

# A Rift Between ‘Africans’ and ‘African-Americans’

By ASHLEY OKWUOSA

I sat still in the black swivel chair as my hair stylist carefully dipped the ends of my braids into boiling water.

I was at Djene Hair Braiding, an East Harlem salon run by West African women, a place that had always had the feel of home ever since I moved to the United States from Nigeria seven years ago. It was something of a sanctuary for me.

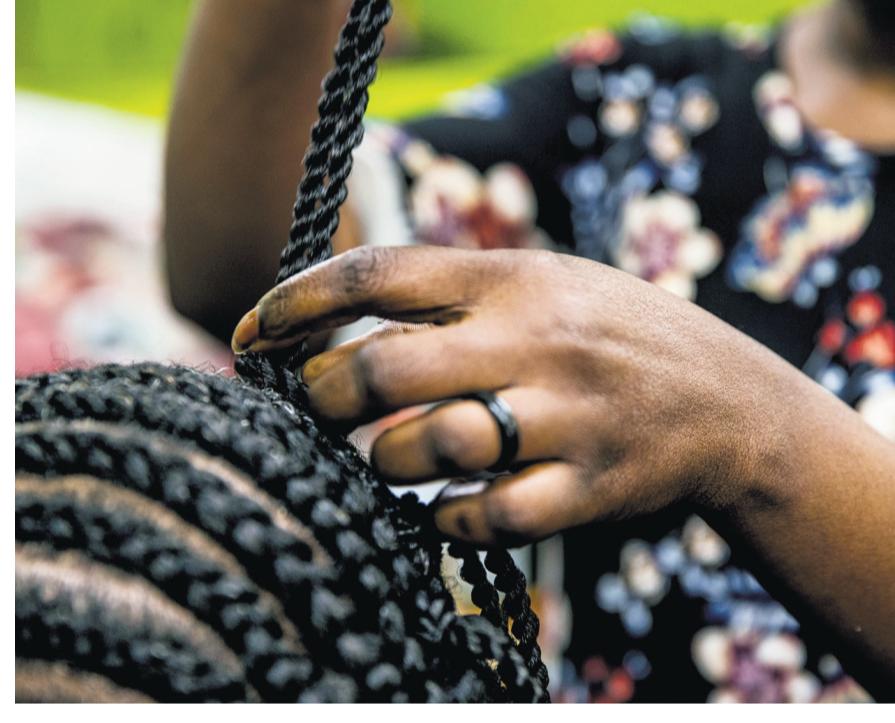
But during one of my regular visits in March, that comfortable feeling was shaken by an ugly confrontation between an African stylist and a customer that reminded me of the wide cultural gulf between African and African-Americans.

Across from me sat a young woman video-chatting on her phone with a friend as the stylist began working on her hair. A few minutes later, the customer, whom the stylist believed to be African-American because of her lifting New York accent and brash attitude, abruptly decided to leave. The stylist said she overheard the customer and the friend discussing a cheaper place to go and the confrontation escalated into yelling.

“Speak English, you keep talking that African shit,” said the customer, in response to the stylist’s speaking Mandinka, a shared West African language, to the other stylists.

The customer angrily put on her coat and shuffled out of the shop, one lone braid dangling as

**An East Harlem hair salon customer walks out, alienated by hearing Mandika.**



AILEEN PERILLA/NYT INSTITUTE

Top, Djene Hair Braiding is one of many salons in Harlem that specializes in hair braiding. Over a dozen braiders work and serve diverse clients of all ages. Left, Diarra, one of a dozen braiders at the salon, works on a client's hair. Right, business cards displayed on the wall allow word-of-mouth advertising.

she tried to take it out herself. The hair braiders kept talking as she left.

“They think we don’t understand them,” said a stylist, pointing to the retreating customer.

It didn’t take me long to realize that the argument I witnessed had nothing to do with hair at all. It was a display of a tension between Africans and African-Americans that I knew existed, but had never seen in such a jarring way. As debates about immigration and who belongs in the United States often focus on the Southwest border, the difficult relationship between African-Americans and African immigrants is often overlooked.

Months before I witnessed the exchange in the shop, President Trump had used the remark “shithole countries” in reference to the African continent. Mr. Trump also said that Nigerians, like myself, who come to the United States, would never return to our “huts” back home if we were let in.

The president’s tirade revealed deep-seated misunderstandings about who people from African countries are, as did the exchange at the salon. It occurred to me that some Americans, both black and white, had accepted many of the tropes about Africans as uneducated and unsophisticated.

Friends have relayed their experience moving from Nigeria to American suburbs and being taunted by their African-American peers with slurs like

“African booty scratcher” and being asked about living in huts or their familiarity with lions and jungles.

But Africans aren’t the only ones who are misunderstood.

In my first year of college, I often corrected people when they assumed I was African-American. In response, I would say “I’m just African, not African-American.” For me, this was a matter of practicality. I had one passport, which was green, not blue, and was issued by my home country. For that reason, I didn’t feel comfortable taking on the hyphenated identity. Years later,

it occurred to me that my hesitation might have also stemmed from what I was made to believe it meant to be African-American.

