

What My America is: Through the Eyes of an Immigrant Woman

By

Ker-én Thomas

Submitted to the Department of Journalism  
School of Humanities  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College  
State University of New York

May 2020

Sponsor: Simon Surowicz

Second Reader: Anna Ozbek

This senior project is about the reality of many immigrants who migrate to the United States for a better life. For many Caribbean immigrants, life on a small, underdeveloped island, working the land, isn't the biggest dream they have for themselves and their family. There are 4.4 Caribbean immigrants that currently reside in the United States, many of them working small jobs barely able to provide for their family. Everyone wants to live the American dream but their reality doesn't always live up to the expectations they had. They want better opportunities for the generations that come after them, and the only way to accomplish that, is to move to America; the land of opportunity. My family is the perfect example of this.

Story Name: What America is: Through the Eyes of An Immigrant woman

Ker-én Thomas

DATE: April 27, 2020

Video link: <https://youtu.be/1EZ0C0-wUKI>

Text on screen	This is the story of my mother's journey to America to seek better opportunities for me and my sister. This is one story of many.
Photo of mom	My mom was born on the caribbean island of Saint Kitts and Nevis. When she was 9 years old, she moved to Antigua to live with her aunt. My dad married my mom in 1995, I was born in 1998 and my sister was born 3 years later.
My mom cooking in the kitchen	I always wanted to be a nurse but for 23 years, working for the government, I loved it, I had a high position there and I gave it all up for my children.
Text on screen	What my America is: Through the eyes of an immigrant woman
Landscape view of grasslands in Antigua	This is where it all started
Driving through streets of Antigua	If I had to describe my life in Antigua I would say we were about high-middle class. We lived in a house, we had two bedrooms, a front yard and a backyard and both of my parents each had their own car.
Antiguan students at assembly	In the Carribean we don't have much choices, like schools and colleges and the things that they (her children) would want to pursue
Interview with social worker	It is true that most people do move because of education, and the education is free in some levels here, and what's not free is more attainable because of loans and all that good stuff.
My voiceover	My mom decided to move us to america for better education opportunities after my 4th year in primary school.
My mom in Kitchen feeding guinea pig	We moved here permanently in 2007. I didn't know what to expect coming to a new place at that time so we finally got here in 2007

Interview with my sister	When I realized that we were actually moving to America and we weren't just coming to visit family I was pretty disappointed because I didn't want to leave my family and friends that I had in Antigua since it was all I knew
Interview with my mom Picture of my dad	The hardest thing was that my children were young and because I didn't have family members in New York or where I was to give me the strength I tried to decide well let us just start a fresh but he didn't want it I mostly depended on him to do a lot of stuff that I know he was supposed to as a provider
	When you look at your future you're taking the steps to build your future so most people if you ask them they came here because they're thinking they are going to go back but once they are here and they attain whatever, they don't want to go back
Interview with my mom	I mostly depended on him to do a lot of stuff that I know he was supposed to as a provider
Interview with social worker	When you're in a third-world country situation you balance each other a lot. You support each other, you're there for each other because this is what we have but when you move to a country like the USA where there's so many opportunities you could build yourself, I could build myself, people do build themselves then they become selfish, they forget their foundation and then they just break up.
Interview with my mom	The day when I was served the divorce papers it was frightening because then I knew that I wouldn't have a partner in my life to help me with my kids. My daughters and I we lived in a shelter because something happened with me and a family member and that caused me to leave to prevent anything more tragic happening
Text on screen	51 percent of households headed by an immigrant reported that they used at least one welfare program during the year. Welfare in this study includes Medicaid and cash, food, and housing programs. - Center for Immigrant Studies

