at that time the trans-European concept of empire building had shifted to asserting dominion over foreign places (the birth of trade monopoly). The historical documentation of such people speaks to the insuperable functions of conceptual analysis and comparison - one cannot exist without the other. West Indian histories from the colonial European perspective proceed with a premise of the legitimacy and authority of European land acquisition and dominion and neglect the ravages of such colonialism. As Aravamudan argues:

Cross-comparative regionalisms...such as that of East Indies and West Indies...produce a model that proceeds from a mistaken assumption of having accepted the primacy of a spatialisation over temporal and historical considerations. However, the meta-comparative aspects of an archipelago undo the extreme homogenization of spatialisation whereby the nation-state historicises a territory and territorializes a history. Spatialised comparison is supplemented by an analysis of temporality (p. 295).

Comparing the East and West Indies only propagated and popularized the "similarities" of two geographically different places in order to benefit colonialism. The criteria required to make such claims is enormously problematic. The sole understanding of these populations was built on the back of misinformed doctrines subscribed as truth, serving only to benefit those who had the authority to write history (which were Europeans colonizers at the time). The comparisons framed as facts were seldom derived from a position of neutrality. Rather, such comparisons stem from an "us" versus "them" viewpoint, or the civilized versus the primitive. To analyze and be critical of such is also to enable imperialism (p. 294).

The naming of the West Indies is deeply ingrained in colonial history to the benefit of the perspectives and interests of European colonizers. As Aravamudan elaborates:

Europe informs the standard and implicit subject position of the viewer of maps and the comparer of peoples whether to the left or to the right. From this central location, the globe can be measured, mapped, compared and accounted for in a manner that places the Americas to the west and Asia to the east. This chiasitic spatial mapping of East and West leads to a number of imaginative assonances and temporal echoes (p. 297).

It is critical to understand the history of the Caribbean in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the impact of imperialism, colonialism, marginalization and what displacement means for West Indians and the larger Caribbean populations. The longstanding history of European governance and dominion over many islands in the Caribbean require a broadening of our understanding of what it means to be Caribbean and the implications that follow throughout history. Accordingly, this includes the Indigenous names of each Caribbean country, and gives recognition, credence and legitimacy to the stories of those who lived in the historical consequences of European economic pillaging and cultural domination. Going forward the region will be referred to as the Caribbean to present the countries in postcolonial context. West Indies represents British colonialism/acquisition while the Caribbean encompasses the entirety of islands that underwent similar colonial rule and erasure (please see figure 4 for Indigenous names of each nation below).



**Figure 3. The Caribbean Before Colonialism.** Retrieved from web, Anbanet Copyrighted 2019

## Chapter 2.

### Literature Review

Self-defining identity is imperative in reintroducing Caribbean culture, history and contributions to Vancouver. In order to center the historical analysis of oral history and narrative this chapter will review collected analyses of oral history and narrative as a literary form. It will combine the works of prominent West Indian authors to demonstrate the need for such Caribbean historical literature to be recognized, and provide counterpoint, alternative or challenge to analyses and accounts offered by Western historians.

#### 2.1. Tracing Narrative and Performance

Oral history, narrative, and performative writing are established areas of critical scholarship that compliment oral and textual histories, and work to preserve and assert the strength and relevance of cultural/ethnic histories and experiences. Patricia Leavy discusses its importance as a “multidisciplinary method” used in multiple fields including “humanities, social sciences, cultural studies and gender studies” (Leavy, 2011, p. 4). Leavy offers a valuable distinction between oral history and oral tradition (Leavy, 2011). She defines an oral tradition as one in which a story is passed down through generations while oral history refers to a method of collecting narratives from individuals for research with both participant and researcher becoming co-creators in knowledge building (Leavy, 2011, p. 4).

The objective is to document firsthand accounts of West Indian and larger Caribbean immigration in Vancouver while they are still available in order to account for those who have firsthand experience and stories of that experience. As Leavy recognizes, this research is imperative for it provides firsthand accounts of events (migration)—accounts that would otherwise die with the individuals because they cannot be properly understood without firsthand renderings (Leavy, 2011, p. 17). Not only does oral history provide firsthand knowledge, it also speaks to the importance of narrative in validating research. As Leavy observes, “Memory, with all its imperfections, mutability and transience is at the heart of...practice and analysis” (Leavy, 2011, p. 17).

The recovery of Caribbean narrative speaks as a response to colonial rhetoric and a revitalization of West Indian identity. In Sue Thomas' (2014) "Telling West Indian Lives", Hilary Beckles (1804) addresses the new order in which it was demonstrated that human rights could be achieved through resistance:

This 'new order' was accompanied by a literature within which the enslaved spoke back and countered the ideological representations established within the texts of slave owners and their authorized supporters (Beckles, in Thomas, 2012, p. 2).

The anti-colonial discourse spread across the African Diaspora, prompting community members to refute mainstream rhetoric and representation. The oppositional life narrative is a direct product of resistance resulting from slavery. Indeed, the power of narrative works to preserve, rehabilitate and revitalize Caribbean families and networks. The following sections of this chapter will explore the role of narrative and its interpretations through a range of works to build an enhanced understanding of narrative progression, its impact and its larger and local integration.

## **2.2. Oral History in Communities of Colour: Colonized Versus the Colonizer**

Exploring oral history as a mode of negotiating Caribbean identity allows a means of identifying the experiences of those who have been oppressed by the injustices of being othered. Such exploration provides the tools for understanding what was thought and felt by the community while undergoing a particular personal and community experiences. Nancy Mirabal's "Geographies of Displacement" (2009) discusses how the gentrification in San Francisco's marginalized Latina community was used as a process to restrict the movement of Brown bodies (p. 7) stripping them of authority and of the means to be heard. Those who control the language control the land, which suggests why oral history is a vital process of combating colonial discourse—reclaiming pre-colonial modes of narration.

Thieme (1984) considers similar post-colonial works in "Alternative Histories", where he discusses the legacy of colonialism in the West Indies and creative writers who question the assumptions of conventional Western history (p. 147). History is more than a theme in Caribbean literature, it is a mode of discourse riddled by slavery, economic exploitation, making Caribbean writers (post-Emancipation) especially sensitive to

historical content propagated by the West. Caribbean writing and the quest for identity is a reflection of the strongly felt need to overcome the “decarnation which lurks somewhere in all West Indian pasts” (Thieme, p. 148). Poet Derek Walcott’s (1974) “The Muse of History” argues that those “whose servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of...revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters” (p. 39).

The need for fostering creative expressive forms serves to identify the quest for distinctive Caribbean identity. The discourse we accept as history is often presented as absolute, but in reality, is as much the product of narrative fiction (Thieme, p. 149). Such historical discourse has an inherent bias against the cultures of traditional Third World societies where pre-colonial narrative modes were primarily oral. Thieme argues that we must concern ourselves with the linear, causological, socially realistic narrative structure of “history” (p. 156).

Complimenting Thieme, Walcott’s (1974) discussion of the method in which we are taught the past, is the same way by which we read narrative fiction—further validating that every event becomes an exertion of memory, prone to its own subjective invention. Thieme (1984) and Walcott (1974) warn that we must not be consumed by rudimentary forms of history. They both argue that a history is subjected to one’s own interpretation which gives Caribbean people the rightful authority to speak to their own experience. As Walcott (1974) recalls the way history was taught as part of the colonial curriculum of his schooldays, he offers various alternatives to speak to this history “furthering the facts, the more history petrifies into myth...as a narrative of the heroic exploits of the British Empire” (p. 144). The colonial version is replaced by local memories and the healing properties of reclaiming cultural identity.

### **2.3. Oral History Theory**

Abrams (2010) explores the role of narrative in as a distinguishing feature referring to the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world (Abrams, p. 21). She describes narrative as a form used to translate knowing into telling. Narrative allows for a story to be arranged and dramatized with a variety of elements: “speech, diversions, commentary [and] reflection” and follow certain codes of structure distinctive to the storyteller’s culture (p. 21). For the practical element of this research,

these codes and distinctions are key tools used to guide conversations in order to draw attention to cultural norms in need of explanation and deconstruction. With Caribbean territories speaking in a variety of English dialects, patois and creoles, it highlights a distinctive structure and manner of recounting migration.

Orality and narrative qualities are very distinct from normative Western usages and practices, which demands an understanding of the historical significance and context of language in the Caribbean. Alleyne (1988) traces the power relations surrounding language and the multilingual assimilation that occurred in the subordinate language. Through colonization, Indigenous languages became near to extinct because of the dichotomy between subordinate and dominant languages present (English and Indigenous Creole). The presence of two languages often turns into English replacing the “subordinate” (Alleyne p. 121) language—a process that I would term verbal colonization.

A number of Caribbean nations underwent similar instances of unidirectional takeover, and historical erasure through assimilation. This assimilation is a product of many of the patois and creoles present in the West Indies and Caribbean to date. Therefore, extra attention should always be taken when collecting narratives from Caribbean participants, as there is a cultural and historical significance in sentence structure and storytelling that is a direct response to colonial takeover and Caribbean rebellion.

Noriega and Barnett (2013) further this understanding of narrative as they offer representations of how oral history works in various ethnic communities. The ethos surrounding the process of oral history as a way of discussion serves as a recognition of being “present” and “giving” (p. 2), constituting good faith in communities of colour as sites of shared knowledge production; that is, dismantling historic colonial discourse. Oral history in its basic of forms is a historical endeavor, designed to discover what individual experience means in historical terms (Noriega and Barnett, 2013, p. 2). The oral historian’s distinctive way of eliciting knowledge works to center interests on how their subjects put together in narrative, the history that they lived through.

Noriega and Barnett (2013) consider oral history as a methodological choice involving three components: a focus on history, an emphasis on narrator-driven



accounts and a life history approach. These narrative components can be understood to impact the revival of Caribbean literature and narrative. Narrative serves as the dominant framework used towards decolonizing the experience of Caribbean people, working towards the reclamation of life experiences as an integral method of deconstructing the dominant Eurocentric historical experience.

## **2.4. Placing Black Canadian Identity in British Columbia**

In order to gain a well-rounded understanding of documented Caribbean settlement in Vancouver, this section will analyze larger Black settlement in Vancouver. Though this may limit research by excluding the contributions of those of Caribbean descent who may not identify as Black, the examination of Black settlers serves as an opportunity to diversify and connect the Afro-Caribbean and larger Black experience in Vancouver. This section will investigate the importance of Black representation in B.C. through the case of Black settlers on Salt Spring Island, and will consider a feature from the CBC's Black History month project from February 2016 to address "what Black looks like in B.C" and "how it is experienced".

Understanding how identity functions amongst youth offers insight into how transmigrant identity is formed through interactions between youth and elders. Clarke's thesis (1996) focuses her qualitative examination on "The Process of Identity Formation in Black Youth" in Vancouver. She focuses on a range of topics involving Black youth and their experiences with dating, family and self-awareness. Participants stress the importance of having a firm home base, noting the family environment as being the place in which they feel most comfortable in exploring issues of racial and cultural identity (Clarke, p. 94). To engage in dialogue surrounding identity conversations were mainly exercised at a private level, rather than explored through friendships or education. Participants state that they only became aware of their blackness when given the opportunity to connect with educating media—offering many their first point of contact to bridging their experiences with tangible racial discrimination taking place:

Participants...discussed how they felt their interest in racial issues or Black cultural experience was triggered...Those participants who reported that their interest was triggered by internal factors stated that they recognized the death of Black cultural experience around them to draw on, being the only Black student in their school or classroom. They started to focus on Black issues when they did appear in media and they began to actively

search out music and literature which was reflective of the Black experience (p. 94).

The experience of Black youth in Vancouver speaks to the need of such research to be examined critically. It reveals the importance of Black representation at a local level. Though there were more accessible avenues to discovering Black identity as a Black Vancouver youth, there is still the critical need for young people to know the contributions of their community and the work being facilitated to celebrate, educate and expand Black representation in Vancouver.

## 2.5. What Does Black Look Like In BC?

*“Far better breathe Canadian air/Where all are free and well/Than live in slavery’s atmosphere/And wear the chains of hell. Farewell to our native land/We must wave the parting hand/Never to see thee anymore/But seek a foreign land (A Voice from the Oppressed to the Friends of Humanity – April 1858 Priscilla Stewart, White 2013)*

The history of Black settlements in B.C. is not widely known or understood, but the case of Salt Spring Island (and surrounding islands in the Gulf) offers an important illustration of such settlement. In the mid 1800s in Northern California, lived a large settlement of Black people. Some had settled there, free from the grips of slavery or as free men and women. They were a literate group who excelled in education and skilled labour (Irby 1974). Evelyn C. White’s photo narrative “Every Goodbye Ain’t Gone” (2008) on Salt Spring Island, Canada, in the Nineteenth Century, offers a detailed history into the motivations of Black settlement to B.C. in the heated California climate of pre-emancipation. The Black people in Northern California were a prosperous community; however, racial tensions with white people seeped into the dreams of freedom.

