



One of the better-known West Indian Americans was Jamaican Marcus Garvey, a black nationalist leader and founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association

capital source and an aggressive migrant ideology, legacies of their native lands. Home ownership and economic entrepreneurship were financed partly by using cultural source of capital, an association called *susu* known in West Africa as *esusu*), that first reached the West Indian societies during slavery. A *susu* facilitates savings, small-scale capital formation, and micro lending. These traditional associations have been incorporated into mainstream financial organizations such as credit unions and mortgage and commercial banks as they adapt to serve the needs of West Indian Americans.

Demographer Albert Murphy, in a report for Medgarvers College's Caribbean Research Center in New York, found that in 1990, 29.1 percent of West Indian Americans had a bachelor's degree or higher degree, compared with the U.S. average of 20.3 percent. In addition, their median household income in 1989 was \$28,000, compared with \$19,750 for African Americans overall and \$31,435 for whites.

Political and Social Incorporation

Early immigrants such as Pan-Africanists Edward Blyden

among the first West Indian Americans to become well-known and well-respected figures. Other famous West Indian Americans are former U.S. representative Shirley Chisholm; Franklin Thomas, former head of the Ford Foundation; federal judge Constance Baker Motley; Nobel laureate Derek Walcott; and world-renowned actor Sidney Poitier. Activist Stokely Carmichael, Deputy U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, and Earl Graves, businessman and publisher of *Black Enterprise*, have made impressive efforts on behalf of African Americans.

From the 1930's to the 1960's, West Indian American politicians were elected with the help of the African American vote; many of the West Indians, believing their stay in the United States to be temporary, did not become citizens and were ineligible to vote. In the 1970's this trend changed, and two congressional districts in New York with heavy concentrations of West Indian Americans became represented by African Americans. However, West Indian Americans, becoming increasingly dissatisfied with African American representation, have been fielding their own candidates in state and local elections in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. These efforts have been aided by the fact that since 1993, when legislation less favorable to the immigrant population was passed, West Indian Americans have been acquiring U.S. citizenship in greater numbers. This trend in resurgence of ethnic political awareness suggests that West Indian Americans may succeed in electing a member of their group to office.

Differential Assimilation

At the beginning of the twentieth century, West Indian Americans and African Americans held negative stereotypes of each other and rarely interacted socially. In the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's, the children of some West Indian immigrants downplayed their ethnicity and attempted to integrate into the African American community, but both groups' images of each other changed slowly. Powell, in his autobiography, *My American Journey* (1995), recalls his African American father-in-law's reaction when he proposed marriage to his daughter Alma: "All my life I've tried to stay away from those damn West Indians and now my daughter's going to marry one!"

The late 1960's, with its emphasis on racial solidarity and group identity, eroded much of the conflict between African Americans and West Indian Americans and supplanted it with black nationalist sentiments and identity. In the 1990's, many West Indian Americans are caught in an identity crisis, unsure of whether they should be West Indians with a strong ethnic orientation, African Americans with a focus on their racial identity, or "West Indian Americans" with a more hybrid identity. Class pressures play influential roles in this identity dilemma. Young, middle-class West Indian Americans, like