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Cultural Diversity Paper

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Cultural Diversity

Around the globe, people have established values, faiths, traditions, and customs they abide by. Namely, it is called culture. Although culture is an essential part of society, it is different among nations or ethnic groups. Culture is often tagged with the word identity. Cultural identity is the elemental catalyst that helps individuals to identify themselves as who they are. For, an individual may be born in one country but identify themselves to the culture of another country. However, the essential part of cultural identity is that it facilitates us to learn about ourselves and international communities. In this same panorama, in this paper, I will share about my culture, my identity, plus debate on other related topics such as power, privilege, and my perception or opinion on others and multiculturalism.

I am a black woman born and raised in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. I grew up in a blended family composed of my parents, my three sisters, myself, and two brothers. Haiti is a Caribbean country located north of the Atlantic Ocean. It is located a few miles away from other Caribbean nations such as Cuba, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, with which it shares its land frontier. Most of the Haitian population is black. Other existing ethnic groups are white and "mullatto," Haitians of Europeans, and Arab descent.

My culture is vibrant and eclectic. It is a fusion of European and African cultures. We based our diet on traditional foods composed chiefly of vegetables, rice, fruits, and legumes. The most famed dishes of my culture are black rice, legim (vegetable stew), and fritaille (a mixture of fried foods). Though many festivals are celebrated in my culture, Kanaval or Haitian carnival is the most anticipated or commemorated event. In the U.S., mainly in Brooklyn, New York, Haitian celebrate carnival on Labor Day, on Eastern Parkway, with other Caribbean people who celebrate this festival. In Haiti, nonetheless, the celebration of Kanaval is held in February each

year, on three consecutive days. It is accompanied by dance, vibrant costumes, parades, and music.

In terms of religion, voodoo, a mixture of African and Catholic faiths, is the most practiced religion in my culture. Roman Catholicism is also prevalent, followed by Protestantism. My paternal relatives are Christians (protestant). My maternal families, on the other hand, are mainly Catholics. As a child, I was catholic. I celebrated my first communion at the age of 10. However, since the age of 17, I have professed the Christian faith. I am now a member of a non-denomination church. Moreover, my belief and relationship with Christ, on the most part, make me who I am today. Although I observe many traditions in my culture and the American culture, which I am also part of, I put "Jesus Culture," God's word and commands above all. Regardless of my culture's demands, I do not abide by it if it does not ally with God's word.

In Haiti, I attended high school until the 10th grade. I was from a middle-class family. My father was an entrepreneur and worked for the Haitian government. My father visited the U.S. on several occasions on a visa; however, he preferred to live in Haiti. Not many family members on my paternal side have traveled to the U.S. or another country. However, on my maternal side, immigration is greatly sought after. For my maternal relatives, immigration to another country is the safest way to escape political turmoil, financial insecurity, and hardship. I came to the United States in 2002 following the death of my paternal grandfather. He was a U.S. citizen. Years before his death, he petitioned for a family-based visa (green card) for my mother and her children to immigrate to the United States. I am now a naturalized U.S. citizen. I have lived in the U.S. since we immigrated.

I represent the third generation of my family in the United States. Coming to the U.S. with an immigrant visa is a privilege as many Haitians do not have the opportunity to enter the U.S. legally. In addition, it has a positive impact on my identity as it catapults me to learn about other cultures, afford better quality health care, and obtain a better education. As for its effect on my culture, immigrating to the U.S. as a permanent resident makes me part of the "diaspora," a name given to Haitians living in other countries. Furthermore, living abroad is a significant asset for my culture as it contributes to a better quality of life for Haitians residing in Haiti. Due to constant political and economic instability, most Haitians living in Haiti are unemployed; they rely primarily on their family in foreign countries to provide for them.

Several aspects have impacted my identity. One of these aspects is my social-economic status. I was born in a middle-income household; however, when I immigrated to the U.S., my family's household income abased to almost the poverty level. My parents had to start from zero, income-wise. With school and hard work, my family's yearly revenues elevated to a considerable level. Now, as a married woman, my income level is in the middle-class range. My current social-economic status has a meaningful effect on my identity, for it helps me provide for myself and those who live in impoverished conditions in my country. Besides, I always sought to achieve my goals in the U.S., and a living wage that surpasses the poverty line is one of them.

My age, gender, and residential locations (past and present) are other factors that influence my identity. As I stated earlier, I was born and raised in Haiti. I came to the U.S. as a teenager. I spent most of my adulthood in Brooklyn, New York. Currently, I live in New Jersey. In Haiti, I only knew the Haitian culture. My classmates, friends, and immediate family were all born and raised in Haiti. This has shaped my identity as most of the traditions I follow are birthed from the Haitian culture. In the U.S., while I resided in Crown Heights and East Flatbush,

Brooklyn, New York, neighborhoods, I held firmly the disciplines I received from my parents and values from my culture to escape from activities that individuals in my surroundings were engaged in. Being resistant to peer pressure and erroneous environmental influences have helped me be who I am today, a strong woman. Residing in these different geographic regions has had remarkable effects on my identity. In my current geographic area, Journal Square, in Jersey City, New Jersey, I am learning to be more receptive to cultures I am not accustomed to. It has an enormous impact on my identity as it helps me develop multicultural competency, which will be extraordinarily useful in my career as a future licensed mental health counselor.