In 1850, a new federal U.S. fugitive slave law made it legal for enslaved Black people who made it to freedom, to be captured and returned to captivity in the state (p. 14). The state law had not only erased the hopes of newly freed Black people but continued to implement legislations that prohibited Black people to live as free citizens. March 19, 1858 Assembly Bill 339 of the California State Legislature entitled “An Act to Restrict and Prevent the Immigration to and Residence in This State of Negroes and Mulattoes” triggered motivations to flee the state (p. 14). The repression of these laws became extremely difficult for them to sustain a fulfilling life, continuing to impose invasive measures to condemn Black people to the hands of slavery. No matter the

amount of capital they owned, the 1857 U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision ruled that Black people were not citizens and had no claims to land or the rights of white citizens (p. 14). Assembly Bill 339 speaks to the political realities of Black people in California. White (2008) suggests the Bill as possibly being the main motivation for Black migration to Vancouver (p. 14). No longer able to bear the restrictions of California life, they set their eyes on a new path—Canada.

Guyana-born James Douglas settled in Canada at the age of 16 and rose rapidly in the ranks as an administrator for the Hudson Bay Company (White, p. 21). In his early thirties he had established himself at a frontier British outpost on Vancouver Island (p. 21), awarded the first governor of B.C. in 1858. Douglas' motivation for accepting Black people in California stemmed from the discovery of gold along the Fraser River, inviting them to move to Victoria. He had hoped to replenish the diminishing workforce as groups of people had left the region to try and find gold (p. 21). The exchange between Governor Douglas and disenfranchised Black people took shape quickly.

No longer able to bear the harassment they suffered by the California Legislature, Californian Black people established an emigration society in San Francisco. Charles Irby (1974) offers details to the evolution of the association and its hopes in finding permanent sanctuary on the Island in his analysis of "The Black Settlers on Salt Spring Island in the Nineteenth Century". A month after Assembly Bill 339 (April 19, 1858), "sixty-five persons had enrolled themselves as emigrants, and would take passage for Vancouver's Island the next day" (Irby, p. 369). After coordination with Governor Douglas and members of the emigration society, the group travelled by sea to Vancouver's Island under the protection of the British (San Fran Daily Evening Bulletin April 28, 1858, p. 369). Preceding their departure there was a report from the delegation chairman who had returned from B.C. and noted the following:

Before entering on the instructions contained in your resolution, we feel happy to state that your delegation was received most cordially and kindly by His Excellency the Governor, and heartily welcomed to this land of freedom and humanity. We are happy to say further, that our interview with His Excellency was cheerful and rendered agreeable and easy by that grace and dignity which is peculiar to the English gentlemen. 1st. Lands can be obtained in this Colony at the rate of twenty shillings per acre, one fourth to be paid on taking possession, the balance in four years by installments; on the balance, there is an interest of 5 per cent, but no tax on the land. 2nd. What are the qualifications necessary to become a British

subject? Holding lands entitle the holders, after a residence of nine months, to the right of elective franchise, sitting as jurors, and to all the protection of the law as citizens of this Colony, but to enjoy all the rights and privileges of a British subject, a residence of seven years, and the taking of the oath of allegiance is required. Town lots, 66 by 132 feet, can be purchased for fifty dollars. All of which is submitted (Mercer, Richard, Moses 1858, 370).<sup>4</sup>

The motivation and intentions of the move were clear. There was not to be any intention for “Black colonization schemes” (p. 370). They were encouraged to avoid such social distinctions and were compelled not to foster segregation. On May 11, 1858, the Declaration of the Sense of the Colored People was read:

That our people be advised to avoid all those social distinctions that we are compelled to make in this country, from the prejudice that exists against us among the Americans - such distinctions as colored churches, or colored schools, or colored associations of any kind, as well as colored public meetings. Let us do everything on the broad platform, regardless of race, whatever the interest mooted may be (p.370).

The ultimate goal of the group was to rid themselves of any instances to encourage prejudice amongst themselves as had taken place in America. It was strongly encouraged to integrate and live amongst the other settlers, no matter the extent of their fear.

## 2.6. Salt Spring Settlers

*“These white viewpoints are responsible for the mythological proposition that ‘because there were Blacks on the Island, they constituted a Black colony” (Irby, p. 368)*

There is contention to date on what brought the influx of settlement on the island. John Pilton’s (1951) “Negro Settlement in British Columbia” suggests that after the gold rush, between July 26 and 30 1859, 241 settlement rights were granted as those who emigrated from Australia, Canada and Great Britain (who had gambled everything on the gold rush), could not afford to return home. He concludes that only four of the 241 settlers granted colonial lands were Black. Its reference as being a Black colony does not intend to exclude the settlement of other races but, paint a more inclusive picture as

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<sup>4</sup> Conversation in reference to those who intended to settle in Victoria.

it is referred to an early settlement of “mosaic...mixed colors and nationalities” (Irby, p. 369).

Many Black people who arrived on Salt Spring Island soon discovered the difficulties of living the integrated life of freedom that was so heavily ingrained in their mission and motivation. Many even went as far to create a Black colony but when a group of colour settlers approached Governor Douglas with the idea, he strongly went against it, requesting it in its best interest to have a mixed settlement (Marie A. Wallace, *Sylvia Stark’s Story*, Ms. B. C. Archives, p. 18; Cf. O’Brien, op. cit., p. 370)

This distinctive and purposeful move to stray away from segregation gave Salt Spring its significant character as an island of mixed and inclusive heritage. Douglas stressed the importance of different persons learning, co-existing and working together to create a unified and celebrated island identity rather than living in segregation. Such a rich history has been known at a local and even national level however is not widely circulated in the Vancouver community. This brief review of historical literature demonstrates the past and ongoing tensions between “official” histories and oral and other histories that belong to people excluded, discriminated against, and marginalized.

## **2.7. Race, Roots and Relocation—What about we just be Canadian?**

In February of 2016, CBC launched its Black History Month project, “Race, Roots and Relocation” (Feb 2016) which celebrated Black contributions to B.C. (Vancouver) in the past and present. The following will examine the experiences of Black Vancouverites and the discourse surrounding local Black history initiatives.

*“We don’t have Black spaces as such. We don’t have Black geography, Black neighbourhoods ... although some are emerging in the suburbs”  
 (“Black in Vancouver” Feb 2016).*

Though our communities and visibility existed in the past, there is not a clear demarcation of where one can encounter other people of colour. Places like Salt Spring Island, with a historically well documented and celebrated arrival of Black people, are in stark contrast of Black communities in the lower mainland. Identifiable spaces of historical Black presence and communities are seldom acknowledged and contested by the city. Discussions surrounding Black identity in Vancouver reveal the lack of Black

spaces and geography in the city. Handel Wright, a Sierra Leone native (CBC interviewee), believes that Black identity is embodied differently than in his home country and even in Toronto (Black in Vancouver, Feb 2016). He makes a point of recognizing the effort of nationality-based groups (Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia), but identifies the issue with framing what “pan-Black identity and groupings” (Black in Vancouver, Feb 2016) looks like.

While he does show distaste for the tokenism of Black contributions to one month in February (Black history month), he chooses to remain an active member of such initiatives to engage in such discussions. While many community members would agree that Black history should not be relegated to one month, the need for such celebrations in Vancouver is critical to increasing the vital signs of Black community. It is not only important to explore the distribution and initiatives taking place in the city but also the discourse surrounding Black-focused initiatives throughout CBC’s Black History Month pieces. The comments section at the end of the article reveals in detail how people feel about the revitalization and celebration of blackness in B.C:

How about, just being Canadian, with no hyphen. Being Canadian is a pretty darn good identity. When someone insists on being different, then of course they will be treated differently” (Comment by CeeDeeEnn Feb, 2016)

@CeeDeeEnn Yep. It’s about time to stop perpetuating the myth of different races, and put an end to racism. There is but one human race, and Mr. Wright’s ‘perfunctory nod’ to others he perceives as ‘the same as him, and different from other humans’ simply promotes discrimination and divisiveness (Comment by bikerjon, Feb 2016).

The sooner we ALL just try to be Canadians the sooner we will get rid of racism (Comment by 2Right4U Feb, 2016).

My first reaction to this is why do you need to have a pan Black community? You are Canadian first. I am of Scottish descent. I don’t go looking for people of Scottish descent who come from the Highlands so that I can build a relationship with them. I am Canadian period (Comment by ktkat1949, Feb, 2016).

Who cares about the colour of a person’s skin, sounds like thinly veiled racism to me, we might be white but we all running around joining a white man’s club, we are too busy just being unified and overlooking anything like skin colour (Comment by joe Canada, Feb 2016)

When approaching the conversation of blackness and Black identity in Vancouver, there is a tension when addressing immigration and difference. What we see is a clear distinction of what types of diversification is accepted within the confines of nationalism. Commenter *CeeDeeEnn* articulates the sentiments of most commenters expressing the obligation of being Canadian and the civic duty of being nothing else. Black people and even immigrants are not given the permission to be racially conscious and relish in their interculturalism but rather are condemned to feeling othered at the periphery of the Vancouver community. Commenters give room for self-expression as long as it adheres and embodies imagined Canadian standards.

Many alluded to the need to just be Canadian but offer no practical means of portrayal. In this context, one needs to ask the question of what it means to be Canadian and second, one needs to analyze the historic immigration policies that have made Canada the nation state it is today. The purpose of such initiatives is not to erase Canadian identity but rather celebrate every facet of what it means to be Canadian. White's (2008) conversation with TC Vakaloma, a resident of Salt Spring since 1976, speaks to importance of a direct, assertive and ultimately celebrated Black identity and history:

People are more likely to ask me about my Black heritage here whereas in Vancouver my being Black is politely ignored at best (White, p. 89).

The celebration of ethnic diversity is rarely visibly practiced amongst the Black community in Vancouver. This is not to argue that there is no visible Black presence but to prove that it is often pushed into the private sphere. The celebration of blackness is often domesticated, stripping it of its visibility to the public sphere. Handel Wright's inability to recognize the programs being initiated and promoted by the Black community in Vancouver is not telling of his failure to share spaces with other ethnicities (as suggested in the comments) but speaks to his inability to recognize spaces of Black recognition, congregation and celebration in the public sphere (CBC). Many participants have noticed the lack of Black representation in Vancouver. It does not mean that Black people or immigrants are not accepting of Canadian identity, but rather are looking for recognition of this cultural mixture in Metro Vancouver.

The invisibility of the Black community should not be a discouragement, but rather a motivation and inspiration to encouraged and create open and safe spaces for

members of the community to experience acceptance. The importance of seeing positive Black representation in an almost invisible community triggers motivation and offers self-revitalization. Offering support to local community and engagement projects, speaking out about racial discrimination and acknowledging one another are direct and forceful actions to be taken. Handel Wright labels this as the perfunctory nod:

That nod simply says ... I see you, I acknowledge your presence, I recognize you as someone similar to me..."We might not have exactly the same history, but I see you. And you nod back and say, I see you too (Black in Vancouver Feb 2016, Para 5-6).

There is a dearth of local Caribbean literature in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia. Black people makeup 1.2% of the population while West Indians and the larger Afro-Caribbean make up less than that (Vancouver Census, 2016). The reason for the lack of historical literature could be attributed to the small Caribbean population however, this does attest to the need for more writers to be fostered and supported in the community. Over the past twenty years there has been a range of scholarship and studies encompassing the displacement of Strathcona's Black community and the present-day effects of this residential erasure that ripple through the fabrics of Vancouver's Black community. The importance of oral history is critical to understanding how Black spaces are negotiated within Vancouver. Compton (2011) offers detailed insight into the procurement of top-down redevelopment and restructuring of Vancouver's east end that caused a sweeping erasure of Black businesses, real estate and community in the early nineteen-fifties.

Discussions of space and city planning often look past the impact the Georgia viaduct had on the Black community only reveling in its incompleteness, without recognition of the strategic bylaws and structures put in place at the expense of the Hogan's Alley community. Though parts of the city were saved from deconstruction, Hogan's Alley was sacrificed without recognition or reparation. The viaducts were a part of an urban revision plan that evolved into phases of "slum clear[ing]" initiatives (Compton, p. 89) which defined the bylaws and rhetoric surrounding the "blight" of the city (p. 91). Bylaw zone planning of 1931 changed the landscape of this community, causing many to feel outside pressures of bullying and displacement. Hogan's Alley was marked as an industrial area rather than residential, causing great deals of lending and real estate exclusion. Homeowners who lived in the community were denied capital from lending



institutions and were not permitted to purchase homes. Shortly thereafter, newspaper outlets (Vancouver Province) began representing the neighbourhood as a slum ridden with “squalors, immorality and crime” (p. 92) rather than the community of honest labourers, porters, church goers and business owners. Leonard Marsh, a University of British Columbia professor’s, publication in 1950 gave way to introducing mass changes to cityscapes without the inclusion or consideration to communities residing in areas of redevelopment. Marsh believed in clearing entire low-income neighbourhoods and rebuilding tower-blocks for displaced residents, stripping community of social support and structures:

Where the previous neighbourhoods had had social networks and community-created methods of coping with poverty, the apartment projects were alienating. These bleak tower blocks resisted improvement and renovation and became vertices of urban despair rather than the utopian answers to poverty (Compton 2011, p. 94).