As a child, I inferred that even though Africans and African-Americans looked the same, we couldn’t be any more different.

What Africans believed, what was important to us, was that our cultures and work ethic were dissimilar from those of African-Americans. Africans were exceptional — we had moved to countries that were not our own and excelled. We opened businesses, went to Ivy League schools and didn’t rely on gov-

ernment assistance. The burden of being black wasn’t ours to bear, and we didn’t sympathize with African-Americans because their problems were not our problem.

As Africans, we had also accepted tropes of who we thought African-Americans were — lazy and most likely to be criminals — and the hostility I perceived in the salon was a reflection of that.

For Temin, a 36-year-old hair braider who asked that her full name not be used, there’s more nuance to the relationship between both parties. The prevailing tension is not anger, in her

view, but a lack of understanding each other.

The confrontation between the customers and hair braiders at the shop “doesn’t hurt because of what she said, it hurts because of what she doesn’t know,” Tenin said.

Shante Johnson, a Harlem native who frequents the braiding shop, acknowledges the chasm between Africans and African-Americans. Ms. Johnson, 41, is a mother to two daughters, and said she finds herself trying to correct assumptions about Africans with her daughters.

“I hear my kids and their

friends say stuff and the first thing I say is, ‘Excuse me, where did you come from?’” Ms. Johnson said. “You really don’t know. We came from the same place that they came from,” she added, pointing at the stylists in the shop.

When I visit the shop now, I look out for small cracks that point to the larger foundational issues and I often remember the last phrase the stylist uttered to the customer as she walked out on that fateful Saturday.

“Come back,” said the stylist. “You don’t know you’re one of us?”

## For Black Women, a Doula Can Make for a Less Stressful Pregnancy

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Washington said. “But she was very comforting and told me exactly what a doula was.”

A doula advises the mother on hospital standards and the medicine they might use, and teaches exercises and movements that can ease labor. Doulas are also present before and during labor, and make sure the mother is relaxed and prepared for when the baby arrives.

“I just felt her passion and her caring,” Ms. Washington said. “She just made me feel like she was an angel. I felt really, really comfortable.”

Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed significant racial disparities in pregnancy-related deaths, particularly among black women in the U.S. During 2011-2013, the ratio of pregnancy related deaths were 12.7 deaths per 100,000 live births for white women and 43.5 deaths per 100,000 live births for black women.

New York City’s maternal mortality rate is above average, according to a ProPublica study. Between 2006 and 2010, black women in the city were 12 times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related diseases.

Partly in response, New York is expanding the use of doulas to try to prevent problems during pregnancy and birth.

On April 22, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced a pilot program that would expand Medicaid coverage for doulas in New York. The program is expected to begin in early June; the Department of Health plans to meet with women health providers, midwives, doulas and others to explain the program.

Doulas have been around for decades, and Nyota Nayo, a doula and prenatal yoga teacher at Harlem Yoga Studio, grew up seeing many women working as them.

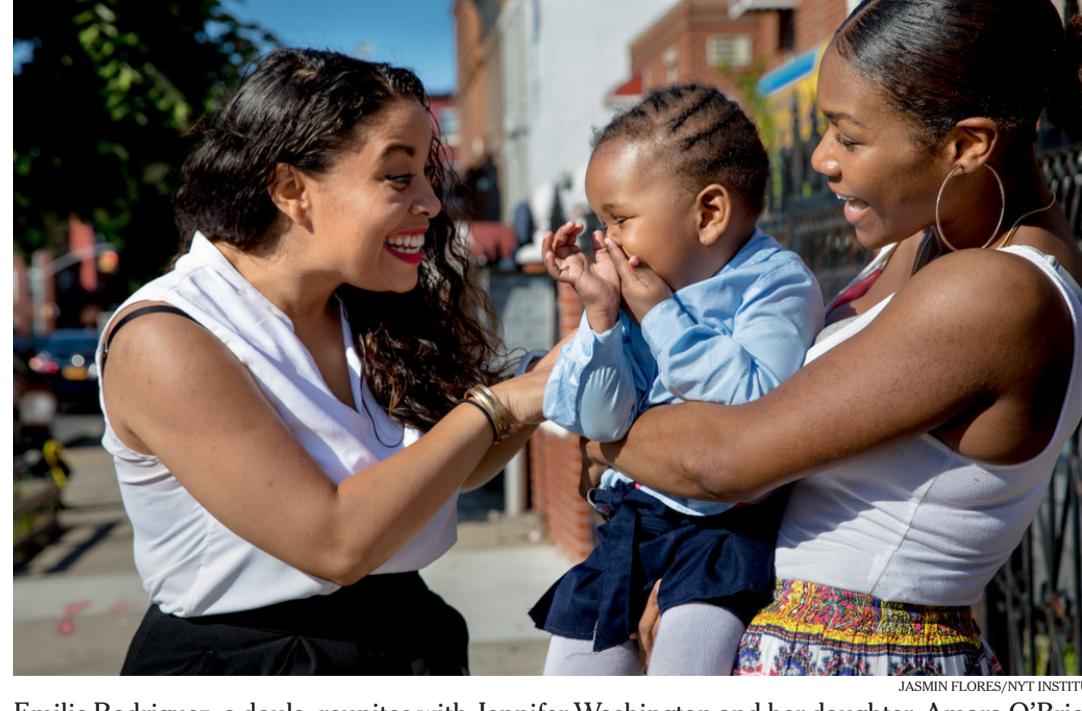
In black culture, she said, “A doula was a mom, an aunty. That’s what it was. Volunteering services just for help.”

