

Ancestors from the WEST INDIES

A Historical and Genealogical Overview of Afro-Caribbean Immigration, 1900–1930s

By Damani Davis

The ancestors of most Americans either immigrated to the United States, served in the military (or married a veteran who served), or were at least counted in one of the decennial censuses. Consequently, the most relevant federal records for genealogical research are those that document these three activities.

This generality, however, does not always apply to the ancestors of African Americans. Immigration records, in particular, have no immediate relevance for researching enslaved ancestors who were transported to America via the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Since enslaved persons were considered “chattel,” or property, they were not recorded as immigrants.

Most African Americans tend to dismiss immigration records and instead focus on other records held at the National Archives, such as those of the Freedmen’s Bureau, Freedman’s Bank, Southern Claims Commission, and the United States Colored Troops.

But if researchers of black American ancestry adhere too rigidly to such assumptions, they may miss valuable information contained in less-than-obvious sources.

Many American citizens currently categorized as “black” or African American in the federal censuses potentially have ancestors who were among tens of thousands of immigrants who migrated from the Caribbean region during the first decades of 20th century—roughly from the 1910s into the 1930s, or even earlier.¹

These Afro-Caribbean, or “West Indian,”² immigrants settled primarily in northeastern port cities, with New York City being the top destination. Outside of the Northeast, South Florida was a major destination, mainly for immigrants coming from the Bahamas.³ Some of these Caribbean immigrants held on to their particular national identities (or a broader “West Indian” ethnic identity), while others intermarried with native black

A view of Bay Street, Nassau, in the Bahama Islands, ca. 1906. Tens of thousands of immigrants migrated to the United States from the Caribbean region in the early 20th century.

Americans. Either way, most of the descendants of this early wave of Afro-Caribbean immigration are now officially categorized and regarded as black and/or African American.

For black Americans with ancestors from the Caribbean region, the citizenship records held at the National Archives can serve as a valuable genealogical resource. The specific records—and the methods used to research these records—are generally standard for all immigration research, regardless of nationality.⁴

Slaves Came to U.S. Mainland By Many Different Routes

Historically, continuous streams of migration involving people of African descent have moved back and forth between North America and the West Indies. Many of the earliest enslaved blacks in the American colonies were transported to the North American colonies by way of the Caribbean.

South Carolina, for instance, was essentially founded in the late 1600s as a mainland extension of the British colony of Barbados when slaveholding families moved to North America to acquire land for new plantations. Those families initially brought their enslaved property with them and imported others from the West Indies. Only later—when its rice and indigo plantations became more prosperous and required more labor—did South Carolinians begin to import large numbers of enslaved Africans directly from the continent.

The eruption of the Haitian Revolution in 1791 sent another wave of migration from the Caribbean region. From the 1790s until approximately 1810, thousands of white, free colored, and some enslaved black Haitian refugees relocated to coastal cities such as Savannah, Charleston, Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and especially to New Orleans, where they made their most significant cultural and demographic impact.

These Haitian émigrés influenced some of the unique character associated with New Orleans and southern Louisiana—including that region’s music, religious practices, cuisine, and other customs.

Migration also moved in the opposite direction.

British Loyalists, Their Slaves Flee during Revolutionary War

A mass migration of blacks from North America to the West Indies occurred in the 1780s at the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War. The American “Tories,” or “Loyalists” who had sided with the British crown, evacuated with British forces from the ports of New York, Charleston, Savannah, and British East Florida.

Among these evacuees were large numbers of “Black Loyalists” who had escaped from slavery in the southern colonies and fought alongside the British in exchange for freedom. After the war, these black Loyalists migrated to destinations throughout the British Empire, particularly to the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone in West Africa.⁵

Southern white Loyalists who were slaveholders were also allowed to evacuate with their “enslaved property.” Many of them relocated to the slave-based plantation societies in the British West Indies while others sold off their human property throughout that region. Of the various islands of the British West Indies, the Bahamas and Jamaica received the largest total number of blacks from the American colonies—whether free or enslaved.⁶ But of these islands, the sparsely populated Bahamas, by far, felt the most significant demographic and cultural effects.

The population of the Bahamas tripled when thousands of black and white Loyalists arrived from Charleston, Savannah, and British East Florida. The majority of the black evacuees were natives of the Gullah or “Geechee” cultural regions of the coastal Carolinas and Georgia.