A combined effort spearheaded by the Non-Partisan Association and Marsh (based on his report) developed a covert plan together with UBC to begin suspicious improvements in an obscure letter to the residents, with no mention to the already approved viaduct project. It was not until 1967 that true intentions were revealed and created public backlash. In the midst of public outcry, NPA along with Vancouver Mayor, Tom Campbell, had already begun the process of expropriation, property owners on the western end of Hogan’s Alley were compensated and first phases of demolition went underway while the community slowly dissipated. After enough public outrage, the project was terminated, leaving only the viaducts and the stories of former residents to confirm the abhorrent history of structural and strategic displacement. Though Strathcona marks the movement of grassroots rebellion and anti-gentrification, it also came with a price that affects how space and community is negotiated in the city amongst Afro-Caribbean residents and the larger African diaspora. The power of acknowledgment is extremely important that it makes the invisible, visible and fosters aspects of a community that is independent of space. Issues surrounding Black spaces in Vancouver provide a direct correlation to sentiments of invisibility and lack of community.



**Figure 4. Construction of Georgia viaduct (1971), Vancouver Heritage Foundation**

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To procure a tangible history of Caribbean cultural identity in Vancouver, the Black diaspora confirms the need for such emphasis and its ability to revitalize Black and Caribbean identities. The Black Strathcona Project, founded in 2014, produced an online archive of the once thriving Black community in Vancouver's east side. The project documents sixty years of Black migration to the island and the lower mainland up until the last community to relocate in 1990 (Black Strathcona 2014). The project uses a number of interactive artworks including downloadable applications, to give the experience of a fascinating historical fusion (The Georgia Straight, March 5, 2014). The project focuses on the historical displacement of marginalized communities in Vancouver who were removed to make way for the Georgia Viaduct. Amongst its casualties, was the thriving Black community, once one of the most vital African-Canadian neighbourhood in Western Canada.

The Black Strathcona Project expanded to commemorate the contribution of African-Canadians and to memorialize their place in the history of Vancouver. While there is an emphasis on artistic works in this project, the webpage offers up a library of oral histories presented and narrated by community members and allies. The use of narrative is not unintentional, in that it affords a sense of strength and connection to the

community that has been stripped of its place. The story of gentrification and displacement in Strathcona is one of considerable struggle and marginalization, but narrative brings authority and hope. The need for the Black Strathcona Project in Vancouver is critical in enhancing any form of Caribbean collective narrative. The project helps to create the foundation necessary for Caribbean communities to offer their narrative as a critical resource in the initiative to enhance visibility, solidify community, and assert cultural identity.



**Figure 5. Hogan's Alley Protest June 2020**  
Photographed by Nyamcah Lewis, Dunsmuir and Georgia Viaduct. 2020 Permission granted by Photographer

The effects of the removal of the Hogan's Alley block in the sixties speaks to the current climate surrounding Black Vancouver identity. The invisibility and disbursement of the larger community is a product of this removal. Though stories of this community have been circulated amongst activists and organizations, the ramifications of displacement pose issues to the survival of this community. The disbursement of Hogan's Alley residents continued onward into the latter half of the nineties and created a new normal for Black Vancouverites. A tangible sense of community visibility has been removed with little remnants of Black history or cultural identity to reference. Without the use of oral history, the story and injustices acted out against this community would

dissipate and be forgotten. Tracing narrative offers a form of reconciliation and preservation of ethnic histories and experiences. The recovery of these stories help rebalance power relations to understand and promote expressive forms of knowledge production. Though historical recognition of British Columbia's Black population has been documented as early as the 1800s, their story and experience have yet been given the recognition deserved for their contribution and sacrifice.

## **Chapter 3.**

# **Theoretical and Methodological Considerations**

### **3.1. Methodology**

The range of literature considered in this chapter emphasizes the importance of narrative inquiry as a method of examining life experiences. For the purpose of filling a historical gap in Caribbean migration, a number of studies point to the role of narrative. Waller et al. (2016) suggests storytelling as a research strategy for the purpose of exploring issues of identity that locate the individual story in a broader socio-cultural perspective (p. 145). The most productive approaches to narrative inquiry that will be discussed in this research include: life history, personal narratives and autoethnography (p. 145). Though there is some debate regarding the similarity or difference between each approach, distinguishing each proves beneficial to this analysis. Life history is used to distinguish a person's story and point to the social and historical contexts that shaped both the life experiences and the stories told. Personal narratives, by contrast, focus on the textual structure of the text and its meaning. For the purpose of encouraging discourse surrounding Caribbean migration, our primary aim is to concern ourselves with the untold story from the experience of Caribbean Vancouverites. The structure and meaning of accounts will reference broader cultural narratives.

Autoethnography will also be explored as a means of encountering and analyzing narrative. In particular, autoethnography acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on research rather than adhering to traditional research standards of objectivity. This approach will serve to develop unique insight into the topic of discussion (being a member of the Caribbean diaspora) and speak to potential benefits for critical analysis. A combination of all three approaches provides space for robust analysis and critical inquiry.

I focused on four central guiding questions to ground my research: 1) What are the realities and outcomes that Caribbean immigrants have encountered migrating to Vancouver, 2) How are immigrant experiences related to current and past immigration policies in place (where is/what is the correlation), 3) Who migrated to Vancouver, from which country/class/socioeconomic statuses, and why? 4) What is the importance of

culture, community and connection for Caribbean migrants? Qualitative approaches are numerous and varied, and involve a range of methods for obtaining data. This analysis borrows from Waller et al. (2016) and Glesne (2011) and both point to qualitative narrative inquiry that consists of: personal narrative, observation, life history and autoethnography

The methodology in this research uses “homogenous sampling”. Glesne (2014) defines homogenous sampling as the selection of similar cases in order to describe a particular subgroup with the purpose of acquiring an in-depth understanding of the topic in question (Glesne 2014, p. 45). I focused on Caribbean people living in Vancouver (and surrounding areas) who have migrated between 1965 and 1995. I chose to concentrate my research on this select group to gain a better understanding of their life story within the group of research participants. Though I initially focused on West Indian populations, I was also granted access to two participants of Haitian origin, broadening my scope to include the larger Caribbean. By examining their accounts, I was able to apply findings to a broader collective analysis that magnifies their relationships over time and across different spaces and cultural contexts.

### **3.2. Interviews: Collaborative Life Experience Narratives and Discussion**

There are five steps that constitute the foundation for analysis of the narratives collected. First, audio-recorded interviews with participants were transcribed. Second, if the participant was not comfortable with details narrated, those details were redacted. Third, journaling was essential to record thoughts and conduct the analysis. Fourth, once transcription and journal notes were complete, an open coding process was applied to the data collected. Fifth, detailed summaries of each participant’s story were completed. The analysis of these codes was refined to thematic analysis and involved determining themes and patterns (Glesne 2011). As Waller et al. (2016) state, both thematic and discourse analysis go through the process of grouping similar codes to gradually refine findings to a more “manageable and illuminating set” (p. 165). Thematic codes were defined by referencing narrative content to analytical models from the critical and methodological literature (discussed previously).

### 3.3. Exploring Narrative: Narrative Inquiry

The multidisciplinary nature of narrative inquiry challenges traditional assumptions of a singular truth or experience amongst populations. Morgan-Fleming, Riegle et al. (2007) define fundamental guidelines to embarking on narrative analysis and deconstruct the use of narrative inquiry in archival work. Narrative inquiry places strong emphasis on the ideas related to uncovering the multiple stories of the past that have long been silenced:

It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (Clandinin and Connelly (2000), p. 2).

In this instance, we must recognize that the past has many versions that may have not been answered or deemed as important, therefore:

When studying the past, we must still ask the following questions: 'Whose story is it? Who authored this tale? Whose voices were included? Whose voices were silenced? As our attention is called to one facet of an event, what aspects are nudged into shadow?' As lives are synthesized, conclusions about what is important and what is equivalent are made. The life of the author filters the experiences of the other, leaving us with one hegemonic tale instead of a symphony of lives. Archived data allows access to the differentiated particular, helping us to understand the complexities of the past (p. 2).

Though there is often a traditional need to synthesize the complexities of the past, narrative offers individuals the opportunity to tell their own understanding of the past and provide a robust compilation of their own recollection. This power and authority to rewrite and contribute to the fabrics of their history can be a powerful gesture for the communities and groups who have become dispersed and invisible in larger context.

It is critical to delineate the differences between narrative inquiry and positivist research approaches (taken from Morgan-Fleming, Riegle et al.). The use of archival materials to tell the story of the past can have a negative impact because it does not compound the narrative accounts or question the extent in understanding cultural

identity or agency. The aim of narrative inquiry is to preserve specific details and the individual experience, illustrating a multifaceted and complex view of the past.

**Table 1. Barbara Morgan-Fleming, Sandra Riegler & Wesley Fryer 2007**

Positivist Research	Narrative Inquiry
Generalization, distillation	Understand the particular
Findings	Meanings
Single voice	Multiple voices
Discard "outliers"	Maintain distinctions

Narrative inquiry may lessen the distance between social science and art towards a more integrated and adequate form of studying human experience. The importance of grounding research in narrative inquiry ensures historical consideration of the emergence of structural functionalism in archival data collection techniques. The paradigm in social sciences to approach topics on an objective framework lacks a consideration of the agency of the individual. In other words, certain trajectories of social scientific inquiry and analysis into narrative can exclude or "overstep" the individuals who actually tell stories and who are the source of the narrative.

Narrative research provides a means to conduct microlevel analysis; and microlevel analysis is useful for identifying and challenging power inequities and imposed, dominant representations. Historians also agree that this holds true when discussing the history of marginalized groups who are not deemed cultivators or co-contributors to their own history. There was an overall shift in reconsideration of structuralism and the effects this system had on the history of marginalized communities. According to Morgan-Fleming et al. (2007) Historians became responsible for characterizing the structures created by forces from both the political and the social. Narrative researchers grew concern with institutional authority and became hypercritical regarding the role of authority and its need to be addressed within narrative inquiry. She states that:



By using narrative, the researcher is tacitly questioning the legitimate authority of macrolevel history. The researcher's skepticism of histories offered in macrolevel analysis underscores a certain power to question that which is said to be true; that inherited authority and power, the researcher suggests, is institutional. Narrative research thus addresses identity politics, at least insofar as it offers an account of individual(s) who in effect (and in part) fill the gap where the authority of macrolevel analysis had been" (Clandinin, p. 6).

Inherited authority and power becomes an underlying but forceful skepticism posed by researchers, interested in seeking the illustrative considerations (identity/belonging) amongst people regarding history which tactically fights between macro and micro levels of understanding the historical factors that shape human experience. The shift to current functions of narrative research, offers a variety of frameworks used to understand how history is able to individualize lived accounts rather than to depend on a hierarchical dissemination of information which serves to diversify historical accounts with better understanding of human experience. Postmodern understanding of historical methodology proves pertinent to reasons why narrative research is a transformative practice of reintroducing the histories of the forgotten. Through narrative accounts, we are able to recognize the true value of the individual. This recognition fosters a reconsideration of the extent to which ideas and/or structures have influenced knowing and becoming.

The moral decision making required when conducting research in communities of colour requires an understanding of two concepts: phronesis and goodness-of fit. In order to guide my approach as a researcher, the application of both transformed my apprehension into a knowledgeable approach when conducting academic qualitative work in communities of colour. The application of both contributed substantially and productively to the qualitative research conducted in this thesis. Because of the inherent distrust in minority communities surrounding research initiatives, I relied upon both concepts to alleviate my own concern as a researcher and that of Caribbean participants, building trust and renegotiating power imbalances. When conducting research in minority communities, researcher positionality will reveal barriers and opportunities as a member of the population of interest. As an insider and outsider, being cognizant of how my access may promote or hinder research was critical when canvassing potential participants. When applying phronesis, it is a recognition of this power dynamic and acknowledging our positionality.

The principle for conducting research must promote a level of transparency that lowers the barriers of distrust. Intentions and motivations must be clearly defined in order to build credibility with participants. Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that social scientists are required to question the values of power through exercising critical judgement. Drawing on Aristotle's work, Flyvbjerg develops phronesis to account for the social and historical contexts to be considered when studying a phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The application of "situational ethics" (p. 114) takes account for who loses and who gains when a such phenomenon is studied:

Phronesis requires acumen from the researcher to understand the complexities of human conduct; to identify power relations and the different dimensions and biases that shape the research ... and to respond appropriately and swiftly to events in the field (p. 114).

Researchers are required to understand complexities, especially when studying minority communities and issues of power. These real-life ethical dilemmas require critical evaluations of situations that are not standardized or site-specific. Phronesis relies on the capacity of the researcher and their ability to negotiate and evaluate, combining traditional research ethics with the practical consideration of their target population. Too often, research in minority communities feels impersonal, similar to a transactional relationship which reflects negatively on the research and the researcher. Potential participants need the opportunity to see the intent clearly before they give their approval. On both sides, the success and validity of the project balances on a scale of trust that is often renegotiated and tested throughout the collection process. As other researchers have voiced, Das and McAreavey (2013) have noted in their evaluation of phronesis, personal disclosure may aid as a catalyst of trust building, offering participants to share their personal information in confidence, without the fear it may be misused or abused (p. 118). In introducing this project, personal disclosure is imperative to my intent. Though I was open to share my experiences, I ensure the focus remains on the participant—as it is their record to be honoured and kept.