Ms. Nayo traced it back to when African women were brought in as slaves to the United States.

“We came out of slave culture,” she said. “Women came from Africa and had traditions from Africa.” Ms. Nayo said. “Birth was no big thing; it was just baby out and that’s it.”

She also said that as society changed and more births began shifting from the homes to hospitals, fewer of these “granny midwives” were used.

“Traditions got lost. I think that’s what happened,” Ms. Nayo said. “It happened with black culture and other cultures, trying to get Americanized and all that. You break that tradition and you just do whatever the doctor



Emilie Rodriguez, a doula, reunites with Jennifer Washington and her daughter, Amara O’Brien.

says.”

Not all black women have the benefit of having a doula throughout their pregnancy. Some women are not aware of doulas while others simply cannot afford one: A doula can cost up \$1,500.

Ms. Washington said the doula was a great help in commu-

nicating her desire to the doctors. “I think that without her, it would’ve been easier for them to do whatever they needed to,” she said.

From covering the clock and dimming the lights in the hospital room, to visiting the mother and newborn at home after birth, doulas can create a safer and

more comfortable experience for the mother, just as Mrs. Rodriguez did for Ms. Washington.

It was a Monday around noon in August 2016 when Ms. Washington began feeling contractions. As they increased, so did the pain.

“That day I was walking on the pier with my boyfriend and

by the time we got home my contractions were a little heavier but not unbearable,” Ms. Washington said.

The contractions kept going until 4 a.m.

“I was eating a bowl of cereal when I was whining my way out, I put my cereal down, I couldn’t go to sleep,” she said. At around 8 a.m., Mrs. Rodriguez arrived to the house.

“She was with us driving to the hospital, she comforted me, she wiped my throw up,” she said laughing. “It was like a movie and Emilie was there for everything.”

After birth, Mrs. Rodriguez kept in touch with Ms. Washington and her daughter, Amara, who will turn 2 this August. Mrs. Rodriguez visited, she called often, she brought them food, held the baby and even went with Ms. Washington to the hospital again when Amara was sick.

“Emilie is such a beautiful person,” said Ms. Washington. Because Mrs. Rodriguez understood the financial situation Ms. Washington was in, she volunteered her services. They remain in touch. “I was so grateful,” Ms. Washington said. “That’s how you know that she really loves what she does.”

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# A Project Seeks To Keep the Internet Open After a Storm

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proposals designed to equip local small businesses affected by Sandy with resources needed to withstand future hurricanes.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says that this hurricane season, which began June 1, could yield one to four major hurricanes.

Kristin Bell, the senior project manager at the New York Economic Development

Corporation — the organization implementing the RISE: NYC competition — said the selection committee considered nearly 200 proposals from people from 20 different countries, and selected 11 solutions. New America, a research organization based in Washington, D.C., submitted the proposal for Resilient Networks.

"What was really exciting about this project is that they had a model that was replicable," Ms. Bell said. "And they had developed this system of working with community organizations to build these community-based networks."

Resilient Networks NYC is a replica itself. Residents in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn installed a similar network just before Sandy. The network allowed them to organize and recover quicker than the rest of the city in the hurricane's aftermath.

New America's local branch is in charge of the current project, and a three-member team called Resilient Communities was assembled to spearhead it.

Staten Island, where more than half of the city's victims died during Sandy, is not included in the project. The borough's Midland Beach neighborhood especially could use the resilient networks, as it is one of the most flood-risk areas in the city. However, talks with Staten Island community organizations and small-business owners fell through, according to Houman Saberi, deputy director of Resilient Communities.

Mr. Saberi said three major features make the network storm-ready. The network has backup battery power and two to three sources of what is called "backhaul." That means when the commercial internet connection goes down at one site, a receiver can pick up a connection from another small business on the network. If all the networks fail, an intranet built within the network allows everyone on the network to send messages to one another offline.

Carol Johnson, an East Harlem resident and a volunteer with the New York City Community Emergency Response Team, helps prepare their neighborhoods for different types of disasters, said help arrived late in her neighborhood after Sandy.

"These networks could help people in the neighborhood become their own first responders," said Ms. Johnson. "We can't get the messages out to everybody."

In Houston last year, during Hurricane Harvey, which killed 82 people, Alycia Miles didn't wait for first responders. Instead, she coordinated rescues using social media and a walkie-talkie app called Zello. She later joined West Street Recovery, a grass-roots mutual aid group

formed out of Harvey that focuses on low-income communities. The group partnered with small businesses and co-ops to provide residents who were affected with food and other supplies.