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES													
Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered													
S. S. "Bradford" sailing from Port Antonio, Jamaica, July 7 th , 1909													
1	2 NAME IN FULL		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Last Permanent Residence		11	12
No. as Lst.	Family Name	Given Name	Age	Sex	Calling or Occupation	Able to Read Write	Nationality (Country of which citizen or subject)	Race or People	Country	City or Town	The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came		Final Destination
			Yrs. Mos.	M.							State	City or Town	
1	Smythe	Theobald	41	M	Carpenter		U.S.A.		U.S.A.	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	
2	Pegani	Leffie	32	F	Domestic help		British African		Port Antonio	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	
3	Morgan	Nathaniel	23	M	Carpenter		British African		Port Antonio	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	
4	Gough	Enos	27	M	Carpenter		British African		Port Antonio	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	
5	McIntosh	Edward	20	M	Carpenter		British African		Port Antonio	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	
6	McIntosh	Alfred	23	M	Carpenter		British African		Port Antonio	Port Antonio	U.S. citizen	Miss Detroit	

Enos Gough arrived in New York City in July 1909 from Jamaica. The ship’s manifest lists his profession as a carpenter and his destination as Philadelphia.

LIST OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS
(FOR THE IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES)

8. 8. SILVIA sailing from TRINIDAD, B. W. I., Oct. 1st, 1929, Arriving at Port of New York, Oct. 10, 1929.

No. on List	NAME IN FULL		AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE	IF NATIVE OF UNITED STATES INSULAR POSSESSION OR IF NATIVE OF UNITED STATES, GIVE DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY OR TOWN AND STATE).	IF NATURALIZED, GIVE NAME AND LOCATION OF COURT WHICH ISSUED NATURALIZATION PAPERS, AND DATE OF PAPERS.	ADDRESS IN UNITED STATES
	FAMILY NAME	GIVEN NAME						
FROM TRINIDAD TO NEW YORK								
1	CRICHLAW	CYRIL	40	M	M	NEW YORK STATE SUPREME COURT 4/4/19	716 - 23RD ST. N.Y. WASHINGTON D.C.	
2	STEPHENS	JOB	29	F	M	BY ACT OF CONGRESS	273 WEST 43RD ST. NEW YORK CITY	
FROM ST. LUCIA TO NEW YORK								
3	HODGE	MARTHA	19	F	S	JUNE 28, 1910 BERGEN COUNTY, N. J.	58 EAST 108TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
FROM ST. KITTS TO NEW YORK								
4	PEDRO	ALVA	52	F	S	AUG 7, 1877, ST. CROIX - V. I.	147 WEST 135TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
5	PEDRO	ANDREW	56	M	S	JUNE 30, 1873, ST. CROIX - V. I.	117 WEST 135TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
6	GRIEBS	MARGARET	29	F	S	FEB. 16, 1900, ST. CROIX - V. I.	101 WEST 141ST ST. NEW YORK CITY	
7	DEMINGS	VIVIAN	38	F	M	NOV. 17, 1906, ST. CROIX - V. I.	204 WEST 61ST ST. NEW YORK CITY	
8	HAYNES	CHARLES	16	M	S	NOV 22, 1912, ST. CROIX - V. I.	31 WEST 118TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
9	WILLIAMS	AUGUSTUS	45	M	S	AUG. 25, 1883, ST. CROIX - V. I.	521 UNION AVE. BRONX, NEW YORK CITY	
10	PRINCE	WILLIAM	29	M	M	MARCH 17, 1900, ST. CROIX, V. I.	311 WEST 145TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
11	BRAITHWAITE	ARTHUR	19	M	S	JULY 21, 1910, ST. CROIX, V. I.	6 WEST 118TH ST. NEW YORK CITY	
12	ROEBUCK	INGELBORG	22	F	S	DEC. 13, 1906, ST. CROIX V. I.	117 WEST 141ST ST. NEW YORK CITY	
13	CROW	ALPHONSO	25	M	S	AUG. 16, 1914, ST. CROIX V. I.	1125 UNION AVE. BRONX NEW YORK CITY	
FROM ST. THOMAS TO NEW YORK								
14	MEYERS	LENDY	29	M	S	FEB. 5, 1906, ST. THOMAS V. I.	233 WEST 142ND ST. NEW YORK CITY	
15	HALL	ALTRINA	18	F	S	MAR. 6, 1911, ST. THOMAS V. I.	108 WENDY AVE. NEW YORK CITY	

Cyril Crichtlow of Trinidad became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1919, but this ship's passenger list records his return from a visit to his the island in 1929.

