

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **EXPLORING THE INTERPRETATION OF RACE IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE COSMOPOLITAN EYES OF TRINIDADIAN IMMIGRANTS**

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Abstract

There is a possibility that a major contradiction exist in beliefs of the people of the island nation of Trinidad. There is a cosmopolitan dogma in Trinidad which proclaims the existence of a raceless society where all groups are equal and live in harmony. Trinidadians often use the term 'cosmopolitan' to describe their country. This thought influences the nature of the culture and philosophies of Trinidadians at home and abroad. The census data of Trinidad and Tobago for 2000 shows substantial race and ethnic differences in family income, occupation, and education. This dissertation project explored the perceptions of immigrant Trinidadians on this cosmopolitan principle and its impact on the interpretation of race, before and after their migration to the United States. The goal was to understand the nature of this incongruity between belief and practice of a race free existence. Another goal of this research was to compare the differences between their perceptions of race in Trinidad and their perceptions of race in the United States.

Data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 Trinidadian immigrants now living in the United States for two years or more. Findings revealed themes that confirm participants' interpretation of race in Trinidad through cosmopolitanism which was not the same as their interpretation for the same in the

United States. Participants acknowledged racial differences but advocated the racial harmony of cosmopolitan concepts, and also rationalized income inequalities without race based explanations. Rationales for the income differences discussed were explained with differences in social capital, aspirations and ambitions of Trinidadians. Their perceptions of race before and after migration to the U.S. had changed. How this cosmopolitan creed impacts the existence of inequality amongst the Trinidadian society was understood. Trinidadian participants in this study strongly believed that race in the United States and race in Trinidad were interpreted, understood and projected differently. Neither age, time in U.S. nor ethnicity/descent had a strong effect on their beliefs regarding race.

Conclusions were presented which represented the perceptions of the Trinidadian diaspora through contributions of Trinidadian immigrants in the United States on the main concepts of race and cosmopolitanism. The study provided valuable knowledge on the cultural psychology of immigration, the introduction of new ideologies in the new home for new arrivals, and the social impact of the intersections of different ideologies, concepts and paradigms in how participants created new referential cognitive environments for interpretation of the world around them.