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**Civic Engagement of
Haitian Immigrants and Haitian
Americans
in
Miami-Dade County**

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Haitian American Foundation, Inc.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project has as its focus the assessment of barriers to civic participation in Miami's Haitian community. There is no doubt that the Haitian community would benefit if Haitian civic engagement could be increased, if more Haitian parents attended PTA meetings, if more Haitians participated in Homeowners' and Neighborhood Associations, if more Haitians started Crime Watch and neighborhood clean-up committees, if more Haitian seniors participated in senior organizations, and if even more Haitians voted and were elected to political office. Haitian participation in these activities would not only allow service providers to deliver services more readily, but would also make more services available as the broader community became aware of Haitian needs.

Our research reveals that Haitians are lacking on all three of the primary dimensions of civic engagement: literacy, skills, and attachment. Civic literacy refers to knowledge of community affairs and political issues. Civic skills incorporates competencies in achieving group goals, and civic attachment includes a feeling or belief that individuals matter in community affairs. The specific issue motivating this research, Haitians' low levels of involvement in local organizations, relates specifically to skills, i.e. competencies in achieving group goals. But we believe that this particular problem also potentially relates to the other two dimensions of civic engagement. Sometimes Haitians may not become more involved simply because they do not know, i.e., they do not have the civic literacy; or, they may not become involved because they are not civically attached, i.e. they do not believe that their involvement will make a difference.

The Haitian community is not civically attached because Haitians do not constitute a harmonious, united community. The Haitian community is divided by distrust and factions

based on friction between Haitian Haitians and Americanized Haitians, social class, language, and ambivalent relations to the African American community. Accordingly, many Haitians mistrust both outsiders and each other and usually believe that their involvement in civic affairs will not make a difference.

In spite of the circumstances and forces that deter Haitian solidarity, Haitians still exhibit the building blocks of community. For Haitians the extended family is fundamental. After family, church provides a social network that is trusted and supportive. Information also flows quickly through the community, both through informal, face-to-face networks of family, fellow church-goers and friends, and especially through the Creole-language radio broadcasts.

Moreover, Haitians have recently demonstrated considerable civic literacy skills in electoral politics. Two municipalities in Miami-Dade County, El Portal and North Miami, now have Haitian mayors and Haitian majorities on their city councils. They have also demonstrated civic attachment in other areas. Unprecedented numbers cooperated with the 2000 U.S. Census, providing a more accurate count of the numbers of Haitians and a firmer basis for assessing their needs. Haitian service agencies have begun to cooperate both with each other and with non-Haitian agencies.

The research identified three particular areas where we believe efforts should be focused on improving civic attachment: youth, schools and the church. The number of Haitian youth ensnared by gangs, drugs, teenage pregnancy or simply the lure of the streets as opposed to school increased dramatically in the 1990s. While the vast majority of Haitian youth are not in gangs, all Haitian youth have been Americanizing by adopting styles and behaviors that their parents and other Haitian adults consider inappropriate. The result is frequent and often intense parent-child conflict. Nevertheless, we discovered the youth still value their Haitian culture and want to be civically attached. They need ways to develop their civic skills and their parents need civic literacy concerning the processes of Americanization.

The concern for youth indicates how important schools are and can be in the Haitian community. Outside the family, schools are the most intensive, prolonged and programmatically continuous social institution for adolescents, almost all of whom spend six to seven hours a day, nine months a year in schools. The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) have been trying to respond to the particular needs of the Haitian community since the 1980s and have made significant strides. Nevertheless, the schools can still advance further the civic literacy, skills and attachment of Haitian parents and students.

Previous research has documented that Haitians are extraordinarily religious. Numerous Haitians report that the one person whom they trust outside of their family is their priest or pastor. Accordingly, Haitian churches can be a key vehicle for promoting increased Haitian civic literacy, skills and attachment.

Although this research was **not** concerned with identifying needs, people often did bring up particular needs they felt should be addressed. Nearly always these were specific areas related to individual and family needs, such as housing, youth mentor programs, and education. These immediate needs are the ones that should be addressed first, rather than more abstract concerns such as the good of the Haitian community. Moreover, the Haitian community in the U.S. does not have a history of partisan ideological politics. Unlike African Americans, most Haitians, especially those who immigrated to the U.S. as adults, do not necessarily view, for example, the Democratic Party as more supportive of the needs of minorities. The politician who addresses the multiple and immediate pressing needs of individuals and families will receive the most support.

The first and most important key to engendering greater Haitian civic attachment is to increase trust among Haitians, a task much easier said than done. Haitians tend to be cynical about activities that claim to be for the good of the community. Agencies must demonstrate through their actions that they or their personnel are not the prime beneficiary of their services or funding. Distrust will not be overcome with a single event or even one long term program. Haitians' cynicism and suspicion is based in nearly two centuries of history. It will

take repeated reinforcement of examples of organizations actually delivering desired services, of incorruptible politicians. Moreover, a single negative example of incompetence or a return to corruption can more than counterbalance numerous positive examples.

The research did not seek to construct specific strategies that would produce greater Haitian civic engagement. Nevertheless, although not stressed but alluded to by our informants, many of the strategies commonly used by American organizations are less likely to work in the Haitian community. Because of their distrust, language difficulties, time constraints, sense of discrimination, and the lack communication between youth and parents, Haitians do not conform to the expectations of strategies that include public meetings, call back, public leadership or committee structures. While finding innovative strategies is beyond the scope of this study, we do suggest:

- Engaging social service agencies in discussions with coalitions of religious leaders
- Engaging churches in activities that would raise civic literacy
- Engaging youth in civic attachment activities at schools and in their churches
- Providing youth with programs outside of school that are sanctioned by their churches and that will build civic engagement skills through group participation.
- Providing Haitians forums to talk about issues surrounding adaptation to the U.S. Pulling small groups together for civil conversation, such as we did with focus groups, seems to give Haitians a way to express their civic literacy and skills and thus promote civic attachment.

Helping Haitian immigrants and their children to become more active players in the civic arena of their adopted country will move the community in all its diverse forms closer to providing for its own needs and contributing to greater social good.

Civic Engagement of Haitian Immigrants and Haitian Americans in Miami-Dade County

This report is a product of an agreement between Alex Stepick and Carol Dutton Stepick of the Immigration and Ethnicity Institute (IEI) of Florida International University and both the Haitian American Foundation, Inc. (HAFI) represented by then Executive Director, Leonie Hermantin, and the Human Services Coalition of Miami-Dade County, Inc. (HSC) represented by Daniella Levine. The purpose of the agreement was to conduct research on Civic Engagement of Local Communities of Haitian Immigrants and Haitian Americans in Miami Dade County. This document constitutes the final report referred to in the agreement.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This research project has as its focus the assessment of barriers to civic participation in Miami's Haitian community. It is not an overall assessment of the needs of Miami's Haitian community. The original proposal to the Kellogg Foundation conceived of a standard needs assessment. Preliminary research, however, revealed other researchers already performing needs' assessments. Moreover, HAFI recognized that a prime obstacle to meeting Haitians' needs are the low levels of civic engagement and basic participation of Haitians in voluntary organizations and community development projects. Our specific focus is to discover the obstacles to Haitian participation in civic and political arenas. We argue that higher levels of such participation are critical to obtaining service delivery at both the community and individual levels. We warn the reader that this report is a research report, not a plan of action. Research of this type does not necessarily translate directly into concrete strategies and solutions, but it can offer insights and perspectives.

WHY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Originally, HAFI proposed to conduct a standard Needs' Assessment for the Haitian community that would focus on predetermined needs such as health, housing, and employment. After extensive discussions with Leonie Hermantin, we agreed upon a different approach. This project does not take the standard approach for three reasons: 1. needs in the Haitian community are either being or have been assessed to some degree by others; 2. Haitian reluctance to become civically engaged deters the assessment of needs since on the whole Haitians are frequently not open with researchers and are not readily accessible to large scale surveys assessing levels of need; and 3. Increasingly, service providers are acknowledging low levels of Haitian participation in programs offering services that require attendance at meetings, call back, committee structures and other cooperative or self-help activities. Not enough Haitians participate in the civic activities that bear directly on their everyday lives. This very lack of civic engagement thwarts efforts to address needs.