Commenting on the cultural impact of this mass migration to the Bahamas, Bahamian writer and folklorist Cordell Thompson states, "The new arrivals . . . brought their food, culture, folkways, and most importantly their language. Although a British colony from 1670 to independence in 1973, culturally and linguistically, the character and personality of the Bahamian people owe much to the Gullah people who live in the coastal islands offshore of South Carolina and Georgia."

Ironically, the later 20th-century migrations of Bahamians to the United States, particularly their heavy migration to south Florida, can actually be viewed as a type of "return migration."

Later Migrations Documented In Federal Records Holdings

The 20th-century migrations were a continuance of these earlier waves of migration, but they were driven by the search for economic betterment rather than the slave trade and revolutionary upheaval. The modern migrations are more likely to be documented in federal records.

The first significant wave of recent Caribbean immigration occurred during the first three decades of the 20th century, particularly during World War I and throughout the 1920s. Before this time, Caribbean migration was primarily internal as migrants sought economic opportunities in other islands and nations throughout the Caribbean basin.

The Panama Canal project, for instance, attracted over 200,000 Afro-Caribbean immigrants from 1881 to 1914. But with the completion of the Panama Canal, along with severe economic recession throughout the region, migrants began to seek opportunities in North America. The passage of the highly restrictive Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, which sharply curtailed all immigration from non-Western European countries, put an end to this era of immigration.

The Johnson-Reed Act introduced the new "National Origins Formulas," a system of quotas based on the existing proportions of immigrant populations in the United States. The explicit purpose of the National Origins Formula was to limit the immigration of various white ethnic groups coming from Southern and Eastern Europe and to restrict all "non-white" immigrants in general—particularly blacks and Asians.

Since the proportion of Afro-Caribbean immigrants by the 1920s made up only a tiny segment of the traditional body of American immigrants, continued immigration from that region into the United States was, by and large, terminated.

New Wave of Immigration Comes with World War II

A second, but much smaller, wave of immigration from the Caribbean occurred with the onset of World War II and throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

This new migration was spurred by American labor shortages during World War II along with expanding economic demands in the immediate postwar period. Many immigrants during this period worked as farm laborers in Florida and other southeastern states and in Connecticut and other northeastern states. These later arrivals were also affected by the passage of the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

Although the McCarran-Walter Act abolished racial restrictions, it still determined the suitability of potential immigrants based on nationality and regional distinctions, with preference given to those from non-Communist countries and from northern and western Europe.

The last, and latest, wave of Caribbean immigration was generated by the larger changes in American policy that resulted from the Civil Rights movement in 1960s. The Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the

National Origins quotas and the explicit racial bias that had long prevailed in the nation's earlier immigration policy.

The removal of these barriers resulted in an unprecedented rise in the number of "non-white" immigrants coming from the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. This wave expanded in the 1970s and has continued into the current century. This last wave, however, is too recent for practicable genealogical research. Viable research of Caribbean heritage should focus on the federal records produced during first immigration wave of the World War I era.

Many Records Available At the National Archives

Federal immigration and naturalization records (Record Group 85) are the primary genealogical resource for those researching immigrant ancestors at the National Archives. These records consist of the passenger arrival records of immigrants and the naturalization records of those who later chose to become U.S. citizens. These records provide valuable personal information about each immigrant.

The passenger lists, or ships' manifests, generally listed each passenger's full name, age, sex, marital status, occupation, and nationality; the passenger's last place of residence in the native country; the destination in America; whether the passenger had ever been in the United States before, and if so, when and where; and, whether the passenger was going to join a relative already residing in the United States, and if so, that relative's name, address, and relationship.

These passenger arrival records are available on microfilm at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and at the regional facilities that hold the arrival records pertaining to the ports in their area.

Ship passenger arrival lists from the major east coast ports of Boston, New York, and Baltimore cover a period ranging from, approximately, 1820 to 1982. A small, incomplete series for the port of Philadelphia begins even earlier, in 1800. Passenger arrival lists for the Gulf Coast begin in 1846 for Galveston and 1813 for New Orleans. Records for immigrants who arrived earlier than these years may be found on the local level—at either the port of entry or at a state archives.