The impact of my identity on my age and gender is tremendous. It is well-known that being a black female beyond thirty in the U.S. has its consequences. At my current age, 34 years old, I feel more responsible and goal-oriented. Although I am, in the U.S., in the minority or oppressive group, I do not allow labels and limitations attached to age and gender define who I am. Culturally speaking, as a married woman, my role is to support my husband and be responsible, in large part, for the care of my children and my house. I do not have no objection with this cultural norm. However, I have personal goals I want to achieve, which I must work hard for. Thus, the person I am, or my identity has a great impact on my age and gender. Though I abide by what is the norm for a woman in my culture, I do not desire to be restricted from pursuing my goals.

In all, the information shared about my cultural heritage, my age, gender, religion, geographic location, social-economic, and immigration status have all influenced my identity development or the individual I am now. Developing my identity was a complex process that consisted of trial and error. I maintained my faith in God amid all. Before cultivating my current identity, I did not aspire to have someone else's identity even when this person is in the same

ethnic and cultural group as me. During the journey of building my own identity, I explored the identity of other cultures, the U.S, for example. In all honesty, I do embrace some parts of the American culture. For instance, I celebrate Thanksgiving like the Americans, a Holiday that is not known nor celebrated in my country of origin.

Moreover, throughout my residency in the U.S., I befriended people of different races and cultures. I love diversity. I am aware of the treatments people of color like myself are receiving. My awareness of oppression, prejudice, and racism against the black community has influenced my behavior and attitude. I do not hold an immersion-emersion point of view or pro-black, anti-white attitude, however. Instead, I internalize with the black community. As a black woman with some power, my goal is to oppose racial inequality and social injustice. I cannot be color-blind when people of my race and age are deprived of many resources and opportunities due to oppression.

My race does not offer me any privilege. Most of the privileges I have earned came from my immigration status and education. My education in the U.S. has helped me to obtain better job opportunities. My current immigration status, on the other hand, has provided me the opportunity to vote, which was denied to me before due to my previous immigration status (permanent resident or green card holder), and access to health care.

I am from a conservative family. In my family and culture, the LGBTQ community is not well-accepted. In my culture, individuals who embrace this lifestyle are often made fun of. My family (parents and siblings) do not ridicule individuals in the LGBTQ groups; however, they do not condone their lifestyle. My family is open to multiculturalism. I have heard bias opinions, nonetheless, from family members against the African American community. Some say that they

are lazy. I believe that these preconceptions stemmed from what they have seen in the media. It is ironic, for we are also black.

My culture is patriarchal. Men are the breadwinner. Women are in charge of taking care of the house chores and children. This restriction or tradition is not entirely followed in the U.S. as women also contribute to their household expenses. As a child, my father set up the rules in the house. One of the social norms was for my sisters and me to kiss, both male and female, on the cheek, and my brothers to kiss, if it is a female, and shake hands if it is a man, everybody in our house when we return home from school. Despite all, I love my culture and my race. I would not trade them for anything else.

Two significant events have affected my family. Moving to the U.S. and the death of my grandfather. These two events coincide. The death of my grandfather accelerated our migration to the United States. At the same time, leaving our home country was dense as we had to leave behind our family and loved ones. My older sister and brother could not accompany us to the U.S. They surpassed the age limit to be derivative recipients on my mother's alien visa petition.

In terms of discrimination, it was barely addressed in my family. In the U.S., most of my family live in neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people from the Caribbean (Jamaicans, Trinidadians, St Lucians, and Bajans). They mainly interact with other races at school and work. However, at times, they suffer prejudiced treatments. My older sister suffered racial discrimination at work on several occasions. On one occasion, she was obliged to confront a white American who insulted her.

Like my family, I interacted with other races when I was at other locations outside my neighborhood. Now it is different as I live in a predominantly southeast Asian community. In Haiti, not much importance is placed on racial groups. I became aware that I was a member of a

specific racial group when I immigrated to the U.S. Since then, I have been well versed in the domain of ethnicity and racial disparity.

Furthermore, reviewing my past (challenges and achievements), I have learned how my history has significantly impacted my cultural identity. One of the lessons I have learned is that the person I am today is a by-product of my culture, my status in the U.S., my education, and the trials I encountered in life. I could not develop my cultural identity without being exposed to those aspects and seasons of my life. It is meaningful to me as it keeps me motivated and helps me stay focused. Also, I do not wish to keep my racial history occulted. I plan to share my cultural history with my children to be aware of my cultural heritage and how my current identity was shaped.