Standard needs' assessments of Miami's Haitian community are already being conducted by a number of researchers as are other related research projects. With funding from the National Science Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Mellon Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and U.S. Census Bureau, IEI has been conducting research with Haitian youth and young adults on the subjects of academic orientation, religious involvement, and civic engagement for the past six years. Presently we have a major project on Immigration, Religion and Civic Engagement which is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. We also have a small project on the impact of welfare reform, which includes a small Haitian sample. IEI also conducted a Needs' Assessment of the Haitian community for the City of Miami in 1994.

The Kellogg Scholar/Practitioner Team under the direction of Dr. Marvin Dunn has been assessing the impact of welfare reform on Miami's Haitian Community. The National Coalition for Haitian Rights issued a Needs' Assessment in October 2000. Gilbert St. Jean, a Haitian graduate student, has also recently conducted a survey to assess Haitian health needs. Dr. Richard Beaulaurier and Dr. Mario de la Rosa of Florida International University are directing a Haitian Juvenile Arrestees Project, which is part of the National Demonstration Project of the Juvenile Assessment Center of Miami-Dade County. Finally, the release of Census 2000 data has just begun, although detailed statistics on specific groups, such as Haitians, will not be available until 2002.

While knowing the objective needs of the Haitian community is a prerequisite to addressing them, our experience has taught us that enormous barriers remain to getting the Haitian community actively involved in addressing those needs, whatever they are. Haitians, as with many other immigrant communities (especially those with a large number of undocumented individuals) are reticent to become involved in community activities such as PTA's, neighborhood associations or more generally making their voice heard in the public arena including assuming any sort of community leadership role. Non-involvement is commonly attributed to cultural differences, e.g., most immigrants come from countries that did not encourage or had no tradition of citizen involvement. There have also been numerous cases

among Miami Haitian organizations which have been accused of malfeasance, failing to deliver services as promised or are consumed by management turmoil . As a consequence, immigrants, and often those who fund Miami Haitian organizations, frequently lack trust in local institutions and those who lead them. Others attribute immigrants' alienation from local institutions to structural obstacles such as language, insecure immigration status or lack of time because they are so busy working. Our goal in this project has been to identify as precisely as possible what the obstacles to involvement are for Miami Haitians. In fact we have been successful in identifying not all but some of the major obstacles from the perspective of Haitians living in our South Florida community.

Somewhat ironically, this report comes just after Haitians have achieved significant gains in one area, local electoral politics where Haitians now are the elected leaders of two municipalities within Miami-Dade County, El Portal and North Miami. While these gains are important, community and voluntary organizations, such as PTAs, Neighborhood Crime Watch committees and homeowners associations still struggle to achieve adequate Haitian involvement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Although we offer some perspectives from outside the Haitian community, the fundamental design of this project relies on a perspective from within, i.e., what Haitians themselves see as the impediments to greater community involvement. We identified potential participants in voluntary organizations, specifically homeowners, parents of school-age children, church leaders and young adults as subpopulations of the Haitian community that have potential opportunities for civic involvement but who have not yet utilized them. The goal of this approach is to determine specifically what the obstacles to involvement are for each of these subpopulations and what might be done to overcome them.

For this, we proposed a combination of focus groups and individual interviewing. We conducted a total of five focus groups of ten to 18 participants conducted with four different subpopulations:

- Homeowners Association members (1 focus group)
- Church ministers (1 focus group)
- College students (1 focus group)
- Parents of school-age children (2 focus groups)

To complement this, we conducted intensive interviews with 15 individuals including both representatives from these subpopulations plus others, such as service providers and community leaders. One special subgroup was composed of young adults and adolescents not in school.

Additionally we called on recent or ongoing research from other projects we are conducting among the South Florida Haitian population to supplement the findings from these focus groups and interviews.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups offer the ability to bring numerous people together for discussion concentrating on a focused topic. They have enjoyed a surge of popularity recently in social science research because they efficiently permit people to openly express their opinions.

We conducted focus groups with: members of the Little Haiti Homeowners Association,

members of the Coalition of Haitian Pastors, Haitian undergraduate students at Florida Memorial College, Haitian PTA member parents at John F. Kennedy Middle School and Haitian parents with children attending Morningside Elementary School. All focus groups were held at locations convenient for participants. For each focus group we developed a moderator's guide that addressed civic engagement issues and issues specific to that sub-population (see Appendix for sample moderator's guide). Dr. Terry Rey, an FIU faculty member who lived in Haiti for a number of years and is fluent in both Haitian Creole and French, moderated all the groups.

The focus group with Florida Memorial College students was primarily in English. All the other focus groups were in Haitian Creole. All the focus groups were audio taped and video taped and subsequently translated and transcribed in English. Focus group participants were recruited by individuals working with each group. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. As can be seen in detail in the focus group moderator's guides in the Appendix, after an introduction that explained focus groups and our research, each focus group addressed issues of civic engagement, but in ways particularly relevant to that group. Thus, the focus group with Haitian pastors devoted extensive attention to the role of religious institutions in the Haitian community, while the two focus groups with parents of school-age children dedicated much more time to education. Participation in all the groups was lively and the participants not only were reluctant to stop after two hours, but asked for another focus group in the future.

Interviews

To complement the focus groups, we conducted 15 interviews with individuals who are either connected with the organizations involved in the focus groups, young Haitian adults who have shown some commitment to community or service providers and community leaders. These individual interviews permitted us to include the opinions of particular individuals whose opinions we felt were important, but who were not available for the focus groups. We promised anonymity to whomever wanted it. Two Haitian youth chose to remain anonymous and their names are thus not listed in the Appendix. As with the focus groups, each interview was audio taped, transcribed and for the interviews conducted in Haitian Creole they were also translated. The research did not have sufficient funds for a survey, a method which is extremely difficult and therefore expensive among Haitians .

We also made use of data from related research. The Stepicks have been conducting research in the Haitian community for over 20 years. Dr. Kretsedemas is a part of Dr. Marvin Dunn's Kellogg Scholar/Practitioner team and was involved with the Haitian community when he worked for the Human Services Coalition of Miami-Dade County. The Stepicks conducted a more traditional needs assessment of Miami's Haitians in 1994 and collected data on needs in the 1980s when they conducted the first and still only representative sample survey of recently arrived Haitians in South Florida. Since the mid-1990s they have been conducting a longitudinal project with Haitian youth that followed high school freshmen through high school and beyond to their post graduation years. Currently, they are engaged in a major research project supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts that is examining Religion, Immigration and Civic Engagement in Miami. These other projects also informed this particular research.

WHAT IS THE HAITIAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTH FLORIDA?

According to the 2000 Census, between 1990 and 2000 the number of Haitians in Florida more than doubled to 267,689. Other sources estimate higher numbers. Officially Florida now has more than a third of all Haitians in the U.S., outpacing New York the previous primary concentration of Haitian settlement in the U.S. . Since the late 1950s, when much of Haiti's educated elite fled the François Duvalier regime, New York had been considered the nation's Haitian epicenter, economically and politically. Since the 1970s and especially after 1980 Florida's Haitian population has been growing and has now finally surpassed that of New York.

Nevertheless, while the Haitian presence has increased, the Haitian community has continually struggled to be recognized, to have its voice heard and to become integrated into South Florida. Life for Haitians in the U.S. has tended to be dominated by struggle, struggle against a discriminatory immigration policy and struggle against ubiquitous anti-Haitian prejudice. For a very large proportion of Haitians their focus in the U.S. is commonly on surviving and getting ahead more than on civic involvement.

While the increase in numbers is significant, even more important is the change in generation. Haitians have been immigrating in significant numbers to the U.S. for over 40 years. The original immigrants' children are now adults. The presence of a second generation of Haitians, who generally refer to themselves as Haitian Americans, is both visible and influential. Increasingly, second generation Haitians are moving into positions of power and influence, especially in the professions as they take advantage of educational opportunities in the U.S.