<p>Police car driving</p>	<p>(me) The day my mom was attacked by my uncle I remembered walking home from school and seeing her standing outside our apartment building crying I didn't know what happened at that point but I knew it was bad. When my sister and I got to her she hugged us and said we couldn't go inside because my dad's family called an emergency meeting. And that they were in the apartment waiting for us to come in so they could take me and my sister away from my mom and kick her out.</p>
<p>Picture of my mom in Manhattan</p>	<p>Inow she doesn't like to talk about it because it brings back bad memories but I think it also made us stronger</p>
<p>Interview with my mom/ NYC shelter tour</p>	<p>Every shelter you've been to is different, when you share a room with somebody else, it's not really nice, we had to throw a lot of stuff and people steal stuff from us. You have a curfew time that after certain hours, you have to be in. You have to get a pass to stay out for the weekend,-because they always wanna know where you are.</p>
<p>Interview with my mom</p>	<p>I was very emotional in a way that maybe would have caused me to lose my mind or whatever, but I was strong not only for myself but when I think about my children I just decide, you know what I think it's going to be worth it one day</p>
<p>Interview with my sister</p>	<p>(my sister) She probably felt like she let my sister and I down because there was nothing she could really do for us and she had to like struggle and we had to see her struggle</p>
<p>Interview with social worker Picture of me and my sister Picture of me, my mom and sister</p>	<p>If you're a woman with children and you're basically on your own to fight and survive without the help of the husband or the partner that makes it tough not just for the woman but for the children. It can affect them in so many different ways, mentally, emotionally and you got to look out for that.</p>
<p>Interview with sister</p>	<p>I was really depressed and I never said anything about it. I never talked about my problems or how I was feeling I kind of ignored it and did not deal with it and seeing now that I'm a young adult, being eighteen, I have to deal with all that stuff that I let build up over the past ten years. Moving around sucked because I never made any friends and that made me really bad at social situations and had really bad anxiety.</p>

Interview of social worker	Their parents are so caught up with what's going on in their lives that they wouldn't even be bothered to listen to what's going to their children outside of the house
Interview of my mom	I was glad I made a decision to put them in a place that's not familiar to me or to them. If you're not wise to the situation that you're in, they will throw you down.
Text on screen	The household income of an immigrant child's family drops on average between 28 percent to 42 percent following divorce. This is a greater effect than that of the Great Depression on the American economy. -Caribbean Institute for family development
Picture of me, my mom and sister in Manhattan	(me)We had visitations with our dad at the police station because there was an ongoing investigation. And they ( police) weren't sure if my dad was involved with the attack on my mom
Interview of my sister Winter in NYC Walking through empty, snowy streets Image of father and daughter	So throughout the divorce we had to have visitation rights with my dad at police stations And I don't remember a majority of them but one that is always in my mind because I remember crying, it was dead of winter, it was like probably like one foot of snow outside maybe more and my mom wanted to cancel the visitation for that day because it was snowing and she didn't want us to have to go out in the snow and my dad was like no I'm going to be there, I'll go. She was like okay so we all got dressed and we went to the station and then he never showed up, that's the only one that I remember and I remember crying because I was like no I want to see my dad, I want to see my dad and then nothing
Interview with social worker	Some of the issues that kids would go through would be acting out, having behavior problems, at home, in school, just acting up on what's happening, being disappointed
Interview of my sister	How I see men in general has changed, how I see America has changed because of my parents divorce
Interview with my mom	Most of the times things happen for a reason because I was always dependent on him for a lot of things, I don't really have the experience or the know how about a lot of stuff so when things like that happen you're devastated
Text on screen	50 percent of Caribbean marriages end in divorce,

	almost of those households with children move into poverty following a divorce. -Caribbean Institute for family development
Interview with my mom	but after some time you say you know what it's a good thing this happened, and to learn new ways of life and to see how other people think differently to how I think. So I believe it's for a reason even though it was hard from the beginning and sometimes I think about it especially that the children don't have him under the same roof
Picture of my dad, sister and I	
Interview with my mom	and I often feel down sometimes because it's a struggle to maintain your life because you don't have the means, and it's been hard because back home (Antigua) we have neighbors
Interview with social worker	But it's true that the life back there (Caribbean) may be better, because the air is better, you have your own home and stuff like that
Interview with Josephine	When I first moved here, I was used to being in a house, having family and friends. The biggest thing for me was the loneliness and the lack of communication that I felt. That we didn't have anyone really that we could depend on or turn to, to ask for help, we were basically on our own.
Interview with my mom	and if you don't have something you say "neighbor give me some sugar or give me some milk" they will just give it to you and it's nothing because that's what neighbors do but here you don't even know who your neighbors are
Image of mother when she was younger	(Me)My mom's life was never easy, even as a young girl. (My mom) As a child I used to work for my shelter. I used to have to work for my clothes and my food and I was treated very badly so I know what it's like to sacrifice myself. And I have been doing that now from since I was a child for myself and now I'm doing it for my kids
Interview of my mom	(me) Do You Regret Moving to america? I would say, yes and no. The regret is I left my job where I would have been maybe in a higher position, having my own order of living and my own home that I don't have to be paying all this rent every month, the rent goes up. And

