

Interview 7

Ethnic Group: Caribbean (St. Vincent & the Grenadines)

Date: 1993

Place: Montreal

Demographic Information

Gender: male

Age: 43

Country of birth: St. Vincent & the Grenadines

Marital status: common-law

Occupation: recreation services

Education: BA (sociology)

Year of arrival: 1968

Children: four children, ages 6, 10, 13, 14; two live with him and their mother (his common-law spouse); the other two live with their mothers

I. BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

I: First I'd like to ask you about how your family came to Canada. Who was the first to come and what year was that?

R: My mother and father came first, in 1968.

I: You came together then?

R: Yes

I: For what reason?

R: My uncle was here some years before that, and my father wanted to join him and was sponsored by his brother.

I: Was the sponsorship covered for your mother and you too?

R: Yes, it was.

I: What was your father doing in St. Vincent before you came?

R: Well, he had a farm and he ran a bus line. But basically it was the farm that kept him busy. My mother was a teacher at one time, but then she had kids and so she didn't do that anymore.

I: What was his main motivation to come here?

R: Well, I guess they wanted to change, and find some opportunities, economic opportunities.

I: And you came here two years later?

R: Yes

I: How did you like it?

R: I didn't like it. It was so different, the buildings looked so old, and I didn't have any friends. I was 18 years old at the time.

I: So did you go into school then?

R: No, I got a job within 4 weeks, and I went to school after work. First job was

in a factory, on St. Patrick street, doing shipping. I stayed there about a year and a half.

I: Did you hear about it from your uncle?

R: No, I guess my parents knew somebody who worked there, and I went and made an application and they hired me. He was from St. Vincent but I guess my parents didn't actually know him before I went for the job.

I: Where did your parents live when they first came here?

R: Charmoney.

I: Is that where your uncle lived? Did they stay with him?

R: Yes, he had a house so they lived with him for a year and a half, and then they rented their own place.

I: Are they still living there?

R: No they have moved back home.

I: Are you married?

R: No

I: Do you have any children?

R: Yes, I do. I have four; the youngest is 6, and then 10, 13, and 14. They all live in Montreal. Two (the youngest) live with their mother, and me and the other two have different mothers and live apart.

I: Are you divorced?

R: No, I was never married.

I: Tell me about your extended family. Do you have any other relatives in Canada?

R: Just the uncle.

I: What led your parents to go back.

R: My father went back in 1987. My mother went back in 1989.

I: Did any of your kids ever live with your parents?

R: No

I: Any brothers or sisters?

R: Yes, I have two brothers and one sister. We all came together in 1968. In St. Vincent I just have parents and other relatives, but not close ones.

I: Did you go back to St. Vincent to visit when your parents were still living here?

R: Yes, we went back. Because my grandparents were alive then, and I was close to them. I went back every year.

I: How did your parents find it here in Canada?

R: I don't know because I wasn't here. But the thing was that all of us kids were

getting to the age where we needed schools and it would have been very expensive to send all of us in St. Vincent. So it made sense for all of us to come here, where education was relatively cheap at the time.

I: What did your parents do here?

R: My mother she worked in a factory, where they make locks. My father worked in a hospital, I think in the kitchen area. I went to [college in Montreal]. I did recreation administration and sociology. I got a B.A. degree in sociology at [university in Montreal].

I: Tell me about the contacts and the network you and your family came into.

R: At the time it was a very small community. Most of the links we had were from my uncle and his friends and relatives. Later I began to meet other people. Now there are so many people that I knew. Many people came in the late 70s and early 80s. At first it was hard to meet people.

I: The Vincentian association?

R: They had dances, meetings, and functions. The association seemed to cater mostly for older people. Only recently are they encouraging young people to join in.

I: Jamaican association?

R: They weren't successful in getting young people involved. Only community centres seem to work for young people. The Black Community Centre is good for young people, you don't have to be from a particular island.

I: Did you and your family have any contact with Quebec government programmes?

R: Yes, through my work I use those programmes but not us personally?

I: How much contact do you have with Vincentians other than your family?

R: A lot, my work involves sports and this centre and we use the space for various projects. I get involved in shipping things to the Caribbean.

I: Are you an active church member?

R: No, I go to Anglican, but I don't go very often anymore. I used to in St. Vincent.

I: Who makes up your closest circle of friends?

R: Some are Vincentians and some aren't. But I don't hang out with many people. I work late and often on weekends, and I want to spend time with my family. I don't really...hang out.

I: How much contact do you have with people outside of the Black Community?

R: A lot. It has to do with my job and I am involved with a lot of people, in governmental level, like community projects, education aspects. I ran for the School Board three years ago, I'm involved in sports a lot. Committees, reform.

I: Have you sponsored any relatives to move to Canada.

R: No

I: Do you ever think about moving back to St. Vincent?

R: Yes, I have just started a business there, and I have some real estate. I am definitely going to move back, and leave it to the younger people. The kids have visited St. Vincent, and they will probably go back too.

I: Who is in your household.

R: The two children and their mother. A common-law marriage. Three and a half year ago. We have known each other a long time. The older one is 12 and the younger is 3.