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<sup>5</sup> Phronesis was used as a technique to understand researcher positionality and inherent power imbalances that needed to be addressed throughout interview process as a researcher of Caribbean descent.

The “goodness-of-fit” process is an important decision-making tool that helped my battle with ethical challenges. Fisher and Goodman (2009) identify how the process minimizes risk and offers an alternative approach to exploratory qualitative research:

Goodness-of-fit ethics conceptualize research vulnerability as the joint product of participant characteristics and the research context...Harms produced by participant-research interactions can be minimized by fitting ethical procedures to participant susceptibility to or resilience against research harms.

There are simultaneously at play both research ethics and ethics related to the priorities, values, and concerns of participants, and as Das and McAreavey point out, researchers need to “fit research methods and ethical procedures to the needs and values of the participant population” (Fisher and Goodman, p. 27). It is imperative that the researcher recognize the importance of the participant and afford the participant the space to be heard, acknowledged and validated. Both researchers and participants are equally important with different areas of expertise.

### **3.4. Outsider Within: Theoretical Considerations**

*Qualitative methodologies demand the involvement of the self in research projects. In trying to disrupt the false dichotomy between the researcher and the participant, the researchers were not detached and objective, indeed, we were embedded in the subjective process as much as we were committed to the individuals being researched (Gooden and Hackett 2012, p. 296).*

As a researcher of Caribbean descent, this offers a unique perspective that engages researcher reflexivity in order to uncover the complexities, positionality and epistemology worthy of analysis. The application of traditional methodology approval of objectivity proves problematic within research that the researcher belongs to the community being researched. As an insider/outsider, we are able to understand the complexities of such positions and consideration of power relations in real time. Gooden and Hackett (2012) discuss the challenges researchers face when they (un)intentionally disrupt traditional western methodology. They approach their technique by questioning inherent research traditions and question their own positions. Hill Collins’ (1986,1990) concept of outsider within serves to:

Critically reflect on the process of designing and undertaking qualitative research. It allowed...researchers to raise theoretical and methodological

concerns about traditional research even as it confirmed...situational nature of identity, which allows individuals [researchers] to shift between locations (Gooden and Hackett, p. 286).

Questioning these traditions as researchers who identify as a part the target population uncovers subjectivities that can alter positionality, whether by questioning privilege or fluidity of shifting perspectives (researcher/community members). This shifting is explained as one of the many by-products of conducting research within their communities:

We often moved back and forth between our research role and our subjectivity as we connected with the narratives of our subjects. We acknowledged that our 'outsider within' status came about, or was evoked in part, due to the subject of study as well as the participants under study (p. 286).

In order to conduct dynamic critical analysis, it is important to reflect on the way knowledge is constructed during the research process and how they are impacted and influenced by researcher experiences. The balancing of this power dynamic should be recognized as a privilege and honoured while accepting the opportunity to expand scholarship. Understanding that an intersectional approach must be applied when conducting research within Afro-Caribbean communities provides a greater responsibility and commitment to exploring more appropriate methodologies. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure positionality is clearly defined in order to ensure participants are treated as experts of their own narrative and remain at the center of the work. Due to traditional theoretical framework, the application of this theory allows for "multiple truths" (p. 296) to exist within a community that is rarely offered the opportunity and space to share their experiences.

### **3.5. Race Matters**

As an Afro-Caribbean researcher interested in examining the role of narrative amongst Afro-Caribbean Canadians, it is important to consider the impact of racialization by applying critical race theory and critical hope theory. James' (2009) analysis explores the social and economic realities of English-speaking Caribbean Canadians and recognizes the function that race serves as an obstacle to upward mobility (p. 93). He explains purpose of critical race theory and states:

Critical race theory calls attention to the relevance of, and the circumstances and cultural contexts, by which race is made consequential in individuals' interactions and experiences. It makes explicit the role that liberal ideological constructs such as democracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, multiculturalism, equal opportunity, and meritocracy play in maintaining and perpetuating racism within and across institutions, communities, and society (Taylor 1998; Stanley 2006).

He calls into questions the normalization of systemic racism and how its subtleties manifest throughout employment, housing and education (p. 93). These lived realities impact Caribbean people as a harsh reality that spews disdain and rejection solely based on colour. Moving from predominant class-based discrimination in the Caribbean to racial discrimination is a reality that immigrants experience regardless of their socioeconomic class. Participants who experienced discrimination are experiencing a larger system of oppression and anti-black racism. Contrastingly, critical hope theory identifies possibility:

Hope provides individuals, in this case, African-Caribbean Canadians, with what Paulo Freire (1994) describes as a "possible dream" or "strategic dream" that can counter despair. According to bell hooks (1999), hope is a life force that can help sustain those living in a world of pain by pulling them back from the "edge of despair" (9; also hooks 1995/2004). Freire (8) also refers to hope as a "concrete imperative," a necessary life force without which people succumb to paralyzing hopelessness and pessimism. And as Marcel (1962, 11) declares, hope is like spiritual oxygen or nutrition without which the human soul "dries and withers." Connected to hope is a conviction that the future holds possibilities for better circumstances, and to this end, individuals learn to juggle hope and despair (James, p.94).

Access to a future with different outcomes pacifies the realities of being racialized in Canada and accounts for agency and hope. This balance both shapes the experiences of Caribbean Canadians that have the ability to exist through multiple frameworks and opportunities for strategic decision making. Succumbing to despair is seldom an option for people of Caribbean origin as their appetite for risk/change fuels their aspirations for themselves and their families.

Applying critical race theory when analyzing anti-black racism serves to frame discussions of counterstorytelling by centering the voices of those who have been pushed to the margins. Identifying anti-blackness denotes reimagining of blackness beyond the scope of subjugation and enslavement. Bryan (2020) stresses the

importance of making a distinction between race, racism and anti-blackness and explains:

Anti-blackness is not simply racism against Black people. Rather, anti-blackness refers to a broader antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity. The concept is most developed in an intellectual project called Afro-pessimism (although not everyone who writes in, or in relation to, this project would define themselves as Afropessimists). Afro-pessimism posits that Black people exist in the social imagination as (still) Slave, a thing to be possessed as property, and therefore with little right to live for herself, to move and breathe for himself. (Bryan, p. 13)

Identifying anti-blackness, provides a framework for understanding how Black people are thought of as property and subjection rather than their humanity. Making a clear distinction between who is deemed worthy of basic human rights and who is not. Framing our understanding of anti-black racism around critical race theory provides researchers (especially those of colour) to effectively challenge dominant ideologies and narratives surrounding the Black diaspora in particular and permits for their voices to be re-centered and spotlighted through counterstorytelling.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to recognize a power imbalance and to adjust that balance. Researchers must be ethically responsible and must also be mindful of how research may be perceived. It is imperative that this project be not only validated academically, but must be validated by the Caribbean community as it their stories that we begin to bridge a long-standing gap between the academic and the Caribbean community of the Greater Vancouver Area. A work such as this must be validated not only in terms of scholarly research, but also in terms of the community of participants.

## Chapter 4.

### Thematic Autobiographical Sketches

The following chapter will include the autobiographical sketches of eight interviewed participants. For the purpose of anonymity, names of all participants have been changed to pseudonyms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to highlight the realities and outcomes faced by the participants when they immigrated to Vancouver. This is not an complete overview of their lives but a representation of their own struggles in forceful and powerful narrative form. Each sketch will provide a brief life story but should not be regarded as a full and robust composition of their history. Though details are captured regarding their history, this section will primarily focus on themes that have emerged in each interview that serve to provide emphasis to their narrative. Every participant highlights different moments that have shaped their identities. Each participant will have a dedicated section within the chapter where we engage with their story and how these stories summarize and represent the struggles of immigrant experiences.

#### 4.1. “These things stick”: Hardship, Resistance and Resilience

Pauline was born and raised in Saint Simons, Barbados in the winter of 1941. She went on to explain her early childhood as a young girl who grew up with both of her parents, her father a teacher and her mother, a seamstress but had a special bond with her great grandmother and great granduncle. Though her childhood was difficult, she always knew she was different from her other siblings. She recognized that she was accustomed to being alone as she was hospitalized at an early age and had grown accustomed to isolation and independence:

That stems from being hospitalized for...months when I was about 18 months. And um I just keep people at a distance, a lot of people don't understand that. You know growing up, and that's why...when you went to hospital as a child parents were only allowed to visit at weekends. It's not like here where you could be with your parents... I guess that is part of it... in the hospitals at that time in the forties.

After attending high school, Pauline began teaching but despised the profession. She decided to migrate to England to pursue nursing in 1963. In June of 1963, she enrolled as a nursing assistant, completed her two-year program and began looking for employment at the general hospitals in the surrounding area. It was her impression that “they’d [met] their immigrant quota...Black people” and did not want to hire people who looked like her. She decided to continue her studies as a mental health nurse in Surrey and here she encountered a first instance of blatant discrimination in her encounter with Mr. Dicker:

We had to do an exam and my first encounter with the chief...Mr. Dicker. He was in charge of the studies...he was a tutor, chief tutor. And he sat with me to do this test and I know me, I know what I’m capable of, what I have done and when I went back to the chief nursing officer I think it was, he says that I didn’t pass the test! And I said, “no no no no, I don’t believe that!” and we sat down and we talked and talked and talked and I said, “For the sake of it, can you get another tutor to sit with me and let me do...I don’t necessarily have to do the same test, I could do another one. And he did and just one thing I think I got 98 out of 100 the second time. So, I said to Mr. Dalton, I knew that I was not that dumb. And we had a conversation there and he told me that I could start.

This instance would set the tone for her future experiences within the nursing field in England and later in Canada. The stigma and discrimination against Caribbean immigrants paints a bleak picture of one of the many obstacles she has had to face while trying to gain certifications and economic independence. She also remembers those who were supportive:

Since then, Mr. Owens and I would work together. Mr. Dicker was very racist... Mr. Owen’s was a human being, I’ll never forget him. During my training, it was supposed to be a three-year course. And then at the ending of that, you had to sit an exam, they used to call it prelims. And there were six of us in that class and I was the only Black. There was a South African, a New Zealander, two Irish, one girl from the Netherlands...and myself...Oh Mr. Dicker gave me nothing but hell. This South African fellow, he was very insulting and Mr. Dicker would encourage him to insult me and things like that. And I just said to him one day, “I’m here to do a course, to look after my patients, and ignore people like you. And before the exam...the only thing Mr. Dicker didn’t tell me was who my mother was... He turned around and says “and you are not going to pass your exam!” And I said to him, I’m going to make you eat your words. Mr. Owens used to sit in the back of the class and he says, “Don’t worry ‘bout that Pauline, I know when you say you gon’ make him eat his words, you gon’ make him eat his words.



While studying to complete her final exams as a mental health nurse in 1967, she discovered she was five months pregnant and was no longer able to continue her studies. She applied and interviewed for multiple positions but was turned down as she had a child. She realized that her having a child was frowned upon and chose to conceal this fact until after she was hired for a nursing position.

In 1969, she passed her exam and continued working until 1974 when her sister Talia sponsored her to Canada. She landed in Toronto and speaks of her regret as she was not accepted to work in her field as a nurse. She explains that she signed her landing papers without reading the fine print which stated that she may only work as a health care worker rather than in nursing but did not realize this oversight until years later. Time after time, she was denied and told that she would need to redo her training in Canada regardless of the qualification she had accumulated over the years in England. She continued to apply for jobs across Canada while working for a staffing agency when she received a phone call that changed the course of her career:

I was staying with my brother...and a cousin of ours, who's here [in Vancouver], he happened to call my brother and that time. He hadn't spoken to my brother at that time in years! And he called, I answered the phone, he says "Pauline what are you doing here?" We got to talking, he said "Oh they...looking for nurses out here." He gave me a number and I called as soon as I hang up. And they sent me some forms...and the next thing I know, I was out here...June '74.

While she did gain employment in a Vancouver hospital, Pauline had to endure discrimination and continuous microaggressions in order to ensure she and her daughter were financially secure. She recalls another instance of prejudice she experienced on her first afternoon shift at work:

It was Roblin, and Margaret and Harms and myself. We came on duty at 3 o'clock [and] went for break at 5:30 and she's talking about Black lazy immigrants... and apparently, she was doing medications and she's talking their... "them Black lazy immigrants" and I said to her, "what are you talking about?" So, I said to her, "who are you talking about?" and she said, "oh them Black lazy immigrants that the government is bringing in here...and taking Canadian jobs" all of this good stuff and I said to her, "can I ask you a question? Were you born here?" "What have you done since you came on duty?" ...I can't remember what happened because I was going to scramble her! And I can remember Roblin and Margaret saying, "please don't do that...don't put your job in jeopardy for an idiot like that." And I got up and started to walk and I never sat back to have coffee with any one of them.