The Haitian community is becoming more dispersed and more diverse. Haitians are no longer concentrated almost solely in Little Haiti. As with other second generation immigrants and many African Americans, most economically successful Haitians no longer live in their original neighborhood. As Haitians have accumulated capital, often through working two or more jobs, they have moved out of Little Haiti and they maintain only tenuous ties to the area that has the largest concentration of Haitians. In fact, there have always been Haitians outside of Little Haiti, especially those who were professionals and middle class before emigrating from Haiti. In the last decade, however, the numbers of professionals, middle class, and successful working class Haitians has expanded dramatically. Many middle class Haitians are moving to South Florida from other parts of the U.S. and to a smaller extent from Canada and Europe. They bypass Little Haiti completely, moving directly to more affluent suburbs primarily in southwest Miami-Dade County or western Broward County. Working class Haitians who have stable employment are also moving out of Little Haiti into North Miami and North Miami Beach. Some feel that Little Haiti is no longer the heart of the Haitian community. "Little Haiti no longer exists," said Leslie Prudent, North Miami Adult Education Center principal. "It was a dream to have a community, a collectivity called Little Haiti. Now it is less than when they dreamed it was here, 125th St. is the center, not 54th" .

It is often taken for granted that we know what the Haitian community is. We do know, for example, how many people on the Census indicated they were born in Haiti or claim to be of Haitian descent. But Haitians well know, and it has been demonstrated by previous research, that the "Haitian community" is amorphous and seldom unified. Haitians have not always had, and some would argue have never had, a sense of solidarity. In their homeland, they did not suffer the apartheid nor the consequent struggle for civil rights familiar to African Americans in the U.S. In the U.S. class divisions imported from Haiti have generally mitigated against a unified Haitian community. Few of the middle and professional class Haitians have felt sympathy toward let alone joined the fight of the majority of Haitians who have fought for immigration rights. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, most successful Haitians did not actively express support for the Haitian "boat people," the relatively poor, recent arrivals who were struggling for entrance to the U.S. and the same treatment that was commonly accorded refugees from Cuba. There were, of course, middle class and professional Haitians who sought to help the broader Haitian community. Haitian community and activist organizations are generally led by such people. But, in contrast to Miami's Cuban community, there are many "invisible" Haitians whose involvement in the "Haitian community" is limited to family and close friends. In fact, the only time that all Haitians united was in 1988 when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) refused to accept blood donations from any one of Haitian descent. The upper and middle class Haitians on this occasion could not distance themselves from other Haitian immigrants. The FDA banned everyone's blood, not just those who were poor or came by boat. Haitians from all social classes mobilized quickly and effectively to convince the FDA that the ban was both unscientific and discriminatory . Moreover, although the majority of Haitians in south Florida have great economic difficulties, they are still doing better than the majority of the population back in Haiti. Thus, those who do feel inclined to help the Haitian community, often feel they can make more of a difference in Haiti than here.

While most people we interviewed simply presumed the existence of the Haitian community, the young people we interviewed in particular often did not have a well developed sense of their community being specifically a Haitian community. When asked what community meant, Sawa, a young Haitian woman, explained, "Community is [people with] different types of background coming together and living in a place, raising kids. A place with different kinds of people. That's a community. People interact with each other." Edner indicated community is, "Another part of your home," meaning "Family, friends. I know community is a big part in how you gonna' turn out in the future. If you grew up in a bad neighborhood, most likely you're going to be used to stuff like that. Like the stuff you being around. In the future you might want to do stuff like that. But, if you grew up in a quiet, good neighborhood, when you see bad stuff you won't be tempted doing that. You know, you're not used to that." These Haitian youth have only a loose sense of and even weaker identification with their community. They speak in abstract terms of potential impact, not in the concrete specifics of what the Haitian community means to them.

In spite of the circumstances and forces that deter Haitian solidarity, Haitians still exhibit the building blocks of community. For Haitians family is fundamental. Haitians put family first and they define family as the large extended family, including distant cousins and occasionally people who are not actually related by kinship. After family, church provides a social network that is trusted and supportive. Individuals often have leadership roles in their churches that are invisible to outsiders. Information also flows quickly through the community, both through informal, face-to-face networks of family, fellow church-goers and friends, and especially through the Creole-language radio broadcasts.

In short, the Haitian community is not a solidarity. It is not a unified force, except when confronted by extreme, pervasive prejudice such as when the FDA refused to accept blood donations from anyone of Haitian descent. Accordingly, many Haitians mistrust both outsiders and each other, such as those from different political factions or even from different churches. Yet, there remains the possibility of a broad Haitian community, even if it arises primarily in response to discrimination. More immediately, segments of the Haitian community, such as extended family networks and fellow church-goers, do cooperate and identify with one another.

HAITIAN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The particular issue that motivated this research was the difficulty in getting Haitians to become involved in local voluntary organizations, such as PTAs or community development projects. This type of involvement generally falls under the label of civic engagement. Concerns have arisen recently whether civic engagement is declining for everyone in the U.S. Most notably Robert Putnam has argued that the U.S. faces a civic crisis today in terms of all young people's civic disengagement. Others have countered that civic engagement has not declined but has simply changed in nature . For example, while people are less likely to read newspapers (one of Putnam's indicators of decline), many instead get news from other sources such as TV and now the internet . Youth voting is low but volunteerism is at an all-time high . The debate has spurred new research. Numerous private foundations have launched initiatives aimed at youth civic engagement including the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and William T. Grant Foundations. And, there have appeared two special issues of journals devoted to the topic .

This recent research concerning civic engagement in the U.S. in general reveals the many dimensions of civic engagement. It is not only voting in elections or knowing who your elected officials are. It includes civic literacy, skills, and attachment. Civic literacy refers to knowledge of community affairs and political issues. Civic skills incorporates competencies in achieving group goals, and civic attachment includes a feeling or belief that individuals matter in community affairs . The specific issue motivating this research, Haitians' low levels of involvement in local organizations, relates specifically to skills, i.e. competencies in achieving group goals. But we believe that this particular problem also potentially relates to the other two dimensions of civic engagement. Sometimes Haitians may not become more involved simply because they do not know, i.e., they do not have the civic literacy; or, they may not

become involved because they are not civically attached, i.e. they do not believe that their involvement will make a difference. This last characteristic is particularly relevant to Haitian history.

Coming from one of the least democratic heritages in the New World, Haitians have little experience with civic involvement. The demise of the Duvalier regime in 1986 infused great hopes in Haiti for both democracy and development. The instability and seeming anarchy that have periodically engulfed Haiti ever since have reinforced a cynicism and distrust of politicians specifically and civic action more generally.

In Miami, rather than being welcomed as Cubans have been, Haitians have encountered rejection at every turn. Cubans have never had to struggle to obtain a legal immigration status. The U.S. automatically extends permanent resident status to any Cuban who has been in the U.S. for one year, regardless of whether they entered legally or illegally. In the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. government even paid the airfare for Cubans emigrating to the U.S. In contrast, the U.S. government has consistently worked to bar Haitians from entering the country irregularly. The interdiction by boat of immigrants attempting to enter the U.S. was created specifically for Haitians. The policy of imprisoning undocumented immigrants in special detention centers was spurred by anti-Haitian fears. The U.S. has spent more per capita on Cuban refugees than any other group, including African Americans, has ever received. Miami-Dade County schools, the County hospital and local law enforcement agencies received millions of dollars to assist in the resettlement of Cuban refugees. Only a particular group of Haitians who arrived in 1980 at the same time as the Mariel boatlift have ever received benefits comparable to those available to Cubans. The recertification of Cuban professionals, from doctors and lawyers to accountants and nurses, was subsidized by the U.S. government. Haitians have received no comparable financial aid, except for a small program at Miami-Dade Community College for local high school graduates who lack a legal immigration status. Cubans have been hailed as model minorities, while Haitians have been inaccurately stigmatized as carriers of AIDS. The experiences of racism urge identification with African Americans. At the same time, prejudice specifically against Haitians, some of it on the part of African Americans, isolates them further. Haitians thus have confronted tremendous discrimination. While both Cubans and Haitians have fled poor countries and oppressive regimes, the U.S. government has welcomed the Cubans (as it has other refugees fleeing from communism such as Vietnamese) and rejected the Haitians .

