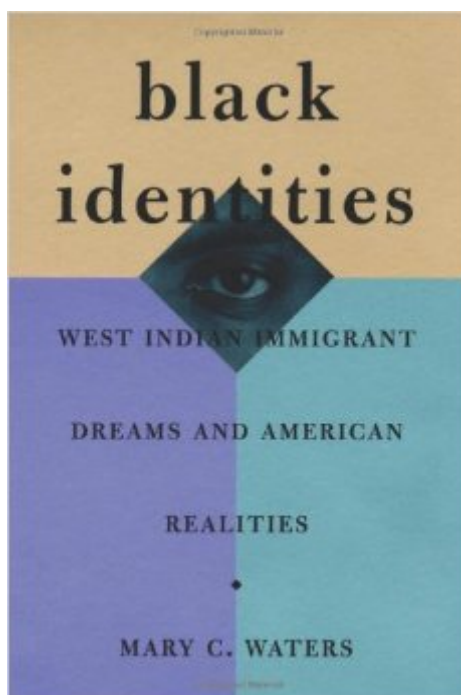


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Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams And American Realities



Synopsis

The story of West Indian immigrants to the United States is considered a great success. Many of these adoptive citizens have prospered, including General Colin Powell. But Mary Waters tells a very different story about immigrants from the West Indies, especially their children. She finds that when the immigrants first arrive, their knowledge of English, their skills and contacts, their self-respect, and their optimistic assessment of American race relations facilitate their integration into the American economic structure. Over time, however, the realities of American race relations begin to swamp their positive cultural values. Persistent, blatant racial discrimination soon undermines the openness to whites the immigrants have when they first arrive. Discrimination in housing channels them into neighborhoods with inadequate city services and high crime rates. Inferior public schools undermine their hopes for their children's future. Low wages and poor working conditions are no longer attractive for their children, who use American and not Caribbean standards to measure success. Ultimately, the values that gained these first-generation immigrants initial success--a willingness to work hard, a lack of attention to racism, a desire for education, an incentive to save--are undermined by the realities of life in the United States. In many families, the hard-won relative success of the parents is followed by the downward slide of their children. Contrary to long-held beliefs, Waters finds, those who resist Americanization are most likely to succeed economically, especially in the second generation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

because a great many of the interview subjects were teachers. I can see how the author would have

found interviewing and possibly 'relating' to teachers in a more easygoing natural way. But the presentation of the views of others was not as extensive. This book gave me some excellent information and probably insight into the experience of the West Indian black immigrant to a society that is predominantly white. Although I have lived and worked in the West Indies, I had not realized that for these people, coming from a society where black people run their own governments and decide on curriculum for students and everything else, in their societies, how difficult it is for them to live in a place where blacks are not a significant group as in the West Indies. I especially had not considered the culture clash between West Indian and American blacks. The book is highly readable and very informative. The reason I gave this review 3 stars has to do more with what I would consider to be a preponderance of interviews of a population subgroup as opposed to a general, random survey across the board of West Indian immigrants to New York. Where are the delivery guys, the letter carriers, the car mechanics..... Or are they under-represented because they could be less articulate? Or is it just a comfort factor for the author to interview people who, although they are from a totally different cultural background, are at least familiar in that they are involved with the academic? Or is it just easier to find teachers since they work in institutions? Whereas perhaps non-professional West Indians working in hourly wage jobs are difficult to influence to believe that the interview is just that and their privacy would be respected? The thing is though, a survey, in order to be valid, should contain a representative sample of all the West Indian black immigrants to New York. Regardless, a potential reader should not be put off by my criticisms. This study is well worth the read. The author has done an excellent job interviewing and interpreting the data from her subjects.

This book, which I read as part of a sociology course, awoke me to the struggles of people who I would have never thought about otherwise. I recommend this one.

Interesting read on the experiences of black and immigrant experiences. Waters outlines the experiences of the blacks both immigrants and US-born with whites in the US.

This was a required text for a class I took. The class was Sociology of Immigration, outstanding professor. Books like this should be standard reading in High School.

I have used this book to provide students with an introduction to the West Indian population. It is a very easy read.

Arrived in great condition!

Great book

This book was amazing. It was assigned as a reading for a class of mine, and I definitely will be keeping this book past the semester. It is VERY informative, especially for someone looking to learn more about the different ethnicities of blacks --particulary black Americans and Afro-Caribbean (or West Indian) blacks.

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