Place Attachment and Philanthropy: A study of 1st Generation Haitian-Americans and 1st Generation Haitian-Canadians

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This work endeavors to answer three questions. First, do 1st generation Haitian-Americans and 1st generation Haitian-Canadians consider themselves to have a strong sense of attachment to Haiti? Second, is place attachment to Haiti stronger in cities where there is a larger presence of Haitian diaspora (Montreal, New York, Miami as opposed to Toronto, Phoenix, & Los Angeles)? Third, is there a correlation between high levels of attachment and high levels of philanthropy (volunteerism and/or donations) to Haiti-related causes by 1st generation Haitian-Americans and 1st generation Haitian-Canadians?

Place attachment is an extremely broad concept (Guiliani, 2003) which, at its root is understood to be a basic human need (Relph, 1976). The formation of place attachment is the result of psychological, social, and cultural processes (Altman & Low, 1992) and has been extensively explored in leisure sciences, recreation studies, and environmental psychology. Within these settings attachment to place has been related to one's sense of identity (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), civic involvement (Lewicka, 2005), and community participation (Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

Attachment to place has been correlated with a higher social involvement and commitment of personal resources (Gerson, Stueve, & Fisher, 1977). Low found that “place attachment can apply to mythical places that a person never experiences” (1992, p.166). While Haiti is not a mythical place, many 1st generation Haitian-Americans and 1st generation Haitian-Canadians have never visited the island. In this light, it is postulated that place attachment can be sentimental but nonetheless strong.

For this study 1st generation Haitian-American/Canadian is defined as an individual who was born in the United States or in Canada and has one or more Haitian-born parents. Philanthropy is defined as participating in volunteering activities for or giving donations to Haiti-related causes. Place attachment is measured using a slightly varied version of Williams & Roggenbuck’s (1989) place attachment measurement scale. Self-reported items for volunteerism and donations are used to measure philanthropy. The survey instrument will be administered online in English for 1st generation Haitian-Americans and will be made available in both French and English for 1st generation Haitian-Canadians.

This study is important for several reasons. To begin, Haitian expatriates send over $1 billion annually in remittances to Haiti along with an estimated $400 million in goods – more than any other national group anywhere in the world (Delva, 2007). Second, as Haitian immigrants age and earn less income, they may not be financially able to help their families in Haiti as much as they once did. First generation Haitian-Americans may be called upon not only to support their elderly parents but also relatives that live in Haiti, many of whom they have never met. Remittances are double Haiti’s national budget and account for nearly 30% of the country’s gross domestic product (Delva, 2007). Until international policies and laws start to benefit Haiti’s poor, remittances are a necessity for life for millions of Haitians. Third, in these financially lean times, it may be in the interest of international nongovernmental organizations not overlook 1st generation Haitian-Americans and 1st generation Haitian-Canadians as potential donor and volunteer groups, particularly if these groups consider themselves attached to Haiti as a place.
References