Under these circumstances, Haitians have ample reason to avoid civic engagement. We might even expect Haitians to be an invisible minority that attempts to avoid all contact with the broader society and specifically be fearful of civic engagement. Haitians, however, are decidedly interested in civic issues. Haitian radio programs are filled with talk shows that address **both** issues in Haiti **and** those in the U.S. Everyone we interviewed, nevertheless, argued that Haitians must become more civically engaged; that they need to move beyond talk to action; and that they should strive to emulate the political successes of Miami's Cuban community.

Positive Signs of Haitian Engagement

While Haitians certainly do not have power comparable to Miami Cubans, there are also indicators of Haitians' willingness and desire to combat prejudice and discrimination and to make their voices heard within and beyond Miami's Haitian community.

Community Organizations

In 2000, a mental health task force was formed that included HAFI, Haitian Support Inc, FANM, Department of Children and Family, and the Health Department to target, among others, at-risk girls. Haitian agencies also got together recently with Hispanic and other non-Haitian agencies to form a task force dealing with problems of elderly Haitian immigrants. Participating groups included The Little Haiti Housing Task Force, Miami-Jewish Home and Hospital Channeling program, Alzheimer's Association - Greater Miami Chapter, HAFI, the

Florida Department of Children and Families, the Center of Information and Orientation and the Haitian Organization of Women. Haitians are also increasingly obtaining important appointed positions in local government and the school district. There are more than a dozen local Haitian-American professional groups, from nurses to engineers. The Haitian American Medical Association now holds annual meetings. And young, bright and talented Haitian-Americans are speaking out and organizing through the Society of Haitian-American Professionals.

Voting

The most notable civic engagement achievements have been the election of Haitian officials. The City Council in the small village of El Portal was the first to elect Haitians. More recently, this has been complemented by the election of Philip Brutus to the State of Florida House of Representatives and the election of a Haitian majority city council and Haitian mayor in the city of North Miami.

In all these elections, ethnicity was a key factor in voting. In the late 1990s, Haitian activists combed the Miami-Dade County voter roles to find the State legislative districts with the highest concentration of Haitian-like names. While the candidates failed the first time around, by the year 2000 they achieved success. They have formed the Haitian Association of Elected Officials which counts ten members.

The candidates emphasized their Haitian origins. Joe Celestin, the Mayor of North Miami, was quoted in the Miami Herald during his campaign as claiming that "North Miami belongs to the Haitians." He now disavows the quote, declaring that what he really said was "that Haitians are going to continue moving into North Miami at the same rate they are moving now, based on the question I was asked by the reporter, in 10 years North Miami could be for Haitians what Hialeah is for Hispanics."

While the Haitian adults in our projects are proud of their newly elected officials, the Haitian youth expressed high levels of cynicism and disillusionment toward politicians in the U.S. In our focus groups, Haitian youth seized upon the One Florida Initiative, a movement within the State of Florida to repeal affirmative action in education, as an example of political discrimination and hypocrisy. Will expressed the feelings several other participants held toward the current Governor of Florida and ostensible author of the One Florida Initiative, "That's why Black people need to stick together as one. I don't like Jeb Bush. That's the way I feel about that. He lied. He's a liar. He lied to get in office. Let me tell you what these governor people do to get in office. They lie. They tell you they gonna do this and that, but they're not going to do it. Then when they get in office they forget about what they said."

The Haitian youth we have studied generally agreed that their one vote could not make any difference. For example, Nadege said, "I mean, I think y'all's vote don't change anything. The decision already made. It's just like a game you know." Erica attributed the reason she doesn't vote to her mistrust of politicians, "I ain't fixin' to vote for somebody and then when they get in office they be messing up, you know. I'll be mad. I'd be saying, 'dang, if I wouldn't have vote they wouldn't have won.' Well, probably they would've won anyways. But still, they be lying and I don't know why should I vote for them. So, I be like forget about it. So, I just don't vote."

The election of Haitian officials reflects a dramatic increase in Haitian civic engagement, an increase that parallels the experiences of earlier and other contemporary immigrants to the U.S. who politically vote as solid ethnic blocks. Irish in Boston and Jews in New York City came to power 100 years ago through ethnic block voting as have Cubans more recently in the Miami area. At the same time, the continued alienation of Haitian youth parallels American youth who generally are disengaged from politics in their teens and late twenties, but who become more engaged as they finish their education, obtain steady employment and form families.

The advance in Haitian civic engagement in electoral politics was foreshadowed in 2000

when many more Haitians cooperated with the Census than had occurred in 1990. The U.S. Census Bureau in cooperation with local governments undertook unprecedented efforts to encourage new immigrants to cooperate with the Census. Many cities spent thousands of dollars on notices enclosed with utility bills, giveaways at block parties, and advertisements on radio in Haitian Creole and other languages. The Census Bureau also hired local Haitians to assist with outreach. The general message was that the Census was critical in determining the distribution of federal funds and thus central to aiding the Haitian community. The results were impressive as cooperation rates were much higher than in 1990 implying that many Haitians believed they might be helping their community by cooperating.

These positive signs are encouraging. The continued cynicism of Haitian youth, however, cautions us not to be overly optimistic. Because the youth appear to be cynical, and because they represent the future of the Haitian community, we want to pause on the issue of Haitian youth.

Sites for Improving Civic Engagement

Haitian Youth

In 1994, when we last conducted a Needs' Assessment of Miami's Haitian Community, concern for Haitian youth emerged as the overwhelming top priority. For this reason and because Haitian youth represent the future, our report pays special attention to them. In previous work throughout the 1980s, immigration status and jobs had always been the most pressing concerns of members of the Haitian community as revealed by research. Through the 1980s, Haitian adults and others, such as teachers and the police, considered Haitian youth to be excellent students, always trying their hardest, and more likely to be the victims than perpetrators of harassment and crime. But gradually a change occurred.

First, in response to ubiquitous, unrelenting anti-Haitian prejudice and discrimination, many Haitian youth became ashamed to be Haitian. They even covered-up, denied that they were Haitian, trying to pass as Bahamian or African American. As a result, they often come into conflict with their parents who want them to look, act and talk like Haitian Haitians. As Richard a Haitian college student explained, "Your parents want you to go to school with church clothes on. Those things don't mix and so it's hard to compromise without cutting something off."

Even if they did become "cover-ups", many, even most, Haitian youth were still working hard in school and staying out of trouble, but by the early 1990's increasing numbers were skipping school, dropping out, using drugs, and becoming involved in gangs. Haitian youths initially formed gangs to protect themselves from harm and reaffirm their identity. But some of these gangs evolved from a relatively benign beginning into violent and criminal operations, according to Louis Hems Marcellin who is leading a study on Haitian gang activity in South Florida. Little Haiti's crime rate has grown rapidly and the most violent youth gangs in the 90s were Haitian. There are over twenty gangs in Little Haiti of which five are engaged in violent criminal activities.

While the vast majority of Haitian youth are not in gangs, they still are a cause for concern, especially to their parents. As Haitian youth acculturate to America, they adopt styles and behaviors that their parents and other Haitian adults consider inappropriate. The boys frequently wear the extremely baggy clothes, corn rows, and gold teeth of hip hop culture. The girls dress more provocatively than would be acceptable in Haiti.

Throughout our research in both focus groups and interviews, Haitian adults repeatedly emphasized how their greatest concern remains the Haitian youth. As Pastor Vilot noted, "While the parents are working hard to adapt to the American lifestyle, the kids are quickly getting the American education by themselves. Therefore the pressure is now for the parents to adjust to the kids as well, since they are being left behind educationally and socially."

Haitian youth also come to understand American freedom and independence as meaning the freedom to disobey one's parents. Corporal punishment has become a particular flashpoint as many Haitian youth threaten to report their parents to the authorities if their parents strike them. The parents often feel caught in a bind. For example, Marie, the mother of a teenage Haitian boy who has been misbehaving, explains:

I feel caught up between two forces. On the one hand, I have to prevent the police from coming to my doorstep, which means that I need to help my son so that he does not engage in criminal activities. On the other hand, I have to prevent HRS (Human and Rehabilitative Services, now called the Department of Children and Families) from coming to my doorstep. This is a really difficult situation for me.