Having to endure relentless hardship, Pauline projects a raw and unfiltered understanding of immigrant life. The negotiations she has had to make to gain upward mobility for herself and her family speak to her bold reality as an Afro-Caribbean woman. Her hardships have defined how she identifies with her Barbadian heritage and continues to serve as a foundation for overcoming obstacles.

## 4.2. Maureen – Tangible Connections

I couldn't even buy nothing, bring up anything with me that's unique from the house too much because, I just put a few stuff in because I didn't have time. And then the next day, here comes the guy, saying to me that "you guys got to be at the airport tomorrow by four o'clock." So, I couldn't get anything!

Maureen's departure from St. Thomas, Jamaica was abrupt. Maureen and her children left Jamaica to reunite with her mother in Vancouver after she was hit by a car and needed care. After being raised by her grandparents while her mother worked abroad, Maureen rushed to make necessary preparations for her children and her grandmother. She had little time to collect valuable belongings or make long term arrangements for her grandmother's care. A physical representation of home was left behind as she and her family departed for Vancouver. Shortly after her arrival on November 8<sup>th</sup> of 1974, Maureen began working at a nursing home and quickly took on two additional positions in hospitals. While working in long term care homes, Maureen witnessed instances of discrimination and details her experience with a resident in her care:

One morning, I was there and I went in to [change] him and he lie there and I'm talking to him. He looked at me and said "Oh you little Black bitch!" He kicked liked this, and you know I had the cupboard opened, good thing the cupboard was opened because I was about to take his clothes out and he just kicked me, one kick right into the cupboard and said "Oh you people should get out of here!" Oh yes, you think it's little things you go through with them?

She assures that working within long term care homes did not only imply "little things" but also blatant acts of discrimination because she was a Black woman. While she was able to gain employment at several facilities across Vancouver, instances of racism and discrimination were constant and frequent. Though she admits that it was difficult, she was still able to provide for her three children:

It was never easy, but looking back at it. I don't regret doing it because, at least...I don't turn out to be a millionaire but as far as I'm concerned, I'm okay and I'm still alive. My kids, they've grown up and got married and now I have three grandchildren.

She notes that through her mother, she was able to make connections to different Caribbean Vancouverites but that they rarely get to connect with one another since they have moved outside of Vancouver:

I think I went to a funeral, a wedding or a funeral. That's where you meet everybody. Other than that, you see no one. We used to have, in June, we do have the Trinidadian picnic. Then you'll see quite a few people. And then in August, we always have the Jamaican one in Surrey, where you used to see a lot of people but I don't even know if it's going on still. Then we used to have the banquet. We used to have the St. Vincent banquet, we have the Jamaican banquet, you have the Antiguan banquet. So, everybody always go to those banquets for support. But all of a sudden, that stop! And then Mel always have New Year's Eve, and now that's where everyone goes and that's the time you'll meet everybody. Once the New Year's Eve is over, you see nobody again. Because people want me to move to Surrey because they don't want to drive this way [Vancouver]. And who live here, don't want to drive out there. So, you know, you kind of scatter...Isolated away from everybody. But still, we try to live [laughter]. We meet up with people once in a while, that's how it is.

The reality of maintaining connections with friends proves to be more challenging than in earlier years. The decline in community engagement brings forward sentiments of isolation as events and gatherings are less frequent. Since friends and family have moved out of Vancouver and into surrounding areas, community and belonging are challenging to achieve. She recognizes that the nature of gatherings has shifted from weddings to mostly funerals. After decades of hard work and dedication to family, education and career, Maureen wishes that there were more robust and frequent community connections.

### **4.3. Peter - “We work twice as hard”: Culture and Education**

Peter was born in 1956 in Haiti. He is one of four siblings and began travelling at an early age of five years old. Peter's father was a doctor and in the mid-fifties, Peter's father decided to apply for positions away from Haiti at the beginning of political totalitarianism. In the early sixties, the United Nations had began recruiting professionals by the hundreds to help develop infrastructure within newly independent countries in

Africa. Peter's father was accepted for a posting in Congo. After two years, Peter joined his family in 1962 in Bukavu, Congo. His father's two-year contract extended into a thirty-year career within the World Health Organization, accepting increasingly important roles across the continent.

Peter attended boarding school in France and in 1972, he and his family arrived in Montreal. He sparked a love for the city, different from his experience in Quebec:

In Quebec, people always tell you about the history of the *pure laine*, francophone Quebecois. My accent is totally French accent and when I open my mouth "where are you from?" you know. "Maudit francais"... So even in my school, I always had issues explained, you know, so here, everybody else is from somewhere else in 82! So, to me that was a big factor. I felt immediately at home, because everybody else was like me! Everybody was from somewhere else.

Peter found his place in B.C. and he did not experience the difficulty in explaining his heritage or feel othered. He felt a sense of belonging that was fostered through space, language and culture. Peter started a French language program on Vancouver Co-Op radio in 1982 and made the decision to leave the PhD program at UBC to pursue a career in teaching. With his certification in teaching and education in French literature, Peter was hired at a technical high school in 1992 and became the head of the department responsible for growing the program.

After accepting another position at a secondary school as a district consultant, he was offered Vice-Principal position at a high school in Vancouver, retiring in 2011. His work ethic and advancement into increasingly important roles demonstrated that his academic and professional achievements did not come without the pressure of excellence solely based on his skin colour:

The VSB has been a wonderful employer for twenty years but I know that early in my career, I had to work twice as hard because I was Black. All eyes were on me, you know "how is he going to handle all those white kids" and you know, I was very careful. It's a very visible profession. So, I was able to navigate through all these things and rise through the ranks. Becoming a department head in two secondary schools, a district consultant—I had been visiting every school in the district. Became a vice-principal, dealing with very sensitive issues, with families, with the police and so to me it's been a really good career but I also worked really hard.

Though he experienced instances where his race affected people's perception of his capacity to perform professionally, the opportunity allowed for him to be one of the first Black vice-principals in the VSB. Peter's connection to the French language provided a gateway for him to share cultural experiences with his students and his peers. Peter found space where he was able to connect with his culture and community by cherishing and celebrating his love for his native tongue. He states:

What drew me to becoming a French immersion teacher though, in addition to the advantages which I mentioned was the fact that I could work in my language. I was always very attached to speaking French. And Diana, my second wife, we speak French at home. And also, this was a job that had a lot of meaning, being a teacher was an amazing job. Especially if you do it well. I could not only speak French, I could also share my culture with the kids.

Through French culture and education, Peter found a balance in navigating his cultural experience as a Haitian who was not raised in Haiti. His attachment to speaking and teaching French can be understood as a deliberate form of activism. The importance of French served as an outlet of expressing appreciation and promoting visibility. His hard work and contribution to the VSB is expressed through his commitment to his culture and education.

#### **4.4. Cathy: "I'm here but, I'm everywhere": Family and maintaining cultural connections**

Maintaining a close connection to family and Haitian culture has always been celebrated by Cathy, especially in her first recollection of meeting a Haitian family in her neighbourhood. She states:

I went to look and I heard one of the little girls speaking French. And they were Black! (laughter) I never saw them before so they told me they just moved there and it's the stuff that they move, they wanna sell. And I asked her, "is your mom Haitian?" She said, "Yes!" and she called her mom. Her mom came out and we became friends since.

Over the course of several moves across Canada, Cathy began building friendships in her community. Cathy was born in Port De Paix, Haiti and was raised in Port Aux Prince. She is the eldest girl in her family and one of five children. At nineteen, Cathy met her husband (Canadian) while attending a training course in Haiti and moved to Sherbrooke, QC at 20. Shortly after her departure in 1978, her mother and siblings also relocated to

Quebec. Because of the nature of her husband's job in telecommunications, Cathy moved across the country and adjusted accordingly. While in Alberta, Cathy attending ESL classes and worked in a hospital cafeteria where she credits the position for helping her learn English:

That's where I learnt my English really. So, they told me, while I'm in there, because I had an assistant medical background, if I got better English, maybe I could find something there.

After working for the hospital for two years, Cathy became pregnant with her first born in 1983 and ended up never pursuing a position at the hospital. This move to remote Cranbrook in the eighties was one of her most challenging times:

We lived in Cranbrook for nine months and I had a little baby. Cranbrooke I was miserable because in five minutes you do all the tour of the mall. Yeah, there wasn't much to do and so anyway, Gregory was about six months old? Seven months old and he [her husband] had a transfer to work here in B.C.

In 1984, Cathy and her family moved to the lower mainland where they settled permanently. She maintained connections with her family and travelled between Montreal, Atlanta and New Jersey. During the summers, she would send her children to Montreal to spend time with their grandmother and cousins. It was important that they maintained a connection to family, culture and the language:

Cathy: I wanted them to speak French. It was important to me because my mom was living in Laval, Quebec then and they would visit her and spend summers with their other cousins. It is amazing that they are so close.

Interviewer: What about foods?

Cathy: Oh yeah! You find mostly all the things here now, you know the plantain. And my kids is creole. I cook for my kids; my kids love the Haitian food. And we get together, and I keep the Haitian tradition even my husband who's Canadian, is in the Haitian tradition. Like the soup we make, Jan 1st, I do that here and I kept all the traditions. My kids know all the traditions. We keep all the traditions and my mom was very good in culture and history. And that's why the kids, I wanted them to speak French and have both of the languages, it was quite an opportunity.

Cathy's recognition of imparting cuisine and traditions onto her children references an active blending of both Haitian and Canadian influences in order to create new connections to her culture that her children are able to understand. The importance of

maintaining ties to family allowed Cathy to instill traditional values in her home and sustain relationships with her siblings no matter the distance. She states:

I talk to my sister two, three times every day [in creole]. When my mom was alive, she woke up in the morning, she called here. Even before she goes to bed, she calls here again. So, I'm here but I'm everywhere.

Though Cathy has lived in Vancouver for 35 years, she remains connected to her family and arranges frequent visits across North America for vacations, holidays and family reunions. In order to ensure familial bonds are preserved, she actively connected to elements of a culture that defined her experience as a Haitian. Her ability to transfer cultural knowledge to her children aided in the preservation of her family, culture and traditions.

#### **4.5. Annabelle: “I just need a better life”: Survival to Success**

After discovering her second pregnancy, Annabelle returned to her grandparents' farm in Cheapside, Manchester. Annabelle was born on February 25th, 1948 and was mostly raised by her grandparents after her parents died in her early teens. Though she attended nursing school in Kingston, Jamaica, once she became pregnant with her first son, her aspirations of continuing nursing slipped further away:

I wanted to go to school and do my nursing career but, you know, there was a stigma behind you having a child already. You should go to some sewing or something and if you have a child in those days, you had no more friends. The family of your friends are gonna say “oh don't be friends with her!”

At 24, she returned to Manchester and was accepted by her grandmother but not her grandfather. She managed to avoid her grandfather while she was pregnant and would rely upon neighbours to notify her once he returned from the farm:

The farm was four miles away, doing his ginger planting and stuff. And I was at the home in the day. As soon as he was coming home, I had a neighbour friend, and he would run come to me and say 'Miss P, Mas John coming!' and I would have to go... Anywhere I could go, down the gully, anywhere. To a friend's house.

Once she gave birth to her second child, Annabelle made the decision to return to Kingston to work. After she married, her husband moved to Vancouver with their children, and Annabelle arrived four months later in the fall of 1990.

After working as a nanny, Annabelle applied for a nursing aid course at Kwantlen College and sat a comprehension test. She received a letter confirming she had passed but was rejected when completing the registration in person:

When I went to register, and they saw me, the lady said it was a mistake [and said] I did not pass it. I tell you, and I don't know who put it in my head, I tell her "I'm going to sue you guys!" and she start looking at me...and she said, good thing they did not call me on the phone and told me I passed, they wrote me so I have the letter. And she said to me, it's a mistake and if I can take the letter to them. I said "do you think I'm that stupid to give away my evidence?"

Annabelle advocated for her acceptance and retained a letter of her acceptance to prove that she was racially profiled. After a month of waiting on a response from the college, Annabelle registered for the nursing aid program. Upon completion, she began working at Surrey Memorial and worked there for nineteen years:

I just put my mind to it and I said I want a better life for me and my children. I don't want them to go through hard life like what I went through. I just need a better life and right now I'm so thankful to all the men who treated me bad...what I went through, it made me a woman!

Her determination to provide better circumstances for her children was her primary motivation that turned her hardships and survival into success. Annabelle's understanding of the difficulties she has had to endure speak to the importance she placed on achieving her goals, regardless of the obstacles that came her way.

