

Association of Haitian Women in Boston

Excerpts of

“Boston Haitian Community Profile ”

A study by Carline Desiré
Executive Director

Our Mission

AFAB's mission is to empower Haitian women by helping them develop individual and collective capacity to improve their social, economic and political status and thus effect positive changes in their lives and the lives of their families.

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INTRODUCTION

The Haitian community of Boston has evolved into a vibrant community. In 2004, Haitian immigrants made up the largest share of Boston's immigrants. Mass Inc. reported in 2005 that the Haitian population is the fastest growing immigrant population with a 10.3 % in the last 25 years. Haitians constitute 10 percent of the city's immigrant population. Haitians are the city's largest and fastest growing immigrant group.

This paper represents a profile of the growing Haitian settlers in Boston, Massachusetts. It highlights the Haitian presence to policy makers, service providers and city planners for a more effective and adequate response in addressing the Haitian community well-being. We attempt to establish the importance of the Haitian community in the City of Boston and the State of Massachusetts at large with a descriptive approach using data from the 2000 Census, a focus group, and 8 interviews with Haitian community leaders and business people.

METHODOLOGY

Using a descriptive approach, we documented a profile of the Boston Haitian community from three major sources. First, we consulted published works focusing on Haitians in Miami, Florida and New York, NY that included limited information on Haitians in Boston. Second, we examined quantitative data from the US Census 2000 provided by the Boston

Redevelopment Authority. Third, we conducted 8 interviews with community leaders, service providers and business owners using a 3-page instrument designed to identify the top three problems facing the community and suggestions on ways to address the problems. Fourth, we conducted a focus group with Haitian women.

Both interviews and the focus group revealed three major problem areas:

- Youth
- Immigration
- Unemployment

HISTORY OF HAITIANS IN BOSTON

Haitians have become part of the social landscape of the City of Boston in the 1990's and 2000's. Regine Jackson (2005) reported that a cross-section of Haitian society migrated to the Boston metropolitan area in four distinct waves: the Pathfinders (pre-1965); the Core (1965-1979); the Boom (1980-1991); and the Newcomers (1992-present). The US Census 2000 reported a total of 43,819 Haitians in Massachusetts. Community leaders, however claim that this figure is very conservative and they typically estimate the number of Haitians in Massachusetts between 85,000 to 100,000. Due to the sizeable undocumented population, there is no way of knowing the exact population figures as Laguerre (1984) argues.

Haitians are no longer ‘sojourners’, seeking temporary respite in the United States with the goal of returning to their home country; Haitians are ‘settlers,’ as true immigrants with plans for settling permanently in the community and bringing nuclear and extended families to the United States to join them. This statement is verified particularly in the greater Boston area, home to many Haitians from different socio-economic backgrounds for over 40 years. Haitians are the most numerous immigrant group in the city of Boston (10 percent) (Charles C. Euchmer, Editor, 2003). The Haitian population of Boston is more prominent in some areas of the City like Mattapan, Hyde Park and Dorchester. Officially, there is an estimated 18,887 Haitian-born immigrants in the City of Boston. Two-thirds of Boston’s Haitians are foreign-born according to the 2000 Census. Haitians make up the largest share of immigrants in Boston, with 10% followed by the Dominican Republic (8%) and China (7%) (New Bostonian 2005).

Like many immigrant ethnic groups, the newly arrived Haitians reside with family or friends until they establish themselves. Once they adjust to the US system, they tend to seek better housing and job opportunities outside of Boston. Over half of Haitians in the metropolitan area live in Boston, but Cambridge, Somerville, and Waltham also have enclaves, mostly in low-income areas (Allen and Turner, 2004). There is also a strong presence of Haitians in the South Shore area particularly in Brockton and Randolph.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HAITIAN COMMUNITY OF GREATER BOSTON

Population

The US Census 2000 highlights 61% of Haitians living in Boston are of middle-age. 23% of the population is between ages 20 and 34 and 16% is under 19 years old. The Haitian community of Boston is 58% female and 42% male. 47% are married while 39% are single.