The youth themselves, however, clarify that their behavior does not mean a rejection either of their parents or of Haitian culture. Yves, who has adopted a thoroughly hip-hop style with extra baggy pants, corn rows, gold teeth, and a bandana on his head, stated:

That (dressing hip hop) doesn't mean you any less of a Haitian than the next person that wear a tie and shoes like my father does. It's your pride and knowing where you came from, where you going and how you have help(ed) others, and by speaking Creole, by doing certain things, that's how you know a Haitian.

The key is whether parents and children can communicate. Louis, a recently arrived Haitian student, who deplores the permissiveness of American culture adds,

(But) Haitian parents don't talk to their children. Children don't feel comfortable with their parents. When they have a problem, they can't talk about it with their parents. There is no respect for children. In the parents' view, children never say something good.

Alan, who has been in the U.S. for two years, concurs, "Haitian parents are not friends with their children. That can lead the children to do bad things."

Suzanne, felt her mother treated her "like a little child too much." When asked if her mother was behaving like a Haitian or an American regarding parental control, she replied,

Like a Haitian. She thinks like a Haitian in the old days. To her, a girl should start dating at 21. This creates a lot of conflict between me and her. I am 18. She doesn't think I should be dating. We argue. When boys call me at home, she doesn't like that.

But Suzanne herself is caught between two cultural models that define the adolescent years quite differently, childhood in Haiti and emergent adulthood in America. Suzanne sees it this way:

Children have too much freedom in the American culture. Way too much. They take advantage of it. In the Haitian culture, I think children have too little freedom. You can't do nothing. Like in the Haitian culture, they have been living in school and church. They don't let you go out with your friends.

Some Haitian adolescent children actually perceive their parents' child-rearing practices as potentially leading to downward segmentary assimilation. Marcelene, born in the U.S. of Haitian parents, asserts, "Their authoritarian way drives you away from them. You can't talk to them. This can lead you to do bad stuff."

Children of immigrants may be in conflict with their parents, but they still feel that family is important. They are caught in a contradiction. They want to advance their traditional value of assuming responsibility for their family as they mature and move out of being dependent. At the same time, they are absorbing the common American notion that adolescence is a period in which individuals move from dependence to independence and responsibility primarily for

themselves. The conflict they embody does not reflect a diminution of one's feelings for family, but an intensification of negative ways of relating. Children such as those quoted above all experience high conflict with their parents. Yet, they all still care very much about their parents and they all recognize how important family is to them.

In sum, the "problem" with Haitian youth is both cultural and generational. Haitian parents believe their Haitian children are abandoning their Haitian heritage as they dress differently, speak English, and are not as obedient. Haitian youth are indeed more familiar with American culture than their first generation immigrant parents. To integrate and succeed in the U.S., Haitian youth feel compelled to look, act and talk like Americans. But, according to the Haitian youth, this Americanization does **not** diminish their feelings toward their parents or Haitian heritage. Haitian youth seek to exploit American "freedoms," but they are not forsaking their Haitian heritage. In spite of the way they dress and talk, in their hearts and minds they still love and respect both their parents and their Haitian roots.

School

The concern for youth indicates how important schools are and can be in the Haitian community. Outside the family, schools are the most intensive, prolonged and programmatically continuous social institution for adolescents, almost all of whom spend six to seven hours a day, nine months a year in schools. Schools not only provide formal learning, but for many adolescents what they encounter during the school day structures their peer relations, leisure activities and extracurricular learning .

In the early 1980s, there were constant calls for the schools to address the peculiar needs of recently arrived Haitians. Some teenagers, for example, had never attended school before arriving in Miami, although they were of high school age. There were few certified teachers who spoke Haitian Creole and virtually no materials on Haiti or in Haitian Creole. In general, there were few people working in the schools who understood Haitian students. The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) have been trying to respond to the particular needs of the Haitian community since then and have made significant strides. Each year there are more teachers and other personnel who speak Creole. In schools with large Haitian populations, there are Creole-speaking personnel who are charged with reaching out to Haitian parents. There is a special program for teenagers who have not previously attended school. And, there are special workshops to inform and sensitize teachers to the needs of the Haitian community. Haitian parents, for example, applauded the special activities that some schools have for Haitian flag day. They all also praised the Creole-speaking outreach workers in the schools.

Nevertheless, there still remains a significant gap between the needs of Haitian parents and students and the available resources. Haitian parents, for example, emphasized to us the importance of always having a Creole translator available for meetings. Marilene, the mother of a middle school Haitian student, admitted, "The problem that you just mentioned about not hearing English is so true. Sometimes I get invited to some meetings, I usually do not attend because it's going to be held in English, and I do not understand English, so I just stay home."

Church

There is a major philosophy that I learned in Haiti, "God, Country and Work." Michelle, a nurse with three children

"Pastors represent the last big hope for the Haitians in Dade County." Herve, a Haitian pastor.

Previous research has documented that Haitians are extraordinarily religious. Nearly 75 percent of recent Haitian immigrants in south Florida reported in 1985 that they attended

church at least weekly . About 40 percent of recent Haitian immigrants in South Florida are protestants and storefront Protestant churches abound in Little Haiti. A few have had explosive growth. "On almost every street corner in Little Haiti one can find a church – there are approximately twice as many today as there were ten years ago," estimates Rev. Jonas Georges. "If there is a storefront for rent, a church is the first to make an offer." One Baptist church has converted a huge, former textile plant in Little Haiti into an impressive church. Several Catholic parish churches have very high Haitian attendance, and the Haitian Catholic Center is still the most visible and important single religious institution in the Haitian community.

Many of our respondents construct an important community in their church and accordingly focus their activities there. For many, particularly the elderly, the church, is their sole social extra-familial contact. But the church remains important for most Haitian youth, too. Keisha, a Haitian, indicated that in his life, "To be honest with you, I care about my church and my education." Another Haitian adolescent, Evan, indicated that his most important social interaction was that he "helps other kids study the Bible." Similarly, the church is where he finds out about activities in the broader world. "I hear from other people. I talk to people about it, especially people in my church; my Sunday school teacher." In general, Haitians trust their religious leaders more than anyone else outside of their family.

Traditionally, Haitian Protestant churches have been more concerned with their followers' spiritual than material lives. But recently, Haitian pastors banded together to form the Conference of Haitian Pastors, which now has more than 80 pastors signed up. They have begun a series of activities directly related to civic engagement. As one of the founders of the Conference stated, "My philosophy is I cannot tell you to get saved or I cannot tell you about Jesus Christ if you hungry. You cannot concentrate to hear that! If you don't have a place to sleep—that's your primary problem." "For instance, it is common in the church that if someone has HIV, they automatically ostracize that person as if the person had to be involved in promiscuity to be in that situation. My philosophy is, HIV does not limit who you are. It does not discriminate whether you come to church or not. Whether you are in promiscuity or not 'cause we have a lot of people...the wife may be saved—the husband may not be. The husband messing around, brings it home."

Some pastors have local Creole-language radio and television programs in which they argue that Haitian Christians should be involved in local affairs. As one pastor who has a radio program related, "You hear me say a lot, 'Tell your pastors...this is for the community. This is going to be good for your church.' They also make the same argument from their pulpits."

Yet, we caution that Haitian churches should not be viewed as the perfect and only vehicle for effecting civic engagement. While the recent organization of the Conference of Haitian Pastors promises to civically engage more Haitians, they have a long way to go. Churches remain overwhelmingly focused on their congregants' spiritual needs. Pastors can be jealous of "sharing" their parishioners with other groups and are often very pessimistic about community organizing.

Factionalism also exists among Haitian churches. The Protestant-Catholic divide may not be as violent as in Northern Ireland, but many Haitians on both sides of this divide do not trust people on the other side. While ecumenicalism is visible and probably increasing, there remain many church leaders who view people who attend churches other than their own as misguided or worse. The factionalism among Haitian churches is only one example of the impediments to civic engagement that confront the Haitian community.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The most frequently mentioned reason for why Haitian adults are not more civically engaged was lack of time. Adults are too busy working, often both parents working two jobs each and raising their families, to have time to go to meetings and participate in events. Surprising numbers of adults are seeking further education, particularly English-language skills. As with most immigrants and working class people, these time commitments to work and family deter

becoming involved civically. Yet, an overwhelming proportion of Haitians somehow still find time to go to church.