Low-income areas with underdeveloped social systems are especially vulnerable during natural disasters, and many residents feel their neighborhoods are the last to get help. In New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina killed nearly 2,000 people and left about 75,000 people homeless in 2005. In Haiti, at least 546 people died during Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

One of Resilient Communities' first steps was to identify and partner with a community-based organization in each neighborhood. Because members of these organizations are deeply connected with their neighborhoods, they are the most adept to recruit small business owners and digital stewards.

Yamil Lora, who coordinates Wi-Fi and theater production at the Point Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHAD RHYM/NYT INSTITUTE



Clockwise from top, Tony Baizan adjusts the wiring on a storm-ready Wi-Fi system; Mr. Baizan and another component of a system, being built in Hunts Point, the Bronx; Chris Baizan and William Marshall drill the final pieces into a new Wi-Fi generator on the roof of the Point in the Bronx. The program seeks to provide small businesses with storm-resistant internet connections that could be used in a natural disaster, a response to the problems from Hurricane Sandy in 2012.



to leave again, and others leave and never come back.

"You want to find people who are willing to commit and grow with the project," said Mr. Lora. "But I knew I had that in Tony and Christopher, so they were my first choices."

Tony and Christopher are now considering careers in tech — and that's part of the mission, said Teresa Gazzambide, the former deputy director of the Resilient Communities program.

"The digital stewards are learning new skills and are keeping these skills in the community," she said. "It's important for residents to own the internet in their own communities, not some tech company who can take it away at any given time."

The neighborhoods involved are low-income, where many residents cannot afford home internet. The New York City Comptroller says about 27 percent of households do not have broadband internet; the Pew Research Center says an estimated five million families nationwide lack access to high-speed internet.

Tony, a former student at Bronx Early Career Academy, said he failed courses because he didn't have internet at home to complete online homework assignments.

"People just assume that ev-

erybody has the internet," he said. "I was so embarrassed to tell my teachers or anybody that I didn't have it."

Christopher, a 10th grader at the academy, said he faces the same challenge and has to stay after school to use the computers.

Even though the government contract requires that the project help small businesses rather than residents, some community organizations, particularly the nonprofits that serve youth, became involved because of the possibility of amplifying the Wi-Fi connections so that they reach individual homes in the neighborhoods once the government contract ends next year. The Equitable Internet Connection, a project funded by private donors in Detroit, is using that model to bridge that city's digital divide.

New America NYC is searching for new funding sources. In mid-May, Resilient Communities invited potential funders to a private informational session at the Point, followed by a tour of one location in Harlem.

"Right now, it's about the getting the business owners set up," said Mr. Lora. "The residents are next, and it will be easier because we'll have the networks already in place."

## Storm-Ready Wi-Fi: How Does It Work?

Each small business will have a node mounted on the rooftop. The node contains a point-to-point link that allows for wireless communication among other small businesses within the network. The network offers free public Wi-Fi to people within 600 feet of a small business on the network. Three main features ensure the network is storm-ready.

### BACKUP BATTERY PACK

Backup battery packs are alternative power devices used when the power goes out. The battery pack is stored in the bottom of the node and automatically kicks in when there is a power failure.

### WIRELESS BACKHAULS

A backhaul connection is needed to access to the global internet. A wireless backhaul transmits data over an alternative wireless path when the normal route is unavailable.

In the Resilient Networks project, each neighborhood network will have two to three sources of additional backhaul, so when one backhaul goes down, the nodes will automatically tap into another one within the network. A connector called a Nano beam redistributes the internet connection.

### INTRANET

Users who sign on to the network are redirected to a page that offers a host of services, including a compact computer that stores local webpages, a WordPress page and a chat room where people can communicate during a natural disaster.

## New York City Schools Plan to Make Sex Education More Inclusive

By DAWN RICHARD

In the United States, only 12 states require that sexual orientation be discussed as a part of a sex education curriculum. New York is not one of them, but New York City officials say they are trying to offer a more inclusive sex education, allowing L.G.B.T.Q. students to also receive information relevant to a healthy lifestyle.

Under the new schools chancellor, Richard A. Carranza, the New York City Department of Education has recently decided to invest \$24 million to improve and emphasize health education and training for teachers. Currently, sex education in New York City public high schools is part of health education programs, with no specific mandate in terms of how much time is spent on it. The department is planning to use the investment to mandate sex education more consistently, a news release about the announcement said.

"It's critical that students have the tools to make healthy decisions now and throughout their entire lives," said Doug Cohen, press secretary for the Department of Education. "Our new investments in health education, which includes sex education lessons, demonstrates our commitment to supporting the emotion-



Xaelah Jarret from Peer Health Exchange talks about consent to students at a Manhattan school.

forgotten when you think about that, and hyper-marginalized and pushed to the extremes."

Heather Corrina, an author and internet publisher who focuses on human sexuality, has been receiving questions from teenagers about sex for almost two decades through her web-

site, Scarletteen.com. She noted that there must be numerous gaps within sex education courses, as reflected in the types of questions she receives.

"If and when young people were getting information, so often it was either wrong or incomplete, especially when you're

talking about things like queer inclusion," said Ms. Corrina, author of "S.E.X., The All-You-Need-To-Know Sexuality Guide to Get You Through Your Teens and Twenties."

