

INTRODUCTION

West Indian Migration to New York An Overview

Nancy Foner

The past four decades have witnessed a massive West Indian migration to New York. The influx—the largest emigration flow in West Indian history—has had enormous consequences for the lives of individual migrants as well as for the societies they have left behind and the city they have entered. This collection of original essays explores the effects of West Indian migration, puts forward analytic frameworks to aid in understanding it, and points to areas for further research.

The focus of the book is on migrants from the nations of the former British Caribbean, who share a heritage of British colonialism, Creole culture, and linguistic background. The location is New York—the most significant destination, by far, for Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Since 1965 more than half a million West Indians have moved to New York City—about twice the size of the population of the island of Barbados and five times the size of Grenada. If one puts together all the migrants from the Anglophone Caribbean, West Indians are the largest immigrant group in New York City. More and more, New York's black population is becoming Caribbeanized. By 1998, according to *Current Population Survey* estimates, almost a third of New York City's black population was foreign born, the vast majority West Indian. Adding the second generation, census estimates suggest that roughly two-fifths of the city's black residents trace their origins to the West Indies. The dense concentrations of West Indians in certain sections of the city have created neighborhoods with a distinct Caribbean flavor. As Milton Vickerman has recently noted, West Indian New Yorkers are more likely to go to Flatbush Avenue to develop a sense of West Indian ethnicity than to Kingston or Port of Spain.¹

In the context of the near record-breaking immigration to the United States, West Indians represent a particularly fascinating case. Because they

are, in American racial terms, overwhelmingly black, West Indians bring to the fore the critical role of race in the U.S. immigrant experience. Because many West Indian migrants remain closely tied to their home societies, they highlight the role of transnational processes and practices. And because West Indian migration to New York has a long history, analysis of the city's West Indian community is able to shed light on what is new about contemporary patterns.

In providing a broad view of West Indian migration to New York, the chapters in *Islands in the City* draw on a variety of theoretical perspectives, empirical data, and methodologies. Sociologists studying West Indian migration have generally focused on immigrant incorporation and issues of identity, historians have often looked at relations between black Americans and West Indians, and anthropologists have been primarily concerned with transnational processes and cultural shifts in the United States. This volume—with authors from the fields of anthropology, history, political science, and sociology—brings together the different approaches. It includes studies of the past as well as the present, analyses of transnational connections as well as modes of immigrant incorporation, comparisons of the first and second generations, and discussions of political socialization as well as economic integration. A wide variety of methods are involved, including archival research, participant observation and in-depth interviews, and quantitative analyses of census materials.

A central question is how West Indian arrivals have been transforming New York as they settle and form communities in the city. West Indians are also changing, and being changed by, New York's system of race and ethnic relations. In the contemporary era, what kinds of racial and ethnic identities have emerged among the first generation—and are developing among the second generation? Are members of the second generation assimilating into the African American population? Is the presence of hundreds of thousands of West Indians playing a role in altering American racial conceptions? Also at issue is the question of transnational practices. What kinds of ties do West Indians maintain to their home societies? What consequences do transnational links have for West Indians at home and abroad? And how should we conceptualize the ties between New York West Indians and their compatriots in other receiving societies such as Britain and Canada?

As the chapters explore the West Indian migrant experience, they shed new light on a number of broad cultural and social processes. Among them are the nature and impact of transnational connections, the dynamics of segmented assimilation, the role of gender in migration, patterns of immigrant residential and economic incorporation, and, above all, the effects of race. Black immigrants are a significant component of America's new immigrants, but they have often been ignored in immigration debates, which typically focus on Asians and Latinos. By highlighting the distinctive experience of West Indian newcomers, the essays in this book bring out the critical role of race in immigrant incorporation. They also

underscore the way “blackness” is being renegotiated in an increasingly multi-ethnic black America. Moreover, because West Indians are closely identified with African Americans, the study of West Indian migration has implications for the way West Indians fare in relation to native-born blacks—and the complex ways that West Indians utilize ethnicity to improve their image and their life chances.