#### **4.6. Matthew: Education, Access and Mobility**

Having the ability to move across spaces awarded Matthew with an understanding of how education can determine access. Matthew was born in 1943 in St. George's, Grenada and is one of seven siblings (three sisters and four brothers) and was raised by his grandmother and aunt. After graduating from medical school, Matthew considered England and the U.S. as options to study and practice medicine. With strict immigration policy in England that curbed the influx of immigrants and with concerns over conscription in the U.S. during the Vietnam war, Matthew settled on Canada. He



was accepted into the University of Toronto as well as the University of Alberta but for the following academic year. He returned to Jamaica to work at the hospital after his internship, but received an offer from UBC:

In late June, I guess, I got a long-distance call from someone in Vancouver. I said, "what the...I don't know anyone in Vancouver." Anyway, I answered and the guy said, "This is doctor x, I'm the program director at UBC and somebody has dropped out and we have a Vacancy, are you prepared to come?" I said, "Well yeah, I'm prepared to come but I don't have any Canadian papers" and that sort of thing. He said, "Well why don't you look into this right away and get back to me." So, I, and in those days, it was so simple. Life was really quite simple. I went down to the embassy in Kingston, on Kings Street and um applied for a Canadian Visa and they gave me a form that [I] had to fill out and [they] said, "you need a medical." Well I had never been to the doctor in Jamaica. So, I went back to the doctor's residents at Mona and I said to one of the guys, "I'm supposed to get a medical", he said (*laughter*), "I'll do it." and he just went tick, tick, tick... So, the next day I went back to Kingston with these forms and they stamped my passport and that was it. I was a landed immigrant.

He arrived in Vancouver the first few weeks in July of 1969, in a steady rotation between Vancouver General Hospital, Shaughnessy (now BC Women's) and St. Paul's Hospital. Though he recognizes the ease in which he was able to receive his immigration status, the stigma within the hospital stuck with him. Matthew recalls an incident with a patient that shaped his experience as a resident:

There was a patient on the surgical floor and that floor also had, not just people who had surgery, people who had lung problems and um, there was this guy and he was, obviously with his lung problem, was coughing and spitting into this container, which is fine. I was passing by and I was, as they would say, well dressed as the resident had to be and although we wore our own clothes, we had to wear a white jacket and a name tag. And he said "Boy! Clear this." and handed me this cup of sputum. That hurt. I did take it from him but, I must confess, that was one of the first times in my life...I'm not sure why this sticks with me so much, but it was the first time in my life, up to then and frankly since then, that I felt hurt by a comment that was racially tainted. And I didn't tell anyone because [you] can't be in conflict with a patient.

Though he knows that he was easily recognizable as a doctor on call, the discrimination he experienced from the patient made a lasting and unpleasant impression. Matthew's trajectory of his career path allowed for mobility and access but not without sacrifice. He detailed his understanding of what his dedication and hard work has cost him and still questions whether settling in Vancouver was worth the price:

It's [Vancouver] too far from the Caribbean. I wish that it would be possible to, especially for Mia [wife] and the kids to be able to go there. Whether it's Grenada, whether it's Nassau, whether it's Jamaica. I don't care...to be able to go more frequently than they have. I know this might sound corny, but I do think that to know who you are, to know where you're going, you have to know where you come from. When the kids were younger, [Jessica] used to say that she would like to take the kids to Nassau for a month or two to attend school there. I would say, "that's nonsense, why would you want to do that" but obviously, she's right because my daughter is now becoming very aware of self and, I make no apologies for this, she's taken to read a lot of Black literature. My son and the other daughter try to block any thought of their heritage. She's not being malicious, I guess she sees herself as Canadian citizen and that's all she is, the rest doesn't matter. I think she's wrong but that's what my regret is that I'm not sure that I gave them the proper tools to understand or appreciate why they need to see themselves as Black and what it means.

With opportunity came a continued understanding of how mobility comes with responsibility. Matthew has been able to create opportunity for himself despite limited access because of his dedication to education. His upward mobility has provided a level of privilege that allows him to question what responsibility he has to retain cultural knowledge in his home. Through his success, Matthew has been able to overcome systemic barriers that could have changed the course of his life were it not for education.

#### **4.7. Janet and Greg: "Appreciating our own culture": Education, Culture and Community**

After attending university and working in Manitoba, Janet and Greg returned to their native home, Trinidad. Eventually however, they made the decision to move back to Manitoba with their three children for hopes of better access to post-secondary education.

Janet: We said, "you know, I think maybe we should go" because the children were getting older, my eldest daughter it was time for her to go high school and we just decided "oh you know what, we think Canada is going to be good for the kids and give them opportunities and so on" so we just made a crazy decision and gave up our jobs and moved to Canada. So, when we came to Winnipeg, in 1993, no jobs! We had no jobs, we were coming and starting cold turkey looking for work, yeah.

Greg: Well I um I think the driving factor was the educational element because in Trinidad, it's very competitive and very tough. And the um tertiary education at the time there was one university

which was a regional university, had campuses on three islands and to get into our university, the one located in Trinidad was really really tough because the level of education in high schools in–Trinidad is very high. So, for kids to get into the university you had to do extremely well so a lot of kids were kinda getting stressed out trying to achieve those levels so we figured, you know what, it might be easier on the kids if we kinda went up to Canada and have a little less stress in terms of getting into university and that kinda thing. So, I think that was the overriding factor, the overriding thing that we decided well you know let's give this a shot you know.

Upon return, Janet began substitute teaching, later gaining a temporary teaching position while Greg continued his search for a year with few prospects. After a year, he was hired for a position at a college in Prince George, B.C.

During his tenure as an instructor, Greg states his transition to be “a mixed bag”, confronted with issues surrounding misidentification:

There were people from different departments teaching in GIS [Geographic Information System] so there were a couple of them who are very close with the African fellas and there's one Trinidadian guy and so we all kinda hang out together and you know went through that way and what was interesting to me is that I was there for 13 years and they still called me by the wrong name. Some people...Yeah because there were four people of African descent at the college so they would see me and they would call me cliff. Clive was 6'2" (laughter) 260 pound or whatever so there was no way that you could think I was Cliff. Or they call me Jason and Jason is 5'5 and what not so you know, we were totally different but they were some, not everybody but there was some people who just you know they saw the colour of the skin and they just assumed. So, after a while I just stopped kinda correcting them. I would just say oh hi and just carry on you know. So that was kinda interesting in my teaching career here. In terms of teaching students' um, it was different because they um whole attitude towards learning and that kinda stuff was different to what I was accustomed to, you know?

Though he was able to find employment within his field, his experience within the program amongst peers made him question his visibility. While Greg was misidentified, Janet was introduced to the different systems and requirements of school boards:

They told me one, I had to go back to school because to get a teaching certificate in B.C., I needed to do literature and I didn't ever do literature, I was doing my science and stuff. So, they gave me a temporary teaching certificate to go work but I still had to go study and the other thing that um, was kind of, well annoying to me, is they were challenging that I could speak English. This was like to me discrimination! I'm like why? Because I was born in Trinidad? Well did

you guys ever take a minute to look and see what Trinidadians speak? Granted, people speak Creole and so on but, in your school system, you speak English! So anyway, eventually, they allowed me to get my teacher's certificate. I didn't have to go and they actually changed this rule that people from Trinidad no longer would be asked to write a test of English.

After battling with the school board in B.C., she was granted her teacher's certificate, changing the rule that people from Trinidad would no longer be required to write an English test.

Though Janet and Greg had encountered situations of discrimination, their emphasis on advocacy and cultural representation created a foundation to educate others. Janet's time in Prince George was centered around advocacy and representation. She was a part of the Black History Association of Prince George who had undertaken projects and initiatives to increase visibility and uncover the stories of early Black settlement in Northern and Central B.C:

My whole years in Prince George were a lot of advocacy because also in the school system there was a social justice committee that I was a part of so I had jobs where I was teaching math and science and so on. But in addition to that, I joined any association that's dealing with racism, sexism, and looking out for the underrepresented students. Marginalized kids. I did a lot of activism work in those days... I've been all over BC presenting anti-racism workshops. Those years were about social activism and specifically Black history events for about ten years or so? We put on all sorts of events in Prince George that they never had before. Concerts, dinners and family day and films and cooking classes. Lots and lots of stuff.

Both express a strong sense of identity and have unapologetically represented their culture through community initiatives, events and connecting the African diaspora in Prince George and northern B.C. Through advocacy and education, Janet and Greg fostered spaces for learning and appreciation, and their contributions have had a substantial impact on their community.

The above sketches have detailed snapshots of each participant's story in order to provide an overview of their life stories. Individually, they have each detailed respective themes that embody the essence of their experiences in Canada and their journey. Each participant has discovered moments of self-expression that have assisted in their transition and settlement. Many were able to overcome adversity through advocacy while others focused on fostering strong family ties and connections. Most

have been able to find a balance between their cultural traditions and accepting change. Though they have different backgrounds and experiences, collectively they share themes that are common across participants. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5.

### Collective Themes

#### 5.1. Community, Identity and Immigration

This project has been concerned with how cultural identity is negotiated among the Vancouver Caribbean community through participants and their stories. Three positions of identity formation were detailed to understand the assertion of identity among the participants and their communities. Chioneso (2008) details that these factors include: the importance of social networks, symbols of identity and transnational ties (p. 75). Identity formation and assertion merits analysis here. As Stuart Hall (1990) argues:

Identities are the names we give the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within narratives of the past that provide a new narrative of identity, one that imagines a community that transcends narrow national and ethnic boundaries (Chioneso, p. 17).

In the case of Caribbean experiences, identity is traditionally attached to territory and to the historical Caribbean experience as indentured labourers. Identity formation cannot exist without initial connection to space.

As Premdas observes, Caribbean identity sustains itself in its diasporic conditions through identity renegotiation and mobility:

The massive movement of Caribbean peoples to metropolitan centers has created another sphere of contestation in the construction of an identity. Caribbean peoples insist that they are 'Caribbean' regardless of where they live, holding on to all their partial alien identities as well (p. 812).

Caribbean identity survives in part because national cultural identity and juridical citizenship have been deoccupied, meaning that cultural identity exists without attachment to territory. (p. 812). Caribbean people are continuously able to reconstruct their identities with functional links to culture and community. With one third of the Caribbean population living overseas, this delinking of territory offers greater reach and enhances its rate of survival globally. But with this delinking, comes into question the main characteristics of what it means to not only be born in the Caribbean but what being Caribbean embodies. This is where concrete demarcations are blurred and the

Caribbean identity transforms into more than birthright and heritage to a constant exchange of cultural knowledge.

Premdas (2011) states that there is a fiction surrounding collective Caribbean identity that can be constantly maintained, (p. 815) but this fiction provides a sense of belonging, comfort and security. This safe reconstruction imparts a “physical expression of home that has nurtured their identity and whenever they are found away from home, the images of the Caribbean assume the shape of a metaphor for life itself” (p. 817). This is a familiar practice of reinvention of Caribbean identity, a means by which Caribbean identity is imagined and reimagined.

Premdas (2011) focuses on the nature and complexities of identity formation in the Caribbean community. In particular, he details the multiple locations, or sites, of identity formation and the “deterritorialization” of identity; that is, identity is formed in the specific context of the migrant community and is asserted and re-asserted on the basis of the strong connection to one’s birth country.

Though this negotiation is often acted on an individual basis, the collective nature of Caribbean identity is a strong foundation of identity formation. Chioneso (2008) explored how collectivist orientations of African immigrant ethnic groups are negotiated and manifested in Canada and how identity formation and assertion is an interplay of both individual and collective imagination and negotiation (p. 74). Chioneso’s analysis indicated that the majority of participants had a collectivistic cultural orientation through three factors: 1) importance of social networks, 2) symbols of identity, 3) transnational ties. In her study, the strength of social networks for participants who had migrated from Ghana and Jamaica, often to reunite with family, was reinforced by collectivistic principles:

Although socioeconomic mobility is frequently perceived as the primary impetus for emigration from developing countries, family (re)unification was the most frequently...reason to leave Ghana and Jamaica. This “pulling” factor, that is the opportunity for increased socioeconomic mobility was the second most cited reason for immigrating to Canada, and it was consistently embedded within reciprocal social networks. Reciprocal interactions and relationships were maintained between network participants living in Canada, the country of origin, and other countries (e.g., England and the United States). Reciprocal interactions included assisting others with their immigration process, providing services (e.g., childminding), exchanging information, emotional support, and so forth.

There was a strong adherence to what one participant metaphorically described as “passing the baton from one person to the other” (p. 75).

For the majority of participants in B.C., this “pulling factor” manifested in familial reconnection, and also, in the form of socioeconomic mobility. This may be a specific contrast between Toronto and Vancouver however, as in this study, out of the eight participants, three migrated to reconnect with their immediate family [spouse, children, parent(s)]. The remaining migrated for career and education purposes. The cyclical nature of the migratory process and philosophy that “migrants help other migrants” (p. 75) is applicable when discussing Caribbean migration to B.C. and reinforces the collectivistic nature of Caribbean identity.

Discrimination from the ‘outside’ stimulated collectivism amongst Caribbean migrants. Symbols of identity representative of culture have been cultivated based on the needs of the community and the countless incidents of discrimination that migrants experienced in Toronto. The creation of a safe collective space (in Toronto) served to encourage solidarity (p. 77) amongst immigrants who have been negatively impacted, targeted and “othered”. Indeed, Caribbean, Afro-Canadian, and African people find common cause, strength, and solidarity in response to systemic racism.