Ms. Corrina also believes that sex education in schools is becoming more gender inclusive,

but only in a few places and at a glacial pace. From her experience, this is because transgender and nonbinary activists have been working hard to make this happen.

New York City's first lady, Chirlane McCray, is also working to better serve L.G.B.T.Q. youth in the city. She is leading the NYC Unity project, which intends to support all young people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

"Tragically, L.G.B.T.Q. young people are more than three times more likely to attempt suicide than non-L.G.B.T.Q. youth" in New York City, Ms. McCray said at a recent news conference about the Unity Project. "It's up to us to do everything we can to prevent damage to the health and fortunes of our young people."

The new sex education initiative may come as welcome news for some New Yorkers who said they did not remember much sex education at all.

"In high school it was a part of the curriculum, maybe spent 15 minutes or one day on it, and never come back to it," recalled, Saif Zihiri, a former Stuyvesant High School student.

# Covering Weinstein: A Lesson In Infamy

By CHAD RHYM

This year's New York Times Student Journalism Institute offered many opportunities for the participants, but none put three visual journalists to the test quite like covering the arrest and arraignment of the disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. Staked out at the New York City Police Department's First Precinct and the Manhattan Criminal Courthouse on May 25, an institute visual journalists' team of Jasmin Flores, Julianna Patino and Aileen Perilla fought for space on the front lines along with other members of the national and international press.

I talked to the three photojournalists about their experience covering Mr. Weinstein's surrender.

**Q: As a journalist, how did you approach covering the Weinstein story?**

**JASMIN FLORES:** It was definitely interesting. I have never covered anything like this before. It's like, we obviously knew he was coming, but we didn't know if he was going to be in the front or is he going to get dropped off on the side. It's all these journalists out there who are trying to get that angle.

**Q: Can you describe the scene of the arrest?**

**MRS. FLORES:** When he arrives, it's like a shock. Like, "Oh my god." There was all of this adrenaline — waiting, waiting, waiting, not really sure how the event was even going to pan out. But then he shows up, and he gets out and I'm not going to say I was star-struck, but it was just very interesting because I've seen the pictures and videos of him online, but then to actually see him in person was like, whoa.

**Q: What were your first impressions during the perp walk at the precinct?**

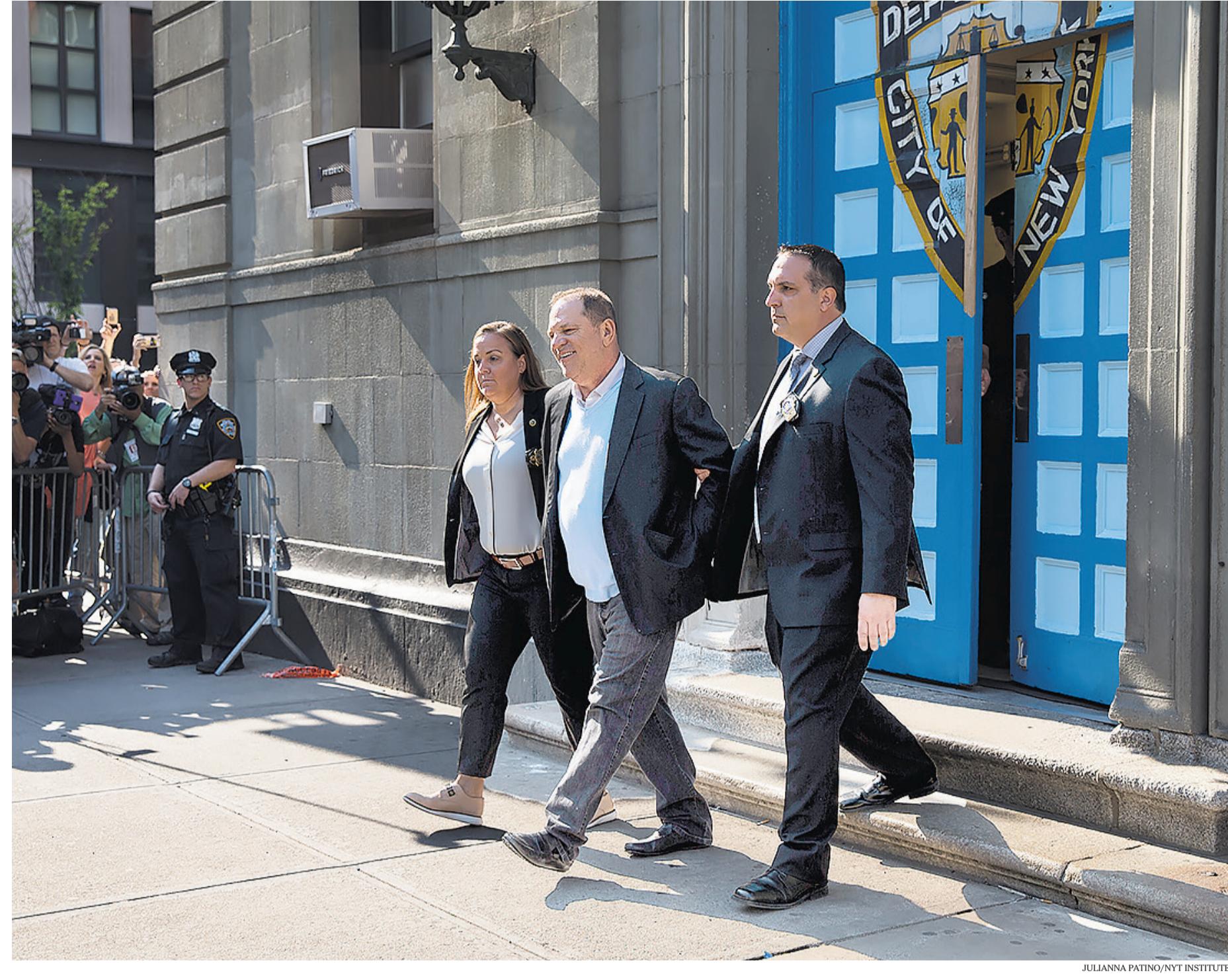
**JULIANNA PATINO:** It was a sea of white men who seemed like they had known each other for a while, like a big clique of white guys lotioning each other up with sunscreen — I'm not kidding. It was kind of weird, and everyone was aggressive, and unusually mean-looking.