Researchers also should keep in mind that the port of entry where the ancestor arrived may differ from the city or state where he or she eventually settled. For instance, an ancestor who settled in New York may have actually entered the country at the port of Philadelphia, or vice versa. Also, a fair amount of Caribbean immigrants entered through the Port of New Orleans, even though they may have settled elsewhere.

Once the ancestor's port of entry is identified, the genealogist can search the microfilmed passenger lists at the National Archives in downtown Washington, D.C., or at any of our archival research rooms across the United States.⁸ Passenger lists have also been digitized and are available on sites such as *Ancestry.com* and *Fold3*.

Naturalization Records Provide Much Information on Immigration

If the immigrant ancestor later chose to become a U.S. citizen, the naturalization documents can provide additional genealogical information.

Naturalizations taking place after 1906 recorded the applicant's name, place and date of birth, occupation, address, date of arrival in the United States, port of arrival, and the name of the vessel, along with the names of spouse and minor children with their dates and places of birth.

The naturalization process typically required that the immigrant reside in the United States for at least five years. After two years, the immigrant could file a formal "declaration of intent" to proclaim that he or she desired to become a citizen.

This application required the immigrant's name, age, country of birth, date of application, and sometimes, date and port of arrival into the United States. After the declaration, the immigrant would file a formal petition for citizenship, which typically contained the petitioner's current residence, occupation, date and country of birth, and port and date of entry into the country.

Federal courts first began to administer naturalization proceedings beginning in 1906, and the records are available from that year to 1995. Before 1906, state and local also had juris-

A Declaration of Intention for Jonathan Rolle, father of actress Esther Rolle, dated April 30, 1928. After the declaration, the immigrant could file a formal petition for citizenship.

Ancestors from the West Indies

284 ORIGINAL

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
NATURALIZATION SERVICE

No. 2284

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DECLARATION OF INTENTION

Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof

State of Florida In the U.S. District Court
County of Alameda ss: Jonathan Rolle of Florida

I, Jonathan Rolle, aged 44 years,
occupation barman, do declare on oath that my personal
description is: Color B, complexion black, height 6 feet 2 inches,
weight 188 pounds, color of hair black, color of eyes black
other visible distinctive marks _____
I was born in Collier Town, Bahamas
on the 23rd day of November, anno Domini 1883; I now reside
at Company, Al.
(Give number, street, city or town, and State.)
I emigrated to the United States of America from Nassau, Bahamas
on the vessel Francis F.; my last
foreign residence was Collier Town, Bahamas. I am _____ married; the name
of my (wife) is Zalyah [she] was born at Bahamas
and now resides at with me.
It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign
prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to
BRITISH EMPIRE: George V, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, Ireland, and
the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India, of whom I am now a subject;
I arrived at the port of Miami, in the
State of Florida, on or about the 1st day
of March, anno Domini 1919; I am not an anarchist; I am not a
polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith
to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein:
SO HELP ME GOD.

Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of
said Court this 30 day of April, anno Domini 1928

[SEAL] Jonathan Rolle
Edwin R. Williams
Deputy Clerk
By Marshall W. Heath Clerk of the U.S. District Court
Southern District of Florida

diction over naturalization proceedings, and not all of those records were necessarily transferred to the National Archives.

The National Archives' regional archives hold the records of naturalizations performed in their regions. Contact the specific regional archives to get the details on availability (a list of locations is inside the back cover of this magazine), but these records are also digitally available on sites such as *Ancestry* and *Fold3*.⁹

Other relevant federal records can supplement the data found in the passenger lists and citizenship records. Census records (Record Group 29) contain information on the households of individuals and families once they had settled in the United States. Passport application records (Record Group 59) can be informative, particularly for researchers whose ancestors may have traveled back to their native countries for visits during certain years.¹⁰

Military records can be of value for those with ancestors who enlisted or were drafted by the United States armed forces after they settled in the United States. Maritime and merchant marine records can be useful for descendants of the many Caribbean natives who served as seamen.

Research opportunities can continue outside the United States. Check records held locally in the West Indies—or in the archives of the European nation that formerly held colonial authority over the Caribbean nation (such as the National Archives of the United Kingdom for nations once part of the British West Indies).

There also are select federal records at the National Archives that relate to specific nations and may be of use to some researchers.