I: What is her occupation?

R: At the time she was working at [Department store] as a bookkeeper. She has been a real estate agent, some books. She has had a lot of jobs. She has a degree in Math and Chemistry. She has many qualifications, even design.

I: How old is she?

R: 32, maybe 34.

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE

I: How is your relationship with your partner now the same or different from that of your parents? (clarify)

R: We have a different sense of responsibilities, because now people are less domesticated. There has been some change.

I: Can you give any examples of intermarriage in your community. Are there any cases where parents have looked down on the choice of a partner?

R: In my family, no. In the community, you see that very often. Things like making an adjustment, maybe get ...

I: How is divorce looked upon in your community?

R: It depends on how religious you are.

I: What is a reason for a divorce in the Vincentian community?

R: It is an affair, either male or female. Its normally that or that relatives don't get along, and it causes friction between the couple. Or it could be decisions that aren't shared whereas the children are concerned. Or a man might lose his job and take it out on the family, he wouldn't stick around he would just leave.

I: How is it different here than it would have been in the islands?

R: No, it is the same, and we all see the same TV and movies anyway. Partners might be a bit more devoted in St. Vincent. It is easier to get together and to move apart here. And some people think that the law here is good for women and children, not for men. In the Caribbean, if a man and his wife get into a fight, he may have a physical exchange. But here if the police get involved it changes the picture entirely. I know of a case where there was a big fight, I don't think there was any physical exchange but someone called the police, and

the police came. That husband had to move out of the house, and that was the end of the marriage--in that the woman tried and tried to get him to come back, but he left the country and he left the marriage--for good.

I: Do you think that there is more infidelity here or in St. Vincent?

R: I don't know. I don't know the proportion of infidelity anywhere.

I: (probe)

R: I don't know. We complain that there is too much violence on TV and too much violence in the society here. But whether it affects them.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Do you want to have more children?

R: No.

I: What are the main things you want for your children.

R: A good education. During that process I want them to understand that they are fully... Believe in themselves.

I: If you could think of the job of your dreams for your kids in the future, what would it be?

R: I haven't thought of a career for any of them. Whatever they decide to do, I just want them to do the best that they can. They have to choose. Not everyone is cut-out to go through university. Some have other things they should be doing. They should...

I: How much freedom should a child have?

R: Kids here grow up too fast. Talk to someone 9 or 10 years old, there is nothing they don't know. When I was a kid I didn't know anything, and we learned from experience from other kids. It was more fun. Through school we learned just so much, and certain things you don't need to know at that age. Kids get involved in drugs and sex at an early age, and so I guess by then they need to know stuff. But we made our own toys, and we played a lot, Here kids have a lot of toys and they don't know how to make them. You can't take kids to the store because they have to walk by all the stuff. They have more freedom than I had at their age. At 14 or 15 years old, I had no parties to go to, and I had to go to church. I had certain responsibilities, and I could do sports after my work was done. Once in a while I may be able to go out and come back at 10 pm. If I was seen in the street at night, talking to a girl or kissing a girl, it was terrible.

I: Do you and your partner agree about raising the kids?

R: No, we often disagree. We need both quality time and quantity time with kids. How you talk to a child, I know a lot about the effects on children of how you talk with the child. Sometimes the things she says to the kids, like 'shut up', are things I wouldn't say to the child.

I: Are disciplining practices the same?

R: Pretty much the same. I do a lot of talking, and she doesn't involve me in discipline. My daughter, who is 12, is 5'11 and she overpowers her mother. So if she doesn't listen to her mother, she says 'wait until your father comes home.'

I: Do your children have any cultural education?

R: We have a camp, a cultural day camp, and my daughter learns her background from that. We started it 10 years back. It is catching on and has grown a lot. Lots of schools now have programmes for Black History month. Home and these camps are the main ways that the kids get cultural education.

I: Do you hope that your children marry a certain kind of person?

R: To me what's important is that they meet a lot of kinds of people and when the time comes to make their decision, they can make it on their own. They will automatically choose someone good if they had a good upbringing.

I: Would you expect your kids to be sexually experienced when they are at the age of marriage?

R: I don't know, its up to them to decide. They get sex education at camp, and at school, but they can come to me to talk about things if they want to.

I: What would a population reaction be if a child told their parents that they were homosexual? And is that different in the islands and in Montreal?

R: I think it may be the same.

I: Do you think that your parents hope for the same things that you hope for your children?

R: Yes, my father always wanted me to have a good education. He didn't have the opportunity to pass elementary school, and he taught me that valuing education is important for kids. My kids say to others that if they don't do well in school their father is unhappy.

I: What features of the culture do you want to pass on to the next generation?

R: They should know about their true history. They need to read because it won't be taught in the schools. If you don't know your history, then what?

I: Is there anything about life in the islands that your want to be sure to pass on to your kids.

R: Well, sometimes I talk with them, but they were born here and they need to bridge over the differences themselves. Some people expect their kids to live out their culture exactly, like Italians, especially their daughters. But we have to be flexible and let the kids make their own choices. You provide a basis, and talk with openness to your kids, and a lot of things just fall into place.

