

## Comparative Perspectives and Prospects for Collaborative Research on Black Women: The Caribbean Context

This paper intends to contribute to the academic debate towards producing ‘a clearer understanding of the unique sub-regional and national challenges facing nations in the Americas.’ Defined in operative terms as the movement of people, goods and services, globalization poses serious questions about immigration and the settlement of immigrants in new homelands. Advanced industrial countries, such as Canada, must deal with the challenge of developing ‘strategies for collective prosperity and growth’ that includes new citizens. Confronting this challenge begins with acquiring a proper knowledge base about immigrants in their diversity, across time and space.

Canada boasts of a continuous and significant in-flow of immigrants annually, with provinces like Alberta, harboring an increasing population of visible minorities that are virtually immigrants. The case of blacks in Alberta is somewhat interesting because the in-flow from both continental Africa and the Caribbean, produces a population that is often is perceived as homogenous even though their experiences also differ in significant terms. The dynamics of gender relations in and across these two social groups highlights the complexities of social integration, which public policy must respond to.

This paper explores these complexities based on the findings of a project (as well as relevant follow of studies) on black women’s experiences titled *Black Women’s Economic Autonomy in Alberta: Barriers to Accessing Equal Opportunities* (1999-2000). Funded by Status of Women, Canada, it examined the experiences black women in Edmonton, a population that is largely immigrant, the majority from the Caribbean, followed by women from continental Africa. The paper focuses mainly on the Caribbean connection, tracing the findings of the study back to the roots of the challenges this particular group faces. It places these experiences within the context of the general social, historical and economic circumstances that brought these Caribbean women to Canada, how these circumstances shape their relationships with other black women, and how they impact on the process of integration with the larger society. As the analysis would clearly show, studies such as this not only highlight the struggles Caribbean women face in a society where minorities must forge alliances and develop networks for active mobilization, but also provide a fertile ground for collaborative research among scholars in African, Caribbean Studies, and African Canadian Studies.