Records documenting Caribbean ancestors who labored in the Panama Canal Zone may be found in Records of the Panama Canal, 1851–1960 (Record Group 185). Those researching ancestors from the Virgin Islands or the former Danish West Indies nations of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, should check the Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands, 1672–1957 (Record Group 55).

These Virgin Island records relate to both the Danish colonial administration up to 1917 and the subsequent American administration up to 1957. Records from the earlier period are written in Danish. The records covering the American period consist of reports from local newspapers and general administrative, legislative, police, and military functions. Local land records, however, remain in the Virgin Islands.

The Stories of Two Immigrants:

Cyril Crichlow of Trinidad

Trinidad native Cyril Crichlow was born in Trinidad in

Form 1 1037 REGISTRATION CARD 858 21
 1 Name in full Cyril Askelon Crichlow 28
 2 Address 5245 Dearborn Chicago Illinois
 3 Date of birth September 12 1889
 4 Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Alien (Trinidad B.W.I.)
 5 Where were you born? Trinidad B.W.I. (Nation)
 6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? British
 7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Editor
 8 If when employed? Half Century Magazine
 9 Where employed? 520 1/2 S. Wabash Ave
 10 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 18, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? Yes. Wife, Children
 11 Married or single (which)? Married Race (specify which)? Negro
 12 What military service have you had? Rank None Branch None
 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? Alien, Wife, Religion
 I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.
 Cyril Crichlow

Cyril Crichlow's World War I draft registration card records such information as date of birth, country of origin, profession, and current address.

1889, immigrated to the United States in 1905, and became a naturalized citizen in 1919. On June 5, 1917—two years before becoming a naturalized citizen—Crichlow submitted his mandatory World War I Draft Registration Card.

The card listed him as a resident alien and citizen of Trinidad, B.W.I. [British West Indies], residing at 5245 Dearborn in Chicago, Illinois. He was employed as an “Editor” at *Half Century Magazine* on Wabash Avenue; he had a wife and children as dependents; and he claimed exemption from the draft on the grounds that he was an alien and because of his religion.

After becoming a naturalized citizen, Crichlow continued to visit his native country as shown by a 1929 ship passenger arrival record that documents him arriving at the Port of New York on a return visit from Trinidad. On a 1920 passport application, Crichlow gives a thorough statement that confirms the information provided on his immigration documents and World War I draft card:

I, Cyril Askelon Crichlow, a Naturalized and Loyal Citizen of the United States, hereby apply to the Department of State, at Washington for a passport. . . . I, solemnly swear that I was born at Trinidad, British West Indies on September 12, 1889; that I emigrated to the United States, sailing from Port of Spain, Trinidad about July 27, 1905; That I resided 15 years, uninterruptedly, in the United States, from 1905 to 1920 at College View, Nebraska, . . . Chicago, Ill., New York, NY (except from June 1918 to Feb.

1919 with the A.E.F. in France); that I was naturalized as a citizen of the United States before the Supreme Court of New York . . . on April 1st, 1919 . . . that I am domiciled in the United States, my permanent residence being at 2376 7th Ave., New York . . . where I follow the occupation of Principal Business School & Shorthand Reporter; that I am about to go abroad temporarily, and intend to return to the United States within Four (4) years with the purpose of residing and performing the duties of citizenship therein; and that I desire a passport for use in visiting the countries hereinafter named for the following purpose: Liberia, West Africa: Engaging in teaching & reporting.

The passport application lists his age as 31 and provides his physical description along with a photograph. A signed statement addressed to the Department of State notes, "This certifies that the undersigned Applicant for passport to Liberia, W.A. desires same in order to go there for the purpose of establishing a business school and engaging in the profession of shorthand reporting." Historical research on Cyril A. Crichlow indicates that he had been an active member of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and his trip to Liberia was on behalf of that movement.

The last form of federal documentation on Crichlow appears in the 1930 census, which shows that he was living in Washington, D.C., was married to a native of New Jersey, and had a 17-year-old son named Martin, who had been born in

Mississippi and was employed as an elevator operator.

The census schedule lists Cyril as 40 years old in 1930; he had been 20 years old when he got married; he was a veteran of the U.S. armed forces; and he was currently employed as a messenger for the U.S. Government. His place of birth is listed as Trinidad, although his father and mother had been born on the island of Barbados.