Table 1- Boston Haitian Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
0-19	2,583	16%
20-34	3,779	23%
35+	9,920	61%
Total	16,282	100%

2000 US Census data from the Boston Redevelopment Authority

Table 2- Boston Haitians Gender

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	6,914	42%
Female	9,368	58%
Total	16,282	100%

2000 US Census data from the Boston Redevelopment Authority

Table 3- Boston Haitians Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	7,623	47%
Widowed	662	4%
Divorced	898	6%
Separated	830	5%
Single*	6,269	39%
Total	16,282	100%

2000 US Census data from the Boston Redevelopment Authority

Education

Haitians have great respect for learning, hard work and moral values. However, the problems of adaptation for Haitian students in American schools have been numerous. Very often, the problems are not disclosed. The students, coming from a country with an already low literacy rate, coupled with disrupted schooling due to political turmoil and poverty, struggle not to be left behind in the US schools. One of the interviewees responded that “the Haitian kids are sinking in the system. A lot of literacy Haitian students are all over the place (misplaced in the Boston Public School system) with no program catering to their needs. Kids (students) are frustrated in school because they are not appropriately placed. Frustration in school leads to early drop out, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, STDs, etc. The (Haitian) parents do not know what is going on with their children.”

Education has been the way out of poverty for most Haitians in Haiti and in the Diaspora. However, only 25% of the Boston Haitian population that is 25 years old or older has a high school diploma; 8% has a Bachelor’s Degree. A much smaller number of the Haitians, about 3% of the population has graduate or professional degree.

Occupations

Thirty-five percent of Haitians employed in the city of Boston work in technical, sales and administrative support. A significant 21 percent of the Boston Haitian workforce work in Managerial and Professional positions. Another 21 percent of Haitians are concentrated in the health care support sector, the remaining workforce is represented in the office and administrative support occupations with 11 percent, transportation and material moving occupations with 9 percent, health practitioners and technical occupations with percent, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupation with 8 percent and production occupations with 8 percent. Haitians continue to reinforce the workforce with entrepreneurship as business owners. Their 108 small businesses contribute \$219 million annual spending, \$222 million to the regional produce, \$60 million in state and federal taxes and 1,997 indirect jobs for the local economy (New Bostonian Series, 2007).

Many Haitians are health-care workers, employed frequently as nursing assistants in nursing homes (Diaz 2003). In a study on the 'Working Conditions of Haitian Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) in the Greater Boston nursing homes', respondents reported that nursing homes' administrations take advantage of the Haitian CNAs having them work long hours... To earn extra money, those CNAs are compelled to take on part-time jobs and work with agencies on temporary assignment. Working long hours enabled them to meet their economic aspirations (Desire, 2006).

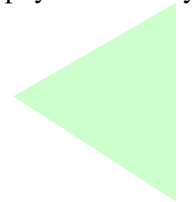
Economic Status

While Haitians may lag some ethnic groups in education, they appear to be gaining middle class status. 22 percent of the Boston Haitian population that have no high school diploma have been reported to reach the middle class. Seventeen percent of the Haitians with high school diploma or GED has reached the middle class. 16 percent of Haitians with some college reached the middle class.

Household incomes for Haitian immigrants very often include several working families. Anecdotal evidence reveals that many Haitian families join forces to purchase several three-decker homes and open businesses. Haitians have made significant gains as residents of Boston as their individual and collective economic power increases. Haitian economic power also augmented as they were the

beneficiaries of attempts to hire more Blacks in the sciences. Haitian intellectuals found jobs in Black Studies programs" (Jackson, 2005). For the large group of Haitians, who found opportunities in growing unskilled sectors such as the city's janitors, nursing home aids, food service workers, fast food employees and taxi cab drivers, social mobility has been slow in part because of the enduring transnational linkages and the continued inflow of poor newcomers (Jackson, 2005).

In considering ones' socio economic status, one's lifestyle, including occupation, income, and education, is a key determinant. For researchers to consider Social Economic Status (SES) when conducting health studies, they weigh in medical care, healthy eating and physical opportunities as part of the lifestyle. Community leaders acknowledge that a good percentage of the Haitians, that have been reported to achieve middle class, continue to have challenges in accessing medical care, healthy food, and physical activity opportunities.



ASSETS OF THE BOSTON HAITIAN COMMUNITY

Assets

The Boston Haitian community has proven to be a capable and asset rich community. All the community leaders, businessmen, and service providers that we interviewed for this report indicate that Haitians are making important economic and social contributions to Boston. Several community based organizations, religious organizations, small businesses and talented individuals have shown the willingness to muster their ability for great accomplishments. Despite multiple hardships, ranging from race discrimination to negative projection of Haitian boat people and the poor in the Island of Haiti, Haitians in Boston have great pride. "The Haitian community is a proud community. Haitians work hard to come together to make something better of themselves" said one of the interviewees.