IV. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

I: [question not transcribed]

R: When parents were here, we all lived in the same duplex and so my kids knew them well. Living together has a lot of advantages, it leaves you free.

I: What are your feelings about marriage?

R: I always wanted to get married, but the one I wanted to marry didn't want to marry me. It was one of those...

I: Would you ever consider living with your parents? Imagine that times got tough would you live with your parents?

R: Well, when I go to the Caribbean now I stay with my parents. But if I went there to live I would get my own place.

I: If they needed help, would they come and live with you?

R: Well, I guess that if they needed medical care or supervision, I guess we kids would get together and decide between us who had the most flexibility to make sure that our parents got the care they needed. I don't suppose they would live with me... We don't get together all at once (siblings) but we do see each other and talk on the phone.

V. RELATIONS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

I: Are there any occasions when you do all get together?

R: Yes, but maybe for the kids.

I: How many times a year?

R: Perhaps less than once a year. They like to get together with their friends, and we might invite all the kids to come over, but not the whole families. Maybe once a month.

I: Do you all get together when there are events in the family, weddings, births or funerals?

R: Yes, but how often does that happen?

I: If they were in financial trouble, would they ask you for help, or would you ask them?

R: Yes, we would help each other. We would go to the bank and get what is needed and give it over.

I: Is there anyone in the family who keeps the whole family together?

R: Yes, my sister usually does that. She phones me up and says 'don't forget to phone your father on father's day.'

I: What are your main thoughts on the family?

R: There are a lot of strains on the family. Especially the family in the islands has a lot of strains and, for example, I lived with my grandparents when I was a kid and my parents lived somewhere else. I grew up with my grandparents and they had more time. My grandparents had a store and I helped them there.

VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

I: How many people from St. Vincent live in Montreal?

R: I don't have an accurate figure. I don't know of any study that was done. I guess it is a couple of thousands.

I: How is abortion looked at in the community?

R: It is more acceptable than being a homosexual, that's for sure. In some communities we look at the adoption differently. You have to go through all those formalities and we just go through life with the idea that your cousin will raise one of the children, or grandparents, or something. Everyone knows who the natural parents are but others give a lot of support without going through a formal process of adoption.

I: Would you say that your community is doing well in Montreal?

R: I wouldn't say that it is worse but we could be doing better. Social, economic, there are several barriers in terms of racism and discrimination. And there isn't that sense of oneness--all Jews relate to Israel, all Egyptians relate to Egypt, but the Black community it isn't the same. Because of slavery, people have lost their sense of identity, their sense of history, their relation to Africa, to America, to the Caribbean.

I: When you came to Montreal, did you have any expectations about whether you would join the wider Montreal community or a transplanted Vincentian community?

R: I didn't have any idea.

I: Did you have any ideas about the French Canadians and other ethnic groups here?

R: No, I didn't have any ideas until after I came, and then I gradually got to know them.

I: What would your life have been like if you had stayed in St. Vincent?

R: I have not regretted having this experience. I came here and I travel widely and I can make a comparison. Maybe I will go back to St. Vincent pretty soon, and maybe I can make another kind of comparison if I go back. Even Montreal has changed, it is more uptight, and there is all this nationalism. And if you speak English the people who speak French get offended. The job situation has changed and the young people are leaving because of the social and economic agenda has changed and the policy of the government is to give all the benefits to the French Canadians.

I: What are the kinds of activities that go on in your home that reinforce your culture?

R: Well, my daughter for instance, she plays reggae music, and she practices the pans, (the steel drums) and she plays on the street, and in a float at Caribbana. When she was five or six years old I bought her a pan and she took lessons for a while. She has taken it to school and she has been very active in it. She got 8 awards at her school, and she was the valedictorian of her class in the 6th grade. Now she is 12 (and 5'11).

I: What about foods?

R: Whenever I go I always make sure that I get a lot of food and bring it back.

I: What newspapers do you read?

R: Lots.

I: Who do you look to for leadership of the Black community in Montreal, Canada, the world? Can be living and dead.

R: I like different people for different reasons. I like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, and in the current leadership. I don't know, I dream of having a Black President or P.M. We are moving in that direction, we just need to have people with good morals who knows what he is doing.

I: How would you feel if the associations in Montreal joined together and merged all the Caribbean associations?

R: It's probably not a good idea because the nationalism is important and the agendas need to be addressed within the Black community. There is a need for some kind of unification, but we don't want to lose the basis for these small communities to stay together. Over time it will change because the kids born here are not going to relate that much to St. Vincent. So membership will decline in the small associations, but just need to move on to the other agendas for the Black community.

I: What agendas?

R: The need of our young people, such as over representation of our children in jails, the drop out rates at school, the economic agendas of jobs and promotions. We have to deal with these as a people. Other groups have problems with their young people too, we are not alone in this.

I: What does it mean to be Black?

R: It means an identity, knowing your culture, having a mission and a direction. I hope that it is what Black means to my children. We can integrate into the larger society as long as we know who we are and where we come from.