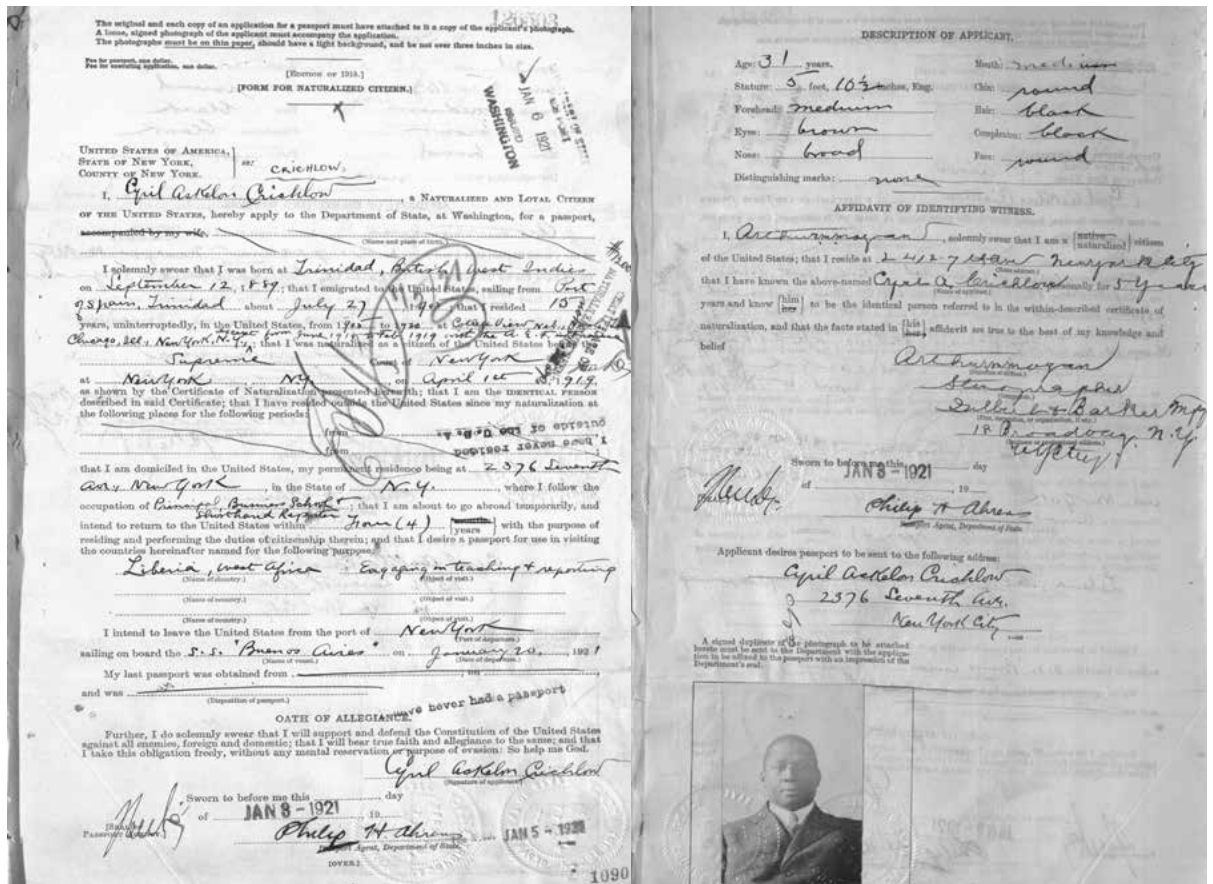
Cyril Crichlow's active life, which involved not only his initial immigration and naturalization as a U.S. citizen but also his continued travel and his military service, produced several forms of federal documentation that provide detailed information about him.

Not all Caribbean immigrants were as thoroughly documented. Caribbean immigrants who never pursued U.S. citizenship would have no naturalization records. Not all of them served in the military or were required to register for the World War I draft, and others may not have been able to return to their native lands or travel as frequently as Crichlow. But if all you can find is the initial passenger arrival record, you will still have important details such as the hometown in the native country and the name of the closest relative still living there.

The Stories of Two Immigrants: Enos Gough of Jamaica

Enos Gough's story is documented only in immigration, citizenship, and census records. A passenger manifest records his arrival in the Port of New York on July 7, 1909, from Port Antonio, Jamaica.

Cyril Crichlow's January 1921 passport application includes a photograph, his age, physical description, and statement of intention to travel to Liberia, West Africa, where he intended to work on behalf of Marcus Garvey's Pan-African movement.



children, Henry, age 7; Clarence, age 4; and Mabel, age 2. There is also a 42-year-old boarder named Mary E. Davis, who is a Virginia native and listed as “housekeeper, at home.”