Time is short for Haitians, but other factors determine why they spend the free time they do have with family and at church instead of going to PTA meetings and participating in other forms of civic engagement. The interviews and focus groups revealed five impediments to civic engagement: 1. trust, 2. a split between first and second generation immigrants, 3. social class divisions among Haitians, 4. English versus Creole language as the appropriate language for young versus older Haitians, and 5. Haitian – African American relations.

Trust

Numerous individuals commented on Haitians' cultural attitudes towards civic engagement, specifically that Haiti does not have a history of individuals involved in civic activities. The focus of social life is the extended family and the church. There is little history, until very recently, of voluntary or social service activities. The government is considered inherently corrupt. Miami's own history of prejudice against Haitians further mitigates against developing a notion of civic engagement. In a basic sense, Haitians do not become civically engaged because they do not trust others. In our research for the 1990 U.S. Census and for an earlier survey we conducted, we discovered that lack of trust was the most important reason that Haitians did not cooperate. Following one of the Haitians we interviewed, we titled our report to the Census Bureau, "What's in it for you? What's in it for me?" Haitians relationships with people outside their family and church are often governed by this narrow view of immediate instrumentality and self-interest. They commonly do not trust that civic interaction can benefit the broader community. They commonly presume that those who claim to act in the name of the broader community really are advancing only their narrow self-interest.

Fortunately, there are examples of being able to overcome this distrust and convince Haitians to participate. The Haitian staff in schools, particularly some of the outreach workers, have succeeded in getting more Haitian parents to be involved in their childrens' schools. The U.S. Census outreach achieved dramatic gains in Haitian cooperation. In our own survey work, we accomplished the first ever random sample survey of a largely undocumented immigrant population.

Haitian Haitians versus Americanized Haitians

"We are facing a unity issue in the Haitian community. The problem comes from our leaders, those that were here before." A Haitian pastor.

Repeatedly we heard of a generational difference in leadership. The "old leaders," the Haitian Haitians, were regarded with distrust, especially by those who are more Americanized because they were either born in or primarily grew up in the U.S. The Haitian Haitians tend to be individuals whose primary cultural ties are perceived to be to Haiti. They are perceived to fulfill the stereotypes that generate the distrust described in the previous section. They are presumed to be interested in leadership primarily as a means to personal enrichment, both monetarily and in terms of ego. They are assuredly perceived as not to be trusted and many feel programs advanced by first generation immigrant Haitians are unlikely to be serious, unlikely to produce results and not worth the effort and time involved in cooperating with them .

In contrast, we heard of a new generation of leaders, the Americanized Haitians, who have been more influenced by American values of community involvement. Sometimes the division was referred to as Haitians versus Haitian Americans. Tending to be younger, Haitian Americans have grown up in the U.S. and most importantly are considered more likely to run an honest organization.

In a study of this kind, it is impossible to know whether this new generation of leaders is

indeed more honest and better at running organizations. Given the extensive discussion of the issue, however, there is no doubt that a transition and struggle is occurring as younger leaders are emerging to challenge the control of organizations by an earlier generation.

Social Class

"We can use the USA as an example and clearly see the way things are done. On the other hand we can see that there is division among us Haitians. My brothers, there is a lot of room for improvement. There is a lot we can do. Let's work together and abolish division." A Haitian Pastor.

Outsiders frequently presume that all Haitians are alike, that since Haiti is such a poor country that everyone within it must be poor. Class differences within Haiti, however, are fundamental. Unlike in the U.S. where racial and ethnic differences are often noted, in Haiti everyone is aware of class. Referring to the bourgeoisie is common and its implications are understood by everyone. Class differences have always riven Haitian society and those divisions are carried with Haitians to the U.S. They are seen among Haitians who insist that church services must be in French, not Creole. Similarly, some people claim not even to speak Creole, but only French. They exhibit as much disdain for the "boat people" as the Immigration and Naturalization Service that tries to bar their entry to the U.S. They claim they have never been to Little Haiti and have no interest in going there. They are as unlikely to engage in civic activities to benefit Haitians in Little Haiti as a xenophobic American.

At the same time, many other individuals from this "bourgeoisie" class are leaders in the Haitian community. They are the ones with the education and skills to run organizations. Many of them have a genuine commitment to helping the Haitian working class, but because of the history of class divisions they are still frequently not trusted. Indeed, when leaders are attacked on Haitian radio, "bourgeoisie" is often one of the epithets that supposedly implies that they cannot genuinely represent the interests of common Haitian folk.

The one time when all Haitians in the U.S. were united was the incident already discussed when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned blood donations from anyone of Haitian descent. Both bourgeoisie and working class Haitians felt attacked and rallied to protest and successfully engaged the American political system and bureaucracy to reverse the decision. After that, however, most middle class and professional Haitians retreated to concerns of their family and church and engaged little in the problems of the majority of Haitians in Miami. It has proven very difficult to engage them in civic activities that affect the broader Haitian community in Miami.

Language

The language of Haiti is Creole, a language that until recently was unwritten and without standard spelling. While many upper class Haitians prefer and even claim to speak only French, the language of informal, everyday speech for everyone born in Haiti, is Haitian Creole. Haitian radio in the U.S. is almost exclusively in Creole. The vast majority of Adult Haitian immigrants prefer Creole. Miami Dade County Schools and local government have made great efforts and strides in providing materials in Creole, but few people are actually literate in Creole. Fortunately, local government also tries to provide translators. Nevertheless, many Haitian parents stated that one of the reasons they do not attend PTA meetings is their inability to adequately understand English and the absence of translation.

In contrast, Haitian youth understand and usually prefer to communicate in English. Their problem is the reverse of their parents. They become frustrated, particularly in church, when everything is in Creole. In our focus groups, all the Haitian pastors agreed that one of their most difficult issues is finding an appropriate language of service. A few are fluently bilingual in Creole and English and can deliver sermons that meld the two languages. But most are not sufficiently bilingual and they struggle to meet the different language needs of both the Haitian adults and their children.

Haitian-African American Relations

Haitians have long had ambivalent relations with African Americans. African American churches were the first to help the Haitian refugees to South Florida in the 1970s. African American organizations, such as the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, and the Urban League, led the struggle through the 1980s for equal rights for Haitian immigrants.

At the same time, some Haitians sadly maintain the same negative stereotypes of African Americans held by white racists, that African Americans do not appreciate the opportunities that exist in the U.S. and are therefore lazy. For their part, African American youth in Little Haiti's schools demean their Haitian peers claiming they are dirty, ignorant, and disease-ridden. Slightly more sophisticated ones, feel that recently arrived Haitians do not understand the struggles that African Americans undertook and still undertake to be treated with dignity and have equal rights. African Americans feel Haitians need to earn their place in the U.S., as they did. They believe that Haitians, as people of African descent, should join them and their organizations in the struggle rather than seek their own political voice. In the recent mayor's race in North Miami, an African American and Haitian opposed each other. The African American accused the Haitian of dividing the community, while the Haitian claimed Haitians deserved their own representation.

Nevertheless, Haitians increasingly are becoming aware and appreciative of both the significance of race in the U.S. and of African Americans' role in forging a place for Blacks in the political arena. As one Haitian leader noted, "Well I think, too, we as Haitian Americans must be grateful to the African Americans because they have paved the way for us. Without the NAACP, without many of the black organizations no black Haitian like me would ever be in this position. It is our time now to embrace the African American community, and to dislodge the perception that we are just here for ours and to work closely with others to show we are one."

SUGGESTIONS FOR CIVIC LITERACY, SKILLS AND ATTACHMENT

There is no doubt that the Haitian community would benefit if Haitian civic engagement could be increased, if more Haitian parents attended PTA meetings, if more Haitians participated in Homeowners' and Neighborhood Associations, if more Haitians started Crime Watch and neighborhood clean-up committees, if more Haitian seniors participated in senior organizations, and if even more Haitians voted and were elected to political office. Haitian participation in these activities would not only allow service providers to deliver services more readily, but would also make more services available as the broader community became aware of Haitian needs.