The maintenance and strengthening of transnational ties speak to the ever-prevailing collectivist structures adapted by participants in Chioneso’s study. While she mentions that the maintenance of connections and feelings of homesickness were pacified with nurturing intimate relationships while abroad, Triandis (1995) stated that “travelling and living abroad increases the probability of individualism amongst collectivists because they are exposed to different viewpoint and experiences” (p. 80). The majority of participants not only split their time between their home country and Vancouver but also enjoy travelling to other regions of the world. This is where the product of the Caribbean identity manifests clearly in Vancouver. Because of transmigration, many participants’ families have passed on or no longer reside in their home countries, forcing many to create a new sense of home, often in two or more places through the course of the year. The mythical nature of existing in multiple places simultaneously comes to fruition for many of the participants, whose Trans-Caribbean experience continues to unfold in British Columbia. Though Chioneso noted decreased levels of interdependence in the study, Vancouver participants do portray different aspects of individualism. This becomes especially evident when analyzing their feelings



of returning to their birth country. In Chioneso's findings, the appeal to "return home" is still a reality for the participants within ten to twenty years of their initial departure.

Conversations amongst many older Caribbean people who resettled in Canada, demonstrate that they never planned to permanently resettle in Canada and have been in the process of alternative living arrangements that suit their transient needs as the true travelers they are. But for others that I have spoken to, there is no moving back. Upon reflecting if they would move back to Trinidad permanently for example, Greg and Janet insisted that Trinidad is not the same country that they left decades ago, a sentiment that is not uncommon sentiment among Caribbean immigrants. Along with their uncertainty, there is a greater factor that persists in determining the likelihood of their return home: health care. As many of the participants have reached or passed retirement age, they must now consider the caliber of healthcare they will need to receive and what access (or lack thereof) they may encounter should they relocate. While some individuals were in great health, a handful admit they still need access to their primary healthcare physicians. This would present a great risk should they not have access to health care in their home countries.

## **5.2. Overcoming Adversity**

The immigrant experience of Caribbean people coming to Canada (or any host country) has been one in which the richness and complexities of their diversity have been diminished by the homogenizing influences of the host country and the marginalization and stereotyping of immigrants by the dominant host culture and society. As Plaza (2004) has argued, such homogenization has "detrimental effects":

The naming and classifying of groups of people into seemingly homogeneous categories can have detrimental effects on a national-origin group. This is...what has taken place within the Caribbean immigration community in Canada. There has been a tendency by outsiders to lump all members of the Caribbean-origin group into one homogenous category (p. 242).

Plaza further suggests that the homogenization of the Caribbean identity creates invisibility for all members of the Caribbean community who fall under the classification of Afro-Caribbean. Throughout conversations with participants, we have seen this reality evidenced, for instance by them being mistaken for other co-workers of similar colour, or

when they are told how well they speak English (or French). The conflation of Caribbean experience with the larger African diaspora fails to address the diversified history of Caribbean people. Though the majority of participants in the sample identified as Afro-Caribbean, there is a critical need to recognize the heterogeneity within the Caribbean-origin group.

There is a constellation of factors that must be considered in terms of the struggles of immigrants in general, and Caribbean immigrants in particular. McLaughlin (2010) and Branker's (2016) analysis of migrant workers and labour discrimination in Canada paints a picture of what migrants often face when introduced to the Canadian labour system. In McLaughlin's discussion of temporary migrant workers from Mexico and Jamaica (primarily) it becomes clear that programs put in place to recruit migrants "foster negative attitudes surrounding who is permitted access into Canada" (p. 80) which creates attitudes of exploitability:

Canadian society thus creates a two-tiered system, in which one group of residents, those deemed worthy of permanent membership, has the chance to develop skills, be mobile, unite with their families, and ultimately, belong; while the other is wanted only to work temporarily—only so long as needed—and is ultimately disposable (p. 91).

Branker (2016) proposes that multiple actors (policy makers, government officials and employers) reproduce specific constructions based on the perpetuated ideals that immigrants on temporary or permanent status should strive to embody. Performances of subordination (Branker, p. 80) relate to the conformability of an "ideal immigrant" in the image of the state. Regardless of status, temporary or permanent residency, these attitudes surrounding immigrant populations still exist and are perpetuated at all levels, despite Canada's immigration policy reform of 1967, which sought to address racial and systemic barriers that excluded minorities. The introduction of regulations abolishing discrimination based on race and nationality pushed Canada forward in attempts to eradicate any remnants of racism (Branker, p. 204).

Before immigration reform, Canada's immigration policy was laden with racist and discriminatory language and principles. While Branker recognizes the shift in policy

to primarily focus on human capital, he argues that immigration laws are missing the link between viable immigrant skills and the labour market<sup>6</sup>:

While immigration laws and policies were amended to allow minority persons to immigrate to Canada, discrimination still exists in many forms and discrimination negatively affects labour market outcomes for racialized immigrants...The value placed on immigrant human capital at the policy level differs significantly from the understanding of human capital on the ground (i.e., how employers actually recognize and utilize newcomer skills within the labour market) which results in poor employment outcomes for many immigrants (p. 204).

There is an apparent human capital imbalance that lives within the gaps of immigration policy. The failure of Canada's immigration policy to adequately protect the rights of migrants can be attributed to the lack of recognition of systemic racism and discrimination on the ground (p. 204). Rather than acknowledging the complexities of racism and discrimination within Canada, the immigration policy denounces its existence and masks remnants of its historical presence. The social construction of Caribbean immigrants as the outsiders solely based on race (p. 212) explains sentiments where participants were discriminated against regardless of their socioeconomic status or education. Sentiments surrounding migration amongst Caribbean participants highlight apparent instances of misconstrued perceptions of their inadequacies, projected by their colleagues, peers and acquaintances, regardless of their acquired qualifications or experience:

Pauline: "Oh them Black lazy immigrants that the government is bringing in here...and taking Canadian jobs"

Maureen: He looked at me and said "Oh you little Black bitch!" He kicked liked this, and you know I had the cupboard opened, good thing the cupboard was opened because I was about to take his clothes out and he just kicked me, one kick right into the cupboard and said "Oh you people should get out of here!" Oh yes, you think it's little things you go through with them?

Matthew: And he said "Boy! Clear this." and handed me this cup of sputum. That hurt. I did take it from him but, I must confess, that was one of the first times in my life...I'm not sure why this sticks with me so much, but it was the first time in my life, up

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<sup>6</sup> Shift is in reference to Canada's immigration policy of 1967.

to then and frankly since then, that I felt hurt by a comment that was racially tainted

Janet: They gave me a temporary teaching certificate to go work but I still had to go study and the other thing that um, was kind of, well annoying to me, is they were challenging that I could speak English.

Annabelle: "I'm going to sue you guys!" - letter of acceptance getting to the college and being told that is was a mistake.

Greg: I was there for 13 years and they still called me by the wrong name.

With immigration came opportunity and access to the Canadian market, but not without a price. Participants experienced notable acts of discrimination and racism in workspaces and educational settings. In particular, their positions or qualifications were called into question on the basis of their complexion or accent. Much of what was shared speaks to the sacrifices (whether known or unknown) that participants had to face in order to adapt to the Canadian experience. As Henry noted, "They try to put you at ease but they never let you forget you're coloured...They don't expect coloured persons to speak well or express themselves in any way (Henry 1968, p. 87).

In her analysis of the West Indian domestic workers' program in Canada, Frances Henry (1968) addressed issues of racial discrimination faced by Caribbean immigrants who, enticed by the glorification of life in Canada, took advantage of the program. The domestic scheme of 1955 did offer access and a means of advancement to Caribbean people, but not without the reality of being ostracized and denied financial, educational and professional advancement. The participants in this study noted that their experiences may not have always presented as overt discrimination but they often remember instances where they would question themselves because of the subtlety. They often do not associate discriminatory behaviour with blatant racism but rather believe it to be ignorance and often chose not to internalize their experiences. Branker (2010) refers to Essed's (1991) expression of everyday racism, which outlines much of what is experienced by Caribbean migrants:

Everyday racism can be manifested in many forms including marginalization, containment, assimilation, patronage, cultural oppression and an overall denial of racism (Essed 1991). Participant's everyday racial

experiences may also be examples of micro-aggression, experiences of racism that may appear to be rather innocuous at first but have been found to have a cumulative effect (p. 209).

The “perpetrators” (p. 209) of these interactions often deny their acts are racially motivated and often overlook and diminish their actions as unknowingly problematic. There were instances where the intellectual and professional abilities of participants were called into question, making Caribbean immigrants aware that they have to work even harder than their Canadian counterparts to achieve recognition and earn their place. As Peter, the educator, pointed out “I had to work twice as hard because I was Black. All eyes were on me, you know ‘how is he going to handle all those white kids’ and you know, I was very careful.”

But with adversity, also came success. Though participants in this study recognize that they have had to endure unjust scrutiny, they also acknowledge friends, family members and mentors who believed in their success and continued striving for better circumstances for themselves and their families. Throughout the stories they shared, every participant expressed and demonstrated both determination and a strong work ethic. Many worked multiple jobs while raising children, maintaining households, supporting family members overseas and fostering connections in their communities. They all have various methods of maintaining their cultural identity, never forgetting their Caribbean heritage.

### **5.3. They are Risk Takers and Dreamers**

In all stories shared, there is a strong sense of taking risks, challenging norms, and embracing and instigating change. Some changes were made for better access, some for love and others were made out of curiosity. In each case, the change was not forced upon the individuals represented in this thesis, but was rather the result of bold and courageous choices, made by each participant, to find and forge a better future. Without exception, the stories shared resonate with a theme that change was critical as all of the participants sought a better life, a vision for a future of promise and possibility.

Like many other participants, Greg and Janet weighed their options and decided that better opportunities for their family would come from their move, and they decided to move for their children’s educational aspirations. Matthew, Peter and Pauline, all

decided to further pursue their education and careers at the highest possible level and their motivation was one of curiosity and ambition. Though they did not know much about the geographic area they would call home, they decided that they would give it a chance, despite their apprehensions, family's concerns, and fears. There is a power in these choices and changes that are present and resonant in all of these stories —small changes leading to big decisions.

While some of these changes might have been drastic and arduous, many of the participants express such changes with humility and understatement. Annabelle, Maureen and Cathy for example, all have similar stories of moving rather dramatically and abruptly, yet they told their stories matter-of-factly. To leave home so abruptly, and without being able to take much of their belongings highlights the difficulties, hardships, and struggles of their lives. These stories and the way the participants chose to share them, speak directly to their characters and what they valued most at the time: better circumstances for themselves and their families. They are the dreamers, the resilient, the forward thinkers that dared to imagine, no matter the cost.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

This thesis has explored the role of oral history in Caribbean culture and its ability to promote the use of narrative in order to retrieve histories missing in literature. We have therefore examined the power of narrative in reconstructing memories through counterstorytelling in order to increase the visibility of a community that has been pushed to the margins of Vancouver's history. The current disbursement of the Caribbean community is directly related to the historical displacement of Black bodies in Strathcona and the intentional attack on their community, real estate and businesses. Intentional displacement has resulted in invisibility at the expense of Caribbean people and the larger African diaspora.

The use of narrative inquiry was approached through critical race theory to actively counter the dominant narrative of Black displacement. Though this work primarily focuses on the story of Afro-Caribbean migrants, their highlighted experiences force the need to acknowledge their colour first, and their culture second without recognition of their whole selves. This forceful recognition of their colour neglects cultural identity, their story and more importantly, their humanity. To inform their experiences, the history of blackness in Vancouver was explored in order to encompass a greater understanding of how Black identities function in B.C.

As such, the objective of this thesis was to spotlight stories of Caribbean narrative and provide space for knowledge sharing amongst eight participants. Through storytelling, participants provided a historical record of their experiences where no record previously existed and expressed moments of success, triumph but also of discrimination and anti-black racism. Respectively, all participants shared their life experiences which also pointed to larger collective themes for analysis. Identity negotiation, labour discrimination and risk analysis were key markers that defined each of their stories in distinctive ways. Though each participant comes from different countries and socio-economic statuses, they are not immune to racism and the subversive societal pressure of pursuing excellence. Regardless of country, intellect or class, many participants still remembered moments of discrimination that have impacted

their understanding of how racism functions in Canada. They were all clear that their race would impact the way in which they move through society and with that sought actionable change in their communities or moved through their reality with constant reminders of their difference.

## **6.1. Limitations and Opportunities**

This project marks the beginning of creating space for Caribbean voices to be amplified. While applying narrative inquiry to provide informed sketches of participant experiences, it may be argued that each sketch requires more ethnographic elements such as thick description (greater detail) in order to recall a fuller understanding of Caribbean experiences in Vancouver. It can also be argued that this project should include voices across other Caribbean islands as well as those who identify ethnically as Indo, Portuguese, British or Chinese-Caribbean. Though this study primarily focused on Afro-Caribbean experiences, if provided with a broader scope, such variants would be worth analysis. Conducting this work requires a larger research team in order to gain access to dispersed pockets of Caribbean people across the province. A consistent limitation is time. The majority of participants are between the ages of 60 and 70 and are currently in the stages of transitioning into their retirement plans, making it more difficult to collect in-person interviews.<sup>7</sup> Many participants have buried close friends and family members in their age bracket which expresses a sense of urgency to collect, retain and advocate for work of this nature to be pursued.