**Q: What was your reaction to the diversity while reporting at Weinstein's arraignment?**

**AILEEN PERILLA:** It's always surprising. There are so many people in the world, and you would think that we would be represented in the field. It's largely men out there, a lot of white men, but it was refreshing to see a few women. I actually saw two women who did freelance for The New York Times. Aside from reporters, for video journalists and photojournalists, I only saw one other female out there.

**Q: Did you feel that this was a monumental moment in contemporary history?**

**MS. PERILLA:** I knew I was photographing a historic moment because he has been so revered,



JULIANNA PATINO/NYT INSTITUTE

Clockwise, from above: NY.P.D. detectives take a handcuffed Harvey Weinstein out of the First Precinct in Manhattan for arraignment on sex assault charges. Mr. Weinstein's lawyer, Benjamin Brafman, addresses the media at Manhattan Criminal Court. The Manhattan district attorney, Cyrus Vance Jr., arrives at Manhattan Criminal Court. A crowd of photographers waits for Mr. Weinstein to arrive at the First Precinct in Manhattan to surrender to the police.



JULIANNA PATINO/NYT INSTITUTE



AILEEN PERILLA/NYT INSTITUTE



AILEEN PERILLA/NYT INSTITUTE

and he's so powerful in the industry. It was just kind of crazy to me when I saw how many people were out there in the crowd. And that was when it seriously hit me, and you could hear all of the shutters from the numerous cameras as he walked out.

**Q: How did you feel coming out of the shoot?**

**MS. PATINO:** I was right next to this TMZ guy. He was screaming "Harvey, why'd you do it?" It was all overwhelming, and I had never shot something like this. And it

was nice for this to be the first one — scary, and intimidating to shoot something to this particular caliber, but I think I learned a lot nonetheless.

## A First-Time New York Visit Confirms Service Members' Decisions

By DEVON ASHBY

Third-Class Petty Officer Jarrell Barksdale stood outside the Yankees Clubhouse shop at 245 West 45th Street in Manhattan on Memorial Day weekend. He was fully clad in his crisp dress whites and was leaning against a red, white and blue wall, having purchased baseball jerseys for his wife and eight-month-old son.

A woman walked over and pointed to her purple shirt that read: "My Father Was a Veteran

The experience was special, he said, because of people like that woman in the purple shirt.

"It serves a purpose," Mr. Barksdale said. "It lets me know, like, there's a reason for what I'm doing."

Being the first to join the military in his family came with high expectations.

"They like it and are really proud," he said. "At first it was hard being the first one, but now it's not bad."

Over the weekend, dedicated to remembrance of the nation's service members who died at war, Mr. Barksdale and E-4 Third Class Petty Officer Berner Figueroa visited One World Trade Center, the site of the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

Petty Officer Figueroa, a Paramount, Calif., native, was not even a teenager when terrorists flew two planes into the Twin Towers. Now 28 and visiting the memorial where the towers once stood, put their service into perspective he said. A video showcasing the victims of the attacks had a profound impact on him, he said.

The first 15 minutes of that video really showed the impact the attack had on our country," he said. "To see it now with my perspective as an adult, it hits me differently than when I was younger and didn't really know what was going on."

Petty Officer Figueroa, origi-



Sailors walk around Times Square on Memorial Day. It was the unit's first time in Fleet Week.

Dutch, Italian, French and German people all in one area." He joked, "No Guatemalans unfortunately."

Mr. Figueroa rarely went on the road at the start of his career, but after five years spent in Virginia, he has since been around the world. His unit has been sent to Greece, France, Germany, Poland, Israel and more.

"It's sometimes seven months before I get to physically see my family again," Mr. Figueroa said. "So it feels good to have somebody shake my hand and tell me 'Thank you' for my service."