In this introductory chapter I set the stage with an overview of contemporary West Indian migration to New York, setting it in the context of past migration and in terms of two issues—race and transnationalism—that are major themes in the volume. The chapters in the first section analyze some basic features of the movement to New York: where West Indians live (Crowder and Tedrow) and work (Model) and women’s experiences in the migration in the early twentieth century (Watkins-Owens). The second part explores West Indian transnational practices (Basch and Olwig). Although issues of race are in the forefront throughout the book, the chapters in the third section are specifically concerned with race, ethnicity, and identity in the first and second generations (Rogers, Waters, Bashi Bobb and Clarke, and Vickerman). In the concluding chapter, Philip Kasinitz offers a review of the social science literature on West Indian Americans, explaining why they are emerging from “invisibility”—and why parts of their experience were ignored in the past and continue, even in the new body of scholarship, to be overlooked.

A few words on terminology. In this chapter, I use “West Indian” to refer to people from the Anglophone Caribbean, including the mainland nations of Guyana and Belize, and, although I have not imposed an editorial straitjacket regarding this usage, many of the contributors have followed the same convention. (A few authors use the term somewhat differently—for example, in their analysis of census data Crowder and Tedrow include people from Haiti and the Dutch and French islands under the West Indian rubric.) Several authors use “Afro-Caribbean” or “African Caribbean” to emphasize the role of race.² Indeed, all of the chapters focus on West Indians of at least partial African descent. Unless otherwise noted, “African Americans” or “black Americans” refer to North Americans of African ancestry, as opposed to “West Indians” or “Afro-Caribbeans”; “blacks” refers to all non-Hispanic New Yorkers of African descent, including those of Caribbean and North American origin.³ Finally, the term “people of African ancestry,” as Vickerman notes in his chapter, includes African Americans and West Indians as well as immigrants from Africa and elsewhere who can trace their heritage back to Africa.

WEST INDIAN MIGRATION TO NEW YORK, PAST AND PRESENT

Emigration has long been a way of life in the West Indies. Its roots go deep—they are traceable to the legacy of slavery, the distorting effects of colonial rule, the centuries-long domination of the islands’ economies by plantation agricul-

ture, and, in recent years, continued dependence on world powers, lending institutions, and corporations. Scarce resources, overpopulation, high unemployment and underemployment, limited opportunities for advancement—these have long spurred West Indians to look abroad for economic security and better job prospects, improved living standards, and ways to get ahead. “Jamaica,” one man told me when I was doing research in a rural community in the late 1960s, “is a beautiful country, but we can’t see our way to make it through” (see Foner 1973, 1978).

In the past few decades, economic crises—along with inflation and unemployment—have continued to fuel migration fever. West Indian small-island economies simply cannot deliver the kinds of jobs, lifestyles, and consumption patterns that people at all social levels want. And increasingly they want more, due to such factors as improved communications, the promises of new elites, the expansion of educational opportunities, as well as reports and visits from migrants themselves. A national opinion survey in Jamaica in the late 1970s found that 60 percent of the population would move to the United States if given the chance (Stone 1982: 64).⁴

The search for a better life has taken West Indians all over the globe—to Central America, other West Indian islands, Britain, Canada, and, of course, the United States. Most who come to this country gravitate to New York. In the first mass West Indian influx, which began around 1900 and peaked in the early 1920s, New York City was the main port of entry. By 1930, more than half of the seventy-two thousand foreign-born blacks from the non-Hispanic Caribbean in the United States counted in the census lived in New York City. Indeed, New York was the only city in the country where a significant proportion of the black population was of Caribbean origin. In 1920 West Indians constituted about a quarter of New York’s black population, and in 1930 nearly a fifth (Kasinitz 1992: 24–25, 41–42).

Today no other U.S. city has so many West Indians, or such a high proportion of the national total. By 1998 West Indian immigrants constituted about 8 percent of New York’s population, making them the largest immigrant group in the city. Census Bureau estimates for the late 1990s put the number of Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, and Barbadian immigrants in New York City—the four largest West Indian groups—at about 435,000.⁵ According to Immigration and Naturalization Service figures, over half of the Jamaicans and Trinidadians and close to three-quarters of the Guyanese who legally entered the United States between 1972 and 1992 settled in the New York urban region, most of them moving to the city itself.⁶

New York City and its surrounding counties have been a popular destination for a number of reasons. Early in the twentieth century, steamships carrying bananas and tourists between the Caribbean and New York helped to establish the city as a migration center. Once West Indians set up a beachhead in New York, a process of progressive network building sustained the flow

until restrictive legislation in the 1920s and the depression of the 1930s cut it off.⁷ Migrants wrote letters encouraging friends and relatives to