The 1930 census suggests that the widowed Gough and Davis had gotten married sometime during the intervening decade.¹¹ The adults in the household are listed as Enos Gough, aged 54, born in Jamaica, with an occupation listed as “carpenter at house.” His wife is listed as Marie Gough, born in Virginia. The oldest child, Henry, age 17, was attending school and employed as a “presser” at a tailor shop. Clarence, age 13, was in school and employed as an “errand boy” at a drugstore. Mabel and Annabel, ages 12 and 10 respectively, were also both in school and had no outside occupations.

Many other examples can be used to illustrate the diverse experiences of individuals and families who emigrated from the Caribbean to the United States

during the early 20th-century. Actress Cicely Tyson’s father, William Tyson, is documented arriving at the Port of New York from Nevis. Charles St. Hill, father of the politician and activist Shirley Chisolm, is documented as a 22-year-old native of Barbados—but then living in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba—who departed on the SS *Munamar* for the Port of New York.

There are naturalization records of the parents of actress Esther Rolle, who was the first of her parents’ children to be born in the United States after they emigrated from the Bahamas to Broward County, Florida. Federal records document the family of Cynthia Delores Tucker, the late civil rights activist and leader of the National Political Congress of Black Women, whose parents immigrated to the United States from the Bahamas and resided in Richmond, Virginia, and New York City before finally settling in Philadelphia.

These federal records document an immigrant experience that is not widely recognized, but it is an experience that is a very important element of the larger Afro-American history and culture in the United States.

NOTES

¹ This early 20th-century immigration of blacks from the Caribbean region coincided with the beginnings of the “Great Migration” of black Americans from the American South to cities in the North. Both migrations, to some extent, were in response to new economic opportunities available in certain American cities resulting from a halt in immigration from Europe as a result of the World War.

² The term “West Indian” is a label used to designate inhabitants of any other entity associated with the “West Indies” or the general Caribbean region.

In the context of American history and culture, the term has traditionally been used to describe the English-speaking peoples of African descent who emigrated from the Anglophone areas of that region, particularly persons from nations formerly comprising the colonies of the “British West Indies.” This term should cover all migrants from the former British, French, Danish, and Dutch nations in the West Indies. The Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations, however, have traditionally been viewed as part of the greater Hispanic or Latin American cultural realm. In order to include immigrants who may have been from certain Francophone Caribbean islands, such as Haiti, I use the broader term “Afro-Caribbean.”

³ The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has an excellent website that describes various aspects of Black migration in the history of the United States (Afro-American, Caribbean, and African): www.inmotionaame.org.

⁴ Although this article focuses on Caribbean immigrants in general, with special emphasis on immigrants from the former British West Indies, the records and research techniques can apply to all Afro-descended immigrants who came to the United States in the first half of the 20th century, whether they were from the French-, Spanish-, or Danish-speaking Caribbean nations or were African immigrants from Cape Verde, from whence there was a significant stream of immigration to the Boston area.

⁵ A similar migration occurred after the War of 1812, when formerly enslaved black Americans who escaped and joined the British forces were allowed to settle on the island of Trinidad.

⁶ Historians estimate that approximately half of free and enslaved blacks who evacuated with the British ended up in the Bahamas and Jamaica; the rest were scattered throughout the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, and Europe. See Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); John W. Pulsis, ed., *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

⁷ See Cordell Thompson’s blog at gullahgeecheeconnection.wordpress.com.

⁸ Reference Information Paper (RIP) 110, “Using Civilian Records for Genealogical Research in the National Archives Washington, DC, Area,” (National Archives & Records Administration, Washington, DC: 2009).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Passport records are held among the General Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Passport application records are available on microfilm at the National Archives. See *Passport Applications, 1795–1905* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1372, 694 rolls); *Passport Applications, 1906 to March 31, 1925* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1490, 2,740 rolls); *Registers and Indexes for Passport Applications, 1810–1906* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1371, 13 rolls, DP); and *Index to Passport Applications, 1850–52, 1860–80, 1906–23* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1848, 61 rolls).

¹¹ A search of the “Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Marriage Index, 1885–1951” on *Ancestry.com* confirms that Enos Gough and Mary E. Davis had indeed gotten married in 1924.