A 22-year-old native of Miami, Florida, Sgt. Caesar Mena also became the first in his family to join the military. Although it usually takes four years to become a sergeant, for Sgt. Mena it only took three.

"Having an influence on the Marines to the left and right of me has been one of my favorite parts of my experience," Sgt. Mena said, motioning to his colleagues. "Just being a leader to them and impacting and influencing their lives and the lives of civilians and my family, who are always watching me."

Mr. Mena stood in Times Square with his fellow Marines, all three wearing their dress blues. Two older women walked up, first thanking them for their service, then taking a large group photograph before giving each Marine a hug.

of World War II," in yellow letters. Petty Officer Barksdale's face suddenly lit up with excitement; he eagerly shook the woman's hand and said simply, "Thank you."

The 22-year-old is the first in his family to join the military; he entered straight out of Hillcrest High School in Simpsonville, S.C., when he was 18. This trip was the first time his unit had come to New York to take part in Fleet Week, a celebration dedicated to members of the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard that extends through Memorial Day weekend.

nally from Guatemala came to the U.S. with his parents in 1993, when he was three years old. He joined the military after spending two years at Cerritos College in California. He is a father

of two: an 11-month-old daughter and four-year-old son, and his wife is a Marine.

Like Mr. Barksdale, Petty Officer Figueroa was in New York for the first time and described it

as a "melting pot of cultures."

"I'm from a melting pot of cultures, too, but here it's a focal point on cultures; you can meet anyone," he said. "This past Friday we met Armenian,

# Even in New York, Speaking Spanish Can Be a Problem

By JESSICA VILLAGOMEZ

Pablo Veadejo has carved a place for himself in New York City in the six years since he moved from the Dominican Republic. He lives in a Bronx neighborhood with immigrants from all over the world, but outside of the borough, he has found that New York can be a fast-paced and sometimes bruising city.

He believes improving his English will not only give him access to better opportunities, it will also help him assimilate and guard himself in situations where speaking Spanish might make him a target. He still speaks Spanish openly, but after taking English-language courses he feels like he can speak up for himself.

"There's people that don't want to speak Spanish out loud," he said. "I'm not one of them, but I see it. I want to be able to speak English to be able to defend myself and others. I want to get a better job and have a better life."

A recent video spread widely on social media captured a Manhattan lawyer's tirade against Spanish speakers in a Midtown deli. In it, he was seen threatening to report workers he thought were undocumented, and insulted patrons and workers he assumed were on welfare. The footage prompted an uproar, making for days of coverage in the city's newspapers. It spurred protests, with activists calling for him to be disbanded and dispatching mariachis to his Upper West Side apartment, where they played "La Cucaracha" in the street.

New York, a sanctuary city, has positioned itself as a counterbalance to the hardline policies championed by the Trump administration. A constant infusion of newcomers — whether Italians coming to the Lower East Side a century ago, or the people arriving now in Queens from places like Guyana, Bangladesh and Central America — has long been a defining element of the city's history.

Yet this episode struck a chord because it has been a reminder that even here, animosity toward immigrants exists. For the work-

*"I keep my head down and pray to God nothing happens to me."*

RICARDO, 29 | An undocumented immigrant living in New York City

ing-class immigrants who are a driving presence in the city but who can also be overlooked, it has contributed to a climate that has forced them to question their relationship with their native tongue as they search for security and opportunity.

Ricardo, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who works at a restaurant in the East Village, approaches the city with an abundance of caution. Already, he worried about being detained by the immigration authorities, and lately, he has started keeping a closer eye on news reports looking for outbursts like the recent one.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIANNA PATINO/NYT INSTITUTE

"One thinks about it," said Ricardo, 29, who spoke on the condition of using only his first name because of his immigration status. "But I keep my head down and pray to God nothing happens to me."

Javier Pelco, 30, said that he was not feeling fear, but exasperation. For years, he said, there has been an unspoken truth among immigrants that racial incidents can happen anywhere, even in New York, where he has lived for eight years. He believes that the current political environment has emboldened the people who harass Spanish speakers.

"It's all politics," said Mr. Pelco, a native of Ecuador. "In reality, President Obama did a lot of stuff against us, too. But the president now publicizes what he thinks. He's more expressive."

After the episode last month, the lawyer, Aaron Schlossberg, said in a post on Twitter that he was "deeply sorry" for his behavior. "What the video did not convey is the real me," he said. "I am not a racist." Many of his detractors refused to accept his apology.

While not every instance may not be as explosive or as explicit, there have been other incidents that have reflected anti-immigrant sentiments. In April, a Latino man was reportedly harassed and pushed onto the subway tracks in an incident considered a bias crime.

The threat the lingering animosity poses is stacked on top of



the other hurdles that confront new arrivals. Yet Mr. Veadejo

has navigated the pushes and the occasional swear words, and hasn't had problems feeling at home. But limited English skills, he said, had put him at a disadvantage.

"I don't want any problems," he said. "The people in New York are very hostile. I can take the train and get yelled at like, 'Excuse you!' They aren't friendly.

It's not a very happy place."