We have seen grounds for both optimism and pessimism concerning future Haitian civic engagement. At times, Haitians have engaged civically to influence and even reverse U.S. policies, such as the banning of the donation of Haitian blood. Moreover, recently Haitians have made dramatic gains in electoral politics. Nevertheless, many Haitians remain cynical about politics, distrusting all forms of civic engagement. Haitians are also divided by class, experience in the U.S., ability to speak English or Creole, religious affiliation and ambivalent relations with African Americans, their most reliable allies in politics.

Our research has suggested some particular means and areas to address the ambivalence and increase Haitian civic engagement.

Individual & Family Needs

As with any primarily low income, immigrant group, a significant sector of the Haitian community has a broad range of issues that need to be addressed, including immigration status, housing, health, education, and access to social services. Although this research was **not** concerned with identifying needs, people often did bring up particular needs they felt

should be addressed. Nearly always these were specific areas related to individual and family needs, such as housing, youth mentor programs, and education. These immediate needs are the ones that should be addressed first, rather than more abstract concerns such as the good of the Haitian community. Moreover, the Haitian community does not have a history of partisan ideological politics as in the U.S. Unlike African Americans, most Haitians, especially those who immigrated to the U.S. as adults, do not necessarily view, for example, the Democratic Party as more supportive of the needs of minorities. They are more likely to support a candidate who addresses their specific needs. The election of Republican Joe Celestin as Mayor of North Miami demonstrates that they are also more likely to support a Haitian than a non-Haitian. While the Democratic party may be more sympathetic to many of the issues in the Haitian community, the Haitian community itself is unlikely to respond to partisan appeals. Whoever addresses the multiple and immediate pressing needs of individuals and families will receive the most support.

Build Trust

The first and most important key to engendering greater Haitian civic engagement is to increase trust among Haitians, a task much easier said than done. Haitians tend to be cynical about activities that claim to be for the good of the community. When we did some research for the Census Bureau on the causes of the undercount of Haitians, following what one of our respondents demanded of us, we titled it, "What's in it for me? What's in it for you?" They were not willing to believe that either our research or more generally the U.S. Census Bureau simply wanted to help the Haitian community. Haitians sometimes did not cooperate until our survey workers exasperatedly proclaimed, "I'm doing this to work my way through college and I need you to cooperate!"

The Conference of Haitian Pastors has taken the approach of encouraging civic participation by offering free services, particularly health fairs. As Pastor Vieux explained, "First we try and let them see, 'Look, we are not trying to get your money, not trying to get anything from you.' What we try to do is, we try to make you see...look we have a community out there looking at us, who need help. It is our duty to begin with to do it by joining with us, we do all the foot work. We'll do all the paperwork."

If free services are to be offered, they must be something the community wants and needs. Haitians will be distrustful of anything free, but will take advantage if they feel they really can use it.

Reinforce the Message

Distrust will not be overcome with a single event or even one long term program. Haitians' cynicism and suspicion is based in nearly two centuries of corrupt, undemocratic government in Haiti. It will take repeated reinforcement of examples of organizations actually delivering desired services, of incorruptible politicians. Moreover, a single negative example of incompetence or a return to corruption can more than counterbalance numerous positive examples.

Work with Churches

Religious leaders are probably the most trusted and therefore effective leaders in the Haitian community. As one pastor announced, "If the pastor says something, Haitians automatically believe it because he's a man of God!" Leaders of the Conference of Haitian pastors use their legitimacy to advance their civic engagement agenda. As one related, "for example when I am on the radio, you hear me say a lot, 'Tell your pastors...this is for the community. This is going to be good for your church.' So people go back and ask, 'Pastor did you know such and such is going on? Do you know this is how they are looking at it? Do you know this is what I heard them say?' So they are working for us, too, to get them to change."

Inform Parents

There are others who also play key roles. Parents are, of course, the most important influences on their children. Parent-child conflict has two sides as not only are the youth frequently trying to escape parental authority, but also parents commonly do not know what is appropriate or even permitted in American culture. Parents will always be a resource for their children, but they can be much more effective if they are better informed about American culture.

Work with Schools

School personnel are another important resource. As indicated above, students spend more time in schools than probably any place else, except perhaps home. Repeatedly, we heard from Haitian students how particular teachers had a large impact on them, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Similarly, Haitian parents reported that the Haitian staff in schools, particularly the outreach workers, were a tremendous asset.

In the 1980s and through most of the 1990s, the school system had great difficulty reaching Haitian parents. It still has difficulties, but it is encountering more success. Hiring Haitian personnel has been critical. Combining that with the use of Haitian radio can greatly extend the outreach. Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) has a daily 10 minute program on the otherwise English-language local NPR station, WLRN. While this resource is free to MDCPS, which owns the station, commercial Haitian radio has a much larger audience.

Create More Activities for Youth

Since the early 1990s, the future of Haitian youth has been a primary concern reverberating among Haitian adults. Our research reveals that they are not as alienated from or as ashamed of their Haitian culture and community as many feared. They do want to become more involved, but not necessarily in a typical or traditional way. As with nearly all youth, they are especially unlikely to be involved in what might be called traditional civic engagement areas, such as formal organizations and political activities. The one exception, at least for college students, is Haitian student organizations. The University of Miami, Florida International University, and Florida Memorial College each have a Haitian student organization. The college students with whom we spoke would like to form a Haitian umbrella student organization.

Other Haitian adolescents have more diverse ideas. One, a recent graduate of Harvard who was scheduled to begin medical school in the Fall, took a year off to work with Vista in an effort to help his community. Nearly all are involved with their church. Many of them resent the "forced volunteerism" they need to do in order to receive their high school diploma from Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Many would like the opportunity to do more, but they do not know how to do it.

Some of the youth pointed out a resource that we would not have identified -- Haitian gangs. They explained then when Haitians are picked on, especially by non-Haitians, Haitian gangs jump to their protection. There have been programs in other parts of the U.S. that have attempted to harness the energy and solidarity of youth gangs to productive purposes. More immediately, the youth's reliance upon Haitian gangs to support them reflects a problem with bullying and violence in Haitian neighborhoods.

The youth also recognize the negative impacts of gangs. Tai, a dropout himself, indicated, "Like when I see them in the streets, when I see that they don't go to school, I say, 'Hey, how come you didn't go to school today?' You know, I talk to them about that. I say, 'Look, I don't want you to end up being like me. Now that I'm out of school, I can't go to college. I want you to stay in school and focus on school'."

Most Haitian youth did express a concern for and willingness to help their community, but they wanted to help on their own terms, of their own volition. Following a national trend, Miami Dade County Public Schools has a community service requirement for high school graduation. The requirement affected all of our respondents and with few exceptions all of them resented the coercion entailed. Consistent with the general proclivity of American youth to prefer individual freedom, they want to decide, not be told, what civic engagement activities to engage in. Much of their activity revolved around their co-immigrant community, such as helping non-English speakers or helping migrants or senior citizens in their neighborhood. About one-fourth had helped their peers through either peer counseling or tutoring. At the same time, they admit that they are ignorant both about what opportunities there are and how to take advantage of those opportunities.

Link Resources Strategically

Community organizations always have fewer resources than they need. To be able to offer desired services effectively, they need to develop strategic links. The recent efforts to bring together Haitian and non-Haitian agencies are a step in the right direction. These should be strengthened. Consideration should also be given to ties with businesses that have an interest in the Haitian community. Typically, commercial firms that have an interest in the Haitian market are the most likely sponsors. These firms must be chosen carefully, for if they are unscrupulous or have a tie to the organization, they will undermine the reputation of the organization, too. If an organization conducts a public event, such as a health fair.

Use Haitian Radio

There is no doubt that Haitian radio is the best way to reach the Haitian audience. Haitian television does exist on cable, but only for a few hours a day. Haitian radio is around the clock. Talk radio call-in programs are particularly effective for outreach. If anything, the difficulty with Haitian radio is that there is too much of it. One must choose among programs and stations, looking for hosts who are receptive and programs that have a wide audience.