Haitians have built many institutions, businesses and have made broad political coalitions with other groups. The community vibrancy is most visible in the town of Mattapan. Mattapan Square, the commercial center of Mattapan, has a high number of Haitian owned businesses. In addition, several mainstream businesses such as

AFAB WISH LIST

Computer
Computer software
Monitor
Printer

Citizens Bank and Sovereign bank employ Haitians in top management. The Haitian-owned businesses include food services (catering and restaurants), money transfer, insurance, mortgages, tax preparation, radio stations and financial management. The Haitian economic strength is also multiplying in other Boston towns such as Dorchester, Hyde Park and Roslindale. There are 108 shops, stores, and businesses that are owned and operated by Haitian residents (ONB, 2005); and these smaller enterprises are often more than economic ventures. They are centers for community life as well.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Office Support
Special Events
ESL Instructors

Kèk sijy relasyon ki gen abi:

1. *Ou pagen dwa pale oubyen wè fanmi w ak zanmi w akoz jalouzi oswa kòlè patnè w.*
2. *Ou kapab fè sèlman bagay patnè w lan vle ou fè.*
3. *Patnè w nan ap fòse w fè sèks oubyen fòse w pran kèk pozisyon nan zafè sèks ki mete w enkonfòtab.*
4. *Fòk tout tan w ap chanje konpòtman w pou pa gen pwoblèm.*
5. *Patnè w lan menase w pou l touye w oubyen pou l touye tèt li si w kite l.*
6. *Patnè w lan pran poukont li tout desizyon nan relasyon an epi nan lavi w tou.*
7. *Opinyon pa w pa gen okenn valè nan relasyon an.*
8. *Patnè w lan pase w nan tenten, imilye w oubyen derespekte an prive tankou an piblik.*
9. *Patnè w lan fòse w pran desizyon kont volonte w.*
10. *Patnè w lan blame w pou tout sa li fè ki pa bon.*
11. *Patnè w lan menase w pou li fè depòte w.*
12. *Patnè w lan konn bat ou, pouse w, souflete w, mare w oswa eseye trangle w.*
13. *Patnè w lan kontwòle lavi espirityèl ou oswa lavi relijye w.*

Haitian community organizations continue to provide the space to help newcomers adjust to life in the United States. Their services range from child care, to health education, to domestic violence prevention and employment. While kin and friend networks remain the principal source of assistance in finding a job, the community based organizations has helped many immigrants to acquire the English language and other skills to find jobs. There exist 4 Haitian community-based organizations who are working in collaboration for the betterment of the Haitian and larger community:

- Association of Haitian Women in Boston (AFAB)
- Center for Community Health, Education, and Research (CCHER)
- Haitian American Public Health Initiatives, Inc. (HAPHI)
- Haitian Multi-Service Center (HMSC)

For **CHALLENGES OF THE BOSTON HAITIAN COMMUNITY**, more information and full citation of article, contact **Carline Desiré**, at AFAB.

AYITI DEMEN CHILDREN and YOUTH PROGRAM

AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITY YOUTH
Arts, Culture, Violence Prevention
and Lots More!!

Every 2 Saturdays, 2-5 pm at KAFANM
330 Fuller Street, Dorchester

To register your child, call 617.287.0096

AFAB-KAFANM SERVICES:

HOUSING AND HOUSING ADVOCACY: KAFANM provides six housing units, one transitional unit, and a community center. AFAB assists newly arrived Haitian immigrants in applying for public housing benefits and facilitates workshops on housing issues such as tenant rights, home buying, etc.

ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS: Our adult education programs provide individuals with the fundamental skills necessary to secure gainful employment and to better integrate themselves into society.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Our youth programs enrich the lives of our students through the delivery of solid academic and social skills. They prepare students to face life's challenges and bridge generational and cultural gaps within the Haitian community.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION: AFAB affirms the right of abused women to be safe and to prosecute their offenders when necessary. A cornerstone of our mission, domestic violence prevention advocacy programs provide essential support to domestic violence survivors and their families while they attempt to regain control of their lives. In collaboration with CCHER and other Haitian agencies, AFAB also works to educate Haitian women on the link between HIV and domestic violence. The Haitian Round Table on Domestic Violence meets every first Wednesday of the month with different providers joining forces in the fight against domestic violence.