Immigrants in New York have also sought out spaces to connect and commiserate with one another. One such place was an English-language class at a library in Hollis, Queens, where students said they met friends and found help applying for citizenship.

The class meets on Thursday nights in a back room of the library. On a recent evening, the

class gathered for a potluck marking the end of the class sessions, and students piled in with trays of food.

Héctor Martínez, 63, recounted as loudly as he could his recent trip to Colombia, his homeland. He boasted that it was "one of the most beautiful countries in the world," and he swiped through the photos on his phone. Mr. Martínez has been in the United States for 34 years,

becoming an activist engaged in groups advocating for civil rights and education issues.

Mr. Martínez said Spanish-speaking immigrants in New York had faced more adversity in the past. English classes for adults were overbooked or not as easily accessible, and children were often placed into special education classes because they struggled with English.

"Today, you find a lot of resources," Mr. Martínez said, noting that now he encounters "a lot of people who get it." "But back then," he added, "it wasn't as easy."

Nemesia Alvarez, 27, felt vulnerable and lonely after she moved to Queens from Honduras. She could not work; she was waiting for her visa, and her English was limited. But with the language class, she has found confidence and community.

"I hear about racism a lot here," she said. "Sometimes I feel that when people hear me speak Spanish they look at me weird. When I came here, it was really nice. I have people."

## To Parents, Value of Spanish Study Transcends Recent Viral Outbursts

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been around since 1979, and was the dream of its founder, Bernardo Palombo. Mr. Palombo wanted to create a space for Latinos in New York City to express their creativity during an era he described as one of oppression, amid multiple military regimes in Latin America.

"It's also the reaffirmation that the culture of this country, by nature, is immigrant culture," Mr. Palombo said.

Parents pay for the Spanish classes at El Taller and the organization also offers free classes in English. The Spanish curriculum is based on a model Mr. Palombo developed while working on "Sesame Street" in 1975. The goal is to teach children conversational Spanish through singing, dancing and playing.

"The kids told me how to teach, and believe it or not," Mr. Palombo said. "We don't even get to grammar."

Mr. Palombo, 70, said his students learn the "Spanish of the Americas," which he described as an anthropological approach to the language that embraces the variety of cultures within Central and South America.

"Some of the parents are Latin and don't want the kid to forget the language," Mr. Palombo said. Others, he said, "are people from here, that realize that New York is multilingual and like the kids to come and learn, playing."

Back in the classroom, Zhamyr Aiden Cueva, known among his peers as Zac, quietly sings "Siéntate, siéntate, busca tu lugar y siéntate." (Take a seat, take a seat, find your spot and take a seat.)

Zhamyr Cueva, Zac's father, who is Ecuadorian, says he and

his Puerto Rican fiancee wanted their son to be immersed in both the language and the culture. He said Zac, 4, gets to practice with his grandparents.

"Well, I wanted him, first, in a class that he could speak to his peers," Mr. Cueva said. "It's a culture that's not going to just stop in the borders of Latin America, it's going to expand."

Matilda, also 4, is the daughter of an Ecuadorian mother and a Swedish father. Her parents speak to her in Swedish, Spanish and English at home, but plan to focus on teaching her English and Spanish for now.

"I wanted to bring her here to get a little bit more immersed in Latin culture in general, and make sure she meets kids like her who are kind of biracial," Karina Jaramillo-Saa, Matilda's mother, said.

The conversation around hostility toward Spanish-speakers is a reality for many of these families.

"Language in the United States is very political," said Elizabeth Taveras Rivera, a research associate at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. "[It] has been used to create systems of suppression."

For Latinos who speak Spanish in public, "you're sort of exposing yourself to people, questioning your intelligence, questioning whether you're part of a gang, questioning which stereotype do you fulfill," she said.

In the past month, a lawyer, captured on video, threatened to call ICE after he heard two workers speaking Spanish at a New York deli. A few days later, a border agent in Montana questioned two women at a gas station about their immigration status. The women said it was because they



Zhamyr Aiden Cueva, and his teacher, Indiana Bervis, during a Spanish class at El Taller in East Harlem.

were speaking Spanish in public.

On the other hand, Ms. Taveras Rivera said, non-Latino Spanish-speakers are often considered more intelligent because they speak another language.

By the end of class, Anya was dancing and jumping along with her classmates. Even Matilda, who was shy at first, was singing and playing.

When asked about any concerns regarding discrimination, the parents of Zac, Anya and Matilda all agreed that the benefits of learning Spanish were greater than any disadvantage, especially in a multicultural city like New York.

"I think the fact that we are non-whites to begin with, and immigrants, we are always kind

of prepared for discrimination," Ms. Anwar said. "In other words, this just adds another layer to it I guess."

Mrs. Jaramillo-Saa said she planned to keep Matilda in Spanish classes, to teach her to be proud of her heritage regardless of what others might think.

"She should feel, like I am, proud of speaking another lan-

guage, and if she's going to be discriminated against, I want her to stand up for her, for that, and make sure that she understands that," Mrs. Jaramillo-Saa said. "That it is something valuable and precious for her culture and for herself, and just the knowledge of another language in general."