

The Karabella (or Quadrille) Dress

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Every country, big or small has someone or something that their people adore and are so proud of. Argentina has Lionel Messi, Brazil has Pele, India has curry, Jamaica has jerk chicken, Colombia has the sombrero hat and USA has Donald Trump. So, like many of those countries, mine—the first black nation to ever proclaimed liberty from their colonizers, a country with 11.0 million people, a 1653 GDP, a HDI of 168 and a very sensitive touch when it comes to culture is no different, for we have the beautiful Karabella (or Quadrille) dress that I will be more than happy to fully display in the few paragraphs to follow.

My item of clothing is a traditional Haitian dress call “Karabella” dress or Quadrille dress in English. Although the warm weather of the Pearle of the Antilles, the Karabella dress is largely made from stronger textiles and is often embroidered with supplementary ruffles, lace, or ric rac to enhance color (blue and red) and visual importance. This traditional dress is almost always made of an off-the-shoulder top or bodice with a full, matching skirt. As mentioned before, Haitian people favor using fabrics in various shades of reds and blues as is traditional for our culture. The Karabella dress is a dress that the women wear to cultural events, it’s like a dress that if you see a Haitian woman wearing it then you automatically know that something extraordinary just happened in her life.

The Karabella dress is meaningful to me because of its significance in my upbringing, I cherish every memory I have of it. Growing up in the streets of Haiti, I remember seeing all the beautiful girls dancing in every parade that was held every May 18th to celebrate the Haitian flag. It was a costume for us, high school students to march, chant and dance but I vividly remember the dancing part because it was the girl’s job to dance while moving their voluptuous bodies in this exquisite dress.

Living in the US for the past 5 years—I’d say that the Karabella dress and Haitian food are the closest thing I have that reminds me of home. Not that I am

objectifying women or anything like that but, every time I walk by the stores that sell those dresses on Flatbush Ave, I feel a nostalgic vibe running down my spine that's reminding me of how much I used to love seeing the girls wearing the dress. As a matter of fact, my best friend wore a Karabella dress to a parade in Boston, according to what she told me—that day was one of her best days for the sole fact that she had the lifetime opportunity of one of the chosen girls to be wearing the dress. She goes along to say that:

When I received a call from the supervisor of a program that I used to go to, I was nervous at first because I didn't know what the call was about. But when she told me that I've been chosen to wear a Karabella dress to go to the parade I couldn't express the amount of joy I had that day. I was extremely excited because that's something I've always wanted to be a part of since I was younger. I would dream of wearing my long and beautiful dress made with the color of my flag and having the opportunity to make this dream come true was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Wearing the Karabella dress made me feel even more proud to be Haitian. I was happy to show everyone where I came from, I was happy to celebrate my country's flag day even though I wasn't in my country. The fact that I had the opportunity to wear my flag dress, dance to my Rara songs, eat my diri (rice) ak griyo (pork) food, speak my native language all in one day was amazing. That was truly an unforgettable experience.

Lastly, I am well aware that the Karabella dress is also common in other Caribbean cultures such as Jamaica and Saint-Lucia so, upon interviewing one of my Jamaican classmates to ask her questions about it she told me that the Karabella dress serves the same purpose on her island. I went along to ask her if she knows where it originated but, unfortunately she does not know where which leads me to take a wild guess saying that the dress is something that we, Black people, probably inherited from our slave ancestors as some sort of gift to pass down from generation to generation. I knew that there was a fraternity between Jamaicans and Haitians but now, I see that the sorority

between Haitians and Jamaicans girls are what it's all about and the Karabella dress shows me how deep this relationship is no matter what the color of the dress is.