	<p>that's the whole thing about it, back home we owned our own homes, we don't have to be paying mortgage and you're working for less than your rent</p>
<p>Interview with social worker</p>	<p>(me)You're taking the leap of faith, do you think it's worth it? If you were established there I would say no it's not worth it, because you have people who did take the leap of faith and leave everything and now they look back and they're sorry that they did but then you have those who didn't. They were established there, they travel but they are grateful that they didn't exchange that for this because it's like no way I ain't giving up that for this, I have an aunt that she' like "no way, I ain't giving up that for this"</p>
<p>Interview with my mom</p>	<p>You know I often look at myself and I say why did I really come here, you know I am proud of them and just blessed to have them as my kids because even though it's hard from the beginning and it's still hard I think I made the right choice in coming here</p>



## Source List

1. Mary Dyett - 58 years old, the main character of the documentary and my mom. The story revolves around her journey to America, seeking better opportunities for her children and the hardships she experienced along the way and how they've affected her. # 929-360-8948 email: lizabeth.thomas@gmail.com
2. Kellyn Thomas - 18 years old, my sister, a freshman in college whose had to overcome many challenges as an immigrant and the story also revolves around her, and her experience as an immigrant and child in America.
3. Ker-én Thomas - 22 years old, The narrator of the documentary and further explains situations discussed in the documentary.
4. Coreen Morrison - years old, former public defender with 15 years of working with adults with disabilities and 3+ experience working with immigrants transitioning into the world. She explained her stance on immigrants behavior and how migrating could affect them. # 917-913-1018
5. Jennifer Nieves - 45 years old, she is a social worker with 10+ years experience in New York City. She focused on the effects that divorce would have on children and her point of view on divorce. Her family is of Caribbean descent and she understands the struggles that immigrants experience. # 347-737-7427 email: sav20vas@gmail.com
6. Josephine Louison - 47 years old, middle school principal, who migrated to the United States with her family, for a better life and opportunities for her children. She explains how she felt as an immigrant in America. She has also had experience with advocacy groups that assisted her family while they were transitioning into American life. # 347-573-1658
7. Renéé Garske - 26 years old, social worker with 2-3 years of experience, and she volunteers she focuses mainly on how divorce affects immigrant children and how the neglect can occur within immigrant families. # 631-384-8667

## Bibliography

1. The Caribbean Institute for Family Development is a non-profit organisation affiliated with the Family Life, Development and Culture (FDC) in Canada and the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) with advisory status at the United Nations. This website has statistics about how divorce affects immigrant family households and their children .<http://cifdt.org/v2.0/>
2. The Center for Immigration Studies is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit, research organization. Since our founding in 1985 by Otis Graham Jr., we have pursued a single mission – providing immigration policymakers, the academic community, news media, and concerned citizens with reliable information about the social, economic, environmental, security, and fiscal consequences of legal and illegal immigration into the United States. Their staff has testified before congress over 100 times. This website has statistics about the economic status and struggles of immigrant parents and their families and how they differ from native born Americans. <https://cis.org/>
3. A small place by Jamaica Kincaid. A bibliography and short essay about growing up as an Anitguan, and how the way Antiguan are raised affects them and their families. The author gives a personal history lesson of Antigua and its foundation. Which leads to individuals, mainly women, who are often dependent on men.