Tap Haitian Symbolic Culture

Adult Haitians have always been proud of their roots. While many, perhaps even most, young Haitians in South Florida were ashamed of being Haitian through the 1980s and much of the 1990s, they now are becoming proud of their Haitian heritage, too. The commercial success of the Fugees and Wycliffe Jean in mainstream American culture permitted Haitian youth to express their pride. As a Haitian pastor stated, "For years kids before Wyclef Jean were not so proud to hang a Haitian flag. After Wyclef Jean came out with a flag on his back, all the kids start with flags." This has been reinforced and supplemented by the schools, which have promoted Haitian culture, particularly Haitian flag day, along with the emergence of local Haitian elected officials.

National flags are always emotive symbols that evoke pride in those who identify with them. The difference is that now Haitian youth, along with adults, are willing to identify with that symbol.

There are also other aspects of Haitian culture that carry symbolic significance and can evoke a sense of community. Ethnic food also always evokes special sentiments. One of the adults we spoke with maintained that he moved to Miami just so he could get good Haitian food.

Finally, Haitian Creole has a special place in Haitian culture. Many people, including youth, referred to speaking Creole as a sure sign of being committed to the Haitian community. Programs for Creole literacy seek to promote literacy efficiently, but also they surely have the consequence of reinforcing a sense of Haitian identity.

Recognize an Ambivalent Racial Identity

Complementing this national Haitian identity and sense of community are other, overlapping communities that can also be emphasized. While Haitians do not come to the U.S. assuming a commonality with African Americans, once here they learn the importance of racial identity in the U.S. With experience and education, they learn of the trailblazing struggle of African Americans and civil rights. As long as racial prejudice and discrimination exist in the U.S., and they certainly continue presently in Miami, alliances with African Americans will be important.

Celebrate Hybrid National Identities

Haitians are also increasingly adopting an identity as not simply Haitian, but also Haitian-American. Increasing numbers of adults are identifying with America as they become frustrated with change in Haiti. One of the Haitian elected officials explained, "Prior to 1986 most Haitians – me personally – we came over here with the intention of going back home. After 1986, the Duvalier regime, the coup d'etat, all the political problems, the non-stop violence, the change of government back and forth and due to changes in immigration laws, around 1992 most of the Haitians decided to file for citizenship." As one pastor proclaimed, "We can use the USA as an example and clearly see the way things are done." "There's one difference, though," says a Haitian boy, "in Haiti, Haiti doesn't have a democracy...here you have a democracy, here you have representatives."

In our recent work with Haitian high school students more youth of Haitian descent claimed to be Haitian-American than anything else. They embody multiculturalism as they identify with being Haitian, Black, and American all at once, emphasizing different aspects of their identity in different contexts.

All of these, being Haitian, Haitian American, Black or simply American, can be used to bring the Haitian community together. The most effective symbols are likely to be the ones based on Haitian national identity, the Haitian flag, music, food, and (for some people) Creole. All of these evoke generally positive emotions and help create what Benedict Anderson called the "imagined community" that constitutes a national identity. Although not all Haitians know each other face-to-face (as is true for any national or ethnic group), symbols of a common culture encourage them to feel a unity, a unity on which some forms of civic engagement can be based. The identities of being Black and an American can also be used. Our research among high school students revealed that a Black identity was evoked in issues of racism and discrimination. Haitian youth and adults are likely to identify with being American when contrasting the corruption and underdevelopment in Haiti with American democracy and development.

Finding the Right Strategies

Service providers find their usual strategies for accessing populations have not been working for Haitians. They have encountered difficulty getting Haitians to attend meetings, call back, serve on committees, or participate in leadership training and other similar activities. This research has attempted to understand the basic impediments to greater civic participation by Haitian immigrants. The research indicated that three key areas for improving Haitian civic attachment are in churches, in schools, and with the youth.

The research did not seek to construct specific strategies that would produce greater Haitian civic engagement. Nevertheless, although not stressed, but alluded to in passing many of the strategies commonly used by American organizations are less likely to work in the Haitian community because of their distrust, language difficulties, time constraints, sense of discrimination, and the lack of communication between youth and parents. While finding innovative strategies is beyond the scope of this study, we do suggest:

- Engaging social service agencies in discussions with coalitions of religious leaders

- Engaging churches in activities that would raise civic literacy
- Engaging youth in civic attachment activities at schools and in their churches
- Providing youth with programs outside of school that are sanctioned by their churches and that will build civic engagement skills through group participation.
- Providing Haitians forums to talk about issues surrounding adaptation to the U.S. Pulling small groups together for civil conversation, such as we did with focus groups, seems to give Haitians a way to express their civic literacy and skills and thus promote civic attachment.

Helping Haitian immigrants and their children to become more active players in the civic arena of their adopted country will move the community in all its diverse forms closer to providing for its own needs and contributing to the greater social good.

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APPENDIX

MODERATOR=S GUIDE

Haitian College Youth

Civic Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Explain what focus groups are: who, what, why, etc. Explain that audio taping is for report-writing purposes only. Entire discussion is strictly confidential (no last names needed). No right or wrong answers. It is important that everyone speak their mind. The only ground rules are that we are polite and let a person have their say. It is perfectly alright to respectfully disagree because there can be no right or wrong answers. In fact the focus group is about hearing the full range of opinions represented by all of you.

Topic Introduction:

We have been asked to help figure out how Haitians can get more involved in their community. We have been conducting research among Haitians in Miami for some time. And, one of the aspects we have focused on is Haitian youth. Now, we have been asked to apply our knowledge, to come up with suggestions on how to get Haitians more involved in the Haitian community. But frankly, we don't think we can do this without your help.

Often statements are made by one group of people about another group of people without really knowing either who they are or why they do what they do. Frequently, you are never asked how **you** feel about things, but others assume to know. Today you have the opportunity to make your feelings known. In fact, in many respects, you are like an Advisory Board to us. We are here to find out what each of you really thinks about the issues of community and society, so that we can write about it and tell the larger world.

I want to reinforce again that everything said here today is strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. We really want to hear what you have to say about your community and society.

Introductions: *Go around table and have participants introduce themselves (first names only), tell what high school they attended, where they were born, how long they have lived in Miami or Dade County and what year they are in college*

Warm-Up Question

one sentence of what the phrase "Haitian community" means to them.

The Most Important Problem in the Haitian Community:

Now let's talk about the Haitian community and you. I think you were all invited here because you do identify as Haitian in some way. So, what I'd like to know from you is what **you** think the most important problem is in the Haitian community.

Probes:

Do you think that your parents have the same view of the most important problems:

Make sure they talk about the "problem" of Haitian youth "going bad."

Try to get some sense of awareness of issues/problems that they feel merit involvement.

What Can Be Done

What do you think can be done about the problem(s)

In our previous research, we've learned how important churches are for Haitians. What role do you think the church might have in addressing community problems?

Obligation & Responsibility

Do you *feel obligated or responsible in any way* to somehow get involved to try to make things better in your community? Or, for the larger society?

Constraints

What kinds of things keep you from doing more of these things that you feel are important

The goal here is to probe for structural constraints, such as time or of alienation based on sense of discrimination.

FINAL QUESTIONS

Now that you have heard everyone discuss issues of government and community involvement and responsibility, answer the following two questions. This is our final question and we will not be discussing your answers with the rest of today's group. So please tell us how you personally feel about these questions.

1. Please take these sheets that we are handing out and please write the **two** community activities that are most important to you or that you consider to be the most important. Please be as specific as possible and list the most important thing first.
2. Now, write below what two changes you would most like to see in government. Again, please be as specific as possible and list the most important thing first.
3. Finally, if you could write a few things about yourself:
 - a. Sex
 - b. Age
 - c. What organizations either in the community or college do you belong to?

I want to thank-you very much for helping us out. As I said, you are like an Advisory Group to us so that we can understand and communicate to others what is important and how you feel about the world. I hope you gained something from this discussion and I wish you the best of luck in whatever you're doing now that you are out of high school.