For future recommendations, this project would greatly benefit by having a minimum of four principal investigators to capture a wider target population. I would also suggest increase engagement, such that the collection of data be conducted at a local level amongst community leaders across the province.

The practical goal of this project is to enhance visibility and promote accessibility to these stories. This cannot be fulfilled if a project of this nature is 'stuck' in an academic bubble where it cannot be easily disseminated and dispersed throughout the community. With approaching this work solely on the basis of internal community

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<sup>7</sup> Some participants are spending less time in Vancouver during the year, making in-person interviewing more difficult to conduct.



building and historical archive, it becomes a project that is in service of the people and facilitated by the people. With conversations surrounding trust building in communities of colour, academia is not a conducive space to begin projects of record-keeping when it is not fostered by those missing from the narrative. A collaborative approach between community and academia may prove more beneficial in bridging the two spaces to enhance the richness of data collection.

With communities in mind, it is important to be mindful of who is conducting the work in these communities. Trust building and direction may be best facilitated when a member from the community in question is able to occupy the space of both insider and outsider to better assess the needs of the population. It is critical that a reflexive approach be used as an opportunity to explore biases and positionality within the research. Room for more reflection on the researcher's epistemology would add more depth and future direction to continued work. This would present an opportunity to further engage with literature and findings for a rounded analysis of cultural visibility and counterstorytelling.

## **6.2. Justice sounds like oppression to the privileged - BLM**

*The system is created to produce advantage for people who are marked as white" -5.13 (Brooks Arcand-Paul, Systemic Racism in Canada, July 2020)*

In a ten-minute video published by the CBC in July 2020, a number of contributors spoke on Canada controlling the narrative surrounding racism and anti-black racism in Canada. When MP Jagmeet Singh called out BLOC leader Alain Therrien in his dismissal of the motion put forward to examine policing in Canada, the narrative that played out did not consist of approaching MP Therrien on his remark but shifted blame and attention to MP Singh's "emotional outburst" and "booted" him from chambers. The actions that took place supporting the normalization of systemic racism denies that historically, institutions were built with the intention that it is only meant to serve only white people. When racism is called out, we are told that it does not exist and in turn, are deemed radical and irrational to even think it can exist. With this normalization and silence, Canadian society became the benchmark of first-world standards. Canada fails to acknowledge that racism and in this context, anti-black racism is a problem that threatens the quality of life of many Canadians.

### 6.3. The popularization of the BLM movement - *#blackouttuesday*

The popularization of the BLM movement has garnered attention of many but has not come without the exploitation of Black pain. Many have reposted, retweeted and shared the video of George Floyd's last moments in order to spark outrage and change but have undermined the emotional trauma that these visuals inflict upon Black people. Many may never forget the image of witnessing him take his last breath but for many Black people, Floyd's death is eerily similar to countless other victims of police brutality who have not received justice. Millions posted black squares on their social media feeds in order to gain traction for the movement in attempts to promote cultural competency. Teach me public health ("TMPH", @teachmepublichealth) makes the distinction between cultural humility and cultural competency that warns against social media advocacy trends.<sup>8</sup> TMPH defines cultural humility as:

Having an understanding of different cultures, identifying your own biases and prejudices, and being able to interact respectfully with people from different cultures (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Cultural Competence*)

While developing cultural humility is a promising starting point, Kumas-Tan et al. argues that cultural competency suggests that there is an endpoint in learning rather than it being a lifelong process (Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod, Frank 2007). The dangers of performative allyship become apparent when it is not approached with an understanding of continuous learning and commitment.<sup>9</sup> What is suggested is learning cultural humility with a "focus on a lifelong commitment to learning, questioning our own biases, and actively working to redistribute power and advocate for historically marginalized communities" (p. 555). Acknowledging the plight of Black people in North America is not enough of a stance against racism and has (long) been the rhetoric surrounding Black history, injustice and discrimination. In order to be a lifelong ally, what

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<sup>8</sup> The term cultural humility was developed by Dr. Murray-Garcia and Dr. Melanie Tervalon at the hospitals in Oakland, California. Kumas-Tan et al. focus on the quantification of cultural humility through a scale

<sup>9</sup> Performative allyship refers to activism from someone who is non-marginalized in support or solidarity with a marginalized group that is not helpful or actively harms the group. Holiday Phillips (Forge author) says this also includes the ally receiving any type of reward for being perceived as a good person or ally.

is required is dedication to actively engage with oppressive systems of power locally, nationally and globally. Performance and symbolism act as distractions without benefit to the victims of racism.

## **6.4. For Us By Us**

*“Just being Black and loving ourselves is a revolutionary act” – (The Skin We’re In Documentary)*

For centuries, Black voices have been erased from literature and academia. The recent widespread attention to Black experiences in Canada has sparked conversations concerning tangible next steps and lasting change. Black people across the nation have fought for recognition and now have the spotlight to take up space. There is a unique opportunity for communities to share their experiences of how racism functions in everyday life. By taking control of the narrative, stories of individuals in all specialities and areas of life who have been pushed to the margins can now be used to amplify those voices and promote visibility and understanding. Through counterstorytelling these historically marginalized individuals are able to take ownership of their narratives as a mechanism of resistance. This thesis is a historical document comprised with current events that informs and recaptures experiences and begins filling in historical gaps that honour all parts of Vancouver’s history.

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# Appendix A. Interview



## **Study Title: Forgotten Voices: The Untold Stories of Caribbean Migration to Vancouver**

The general interview style will remain minimally structured. Our objective in this study is to provide participants with a platform and opportunity to share their narrative. Should conversation need to be initialized by researcher, I will return to guiding conversation towards the following research questions developed:

- 1) What are the realities and outcomes that migrants have encountered migrating to Vancouver
- 2) How are migrant's experiences related to current and past immigration policies in place in the past and present (where is/what is the correlation),
- 3) Who migrated to Vancouver, from which country/class/socioeconomic statuses,
- 4) What is the importance of storytelling for West Indian migrants?

### **Early Life**

- What is your nationality?
- Where were you born/raised?
  - Who raised you? Any siblings?
  - What are some of the earliest memories (you're willing to share) of your childhood/adolescence?
- How were you educated?
  - Highest level of education?

### **Leaving home**

- In which year did you immigrate to Canada?
  - Did you move to any other continent before Canada?
- What were your feelings around leaving?
  - Did you want to leave?
- How was the process of migrating to another country?
  - Were there any successes and/or challenges?

### **Resettling**

- Which city did you first live in upon arrival?
  - Who did you live with and why?
- What were your first impressions of the place?
  - Who did you meet?
- Work and Job Opportunities
  - What was your first job?
  - Were there potential career opportunities?
- Family planning and residence?
  - Nuclear family?

- Extended family?

### **Cultural Identity**

- Do you celebrate/share your culture with others?
  - Why?

### **Return**

- Do you visit your place of birth?
  - How often?
  - With who?
  - Where do you stay?
- Is there a long for return?
  - Would you like to move back?



# Appendix B. Informed Consent Form



Dear Sir or Madame:

I would like to thank you for your interest in this project. The purpose of this study aims to include the stories of West Indian migrants who have settled in British Columbia, highlighting the life experiences and contributions to the fabric of their community.

You have been asked to take part in this study to add your story of relocation to begin conversations of Caribbean presence and visibility in Vancouver and surrounding areas. Discussions of this nature have yet been given appropriate recognition and have often been unheard when asserting West Indian settlement in Vancouver. Our aim is to spark discourse surrounding transnationalism and the efforts made to preserve West Indian identity in Vancouver. We are inviting to be a part of connecting West Indian narratives and community to public conversations.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time in this process, you are welcomed to refuse participation. We do not believe participation in this study could harm you or be damaging psychologically. Since we do ask that you share your personal experience, we acknowledge risking privacy and confidentiality. Should this be a pertinent issue, we will include privacy measures that adhere to maintaining confidentiality between yourself and the researcher.

We hope that your participation will encourage conversations and speak to the contributions of West Indian persons across the lower mainland. Your story speaks to the revitalization of Caribbean identity in British Columbia, sparking future research initiatives to take place from the stories shared in this study. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Robyn Broomfield

[ ... ]  
[ ... ]

## Forgotten Voices: The Untold Stories of West Indian Migration to Vancouver

### STUDY TEAM

**Principal Investigator:** Robyn Broomfield, Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology,

Email: [ ... ], Phone: [ ... ]

**Faculty Supervisor:** Martin Laba, Email: [ ... ], Phone: [ ... ]

This research is intended for completion of a graduate degree in the form of a thesis (public document). The information collected will be used to compose a thesis subject to defense. Upon completion, information will be made publicly available.

**Co-investigators:** This project only includes research conducted by the principal investigator and will not include co-investigators.

### INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

#### ***Why should you take part in this study?***

The purpose of this study aims to include the stories of West Indian migrants who have settled in British Columbia—centered around highlighting their life experiences and contributions to the fabric of their community.

***Why are we doing this study?*** You have been asked to take part in this study to add your story of relocation to begin conversations of Caribbean presence and visibility in Vancouver and surrounding areas. Discussions of this nature have yet been given appropriate recognition and have often been glazed over when uncovering West Indian settlement in Vancouver. Our aim is to spark discourse surrounding transnationalism and the efforts made to preserve West Indian identity in Vancouver. We are doing this study to invite you to be a part of connecting West Indian narratives and community to the public.

### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

#### **Your participation is voluntary**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time in this process, you welcomed to refuse participation if you are unwilling to contribute.

### STUDY PROCEDURES

#### **What happens if you say, “Yes, I want to be in the study”? What happens to you in the study? How is the study done?**

This study focuses around how much you are willing to contribute and at which pace you prefer to participate. The total amount of time required can range between two to four hours OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

depending on your comfort level. Meetings can be separated and spread amongst days or months, depending on time you are willing to spend. Meeting times are completely depended on your comfort level and are for you to discuss with the investigator (Robyn) at your discretion.

If you say ‘Yes,’ here is how we will do the study:

- We will ask you about what you are willing to share
- We will ask you to detail your story of migration.
- Sessions and time taken for each interview will be at your discretion. Overall amount of time required for each session may last up to two to four hours, depending on your comfort level and schedule.

Since interview structure is open-ended, some of the questions asked may be sensitive or personal in nature. Participants do not have to answer any question if they do not want to

### POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

#### ***Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?***

We do not believe participation in this study could harm you or be damaging psychologically. Since we do ask that you share your personal experience, we acknowledge risking privacy and confidentiality. Should this be a pertinent issue, we will include privacy measures that adhere to maintaining confidentiality between yourself and the primary investigator. There is

a potential risk that though identifying information is removed, acquaintances, friends and/or family may still be able to identify you in the participation of this study. Section "PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE" below will provide participants with the option of remaining unidentifiable or identifiable.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

##### **Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?**

This study is aimed towards the benefit of collective West Indian life stories. We are uncertain whether or not you will directly benefit from this study. However, we hope that your participation in this study will encourage others in the future who may benefit from the stories told in this study.

#### **PAYMENT**

##### **Will you be paid for your time/ taking part in this research study?**

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained? Measures to maintain confidentiality

- Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent and will be kept confidential at all times. Should you wish to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym, you are welcomed to do so at any time. All audio recordings will only be collected with your consent **and will be destroyed after transcription**, should you be unwilling to disclose your information/identity.
- All documents will be identified only by the pseudonym and kept on a USB stick with a protected security code to gain access. Access will only be accessed by principal investigator. Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. At any point in the study, if you reveal that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring) please be advised that the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities
- Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. If the researchers are requested to reveal information by subpoena, the researchers may reveal your identity and other information you disclose to me during the course of this study to the authorities.
- Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless at any point in the study, you tell the researchers that you plan to harm yourself or others, the principal investigator will report this information to the appropriate authorities.

#### **WITHDRAWAL**

##### **What if I decide to withdraw my consent to participate?**

- You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons and with no effects on grades, employment etc.
- If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

#### **STUDY RESULTS**

- The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.
- Results will also be available to participants. Option to access study results will be reported to email address included on consent form.

#### **CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY**

##### **Who can you contact if you have questions about the study**

- All participants are encouraged to contact the principal investigator should you have any questions or concerns about the study.  Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.
-

**CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS**

**Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics [ ... ] or [ ... ]

**FUTURE USE OF PARTICIPANT DATA**

Future uses of personal information and research data collected in the study may be disseminated in the form of a video project. This is mainly to offer a more accessible means to members of the Caribbean community and their allies.

**FUTURE CONTACT**

For future research, participants may be asked for a follow-up or additional information. If you wish to be contacted for future research, please check appropriate yes/no check boxes.

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE**

*Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your [examples should be relevant to the participant and could include references to employment, class standing, access to further services from the community centre, day care, etc.].* OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

**Participant Identification:**

*Please check corresponding box for how you wish to identify in the participation of this study:*

- I wish to remain unidentified (all identifying information will be changed in your account: names, places, dates)*
- I wish to remain identifiable (all identifying information will remain in your account: names, places, dates)*

Participant Signature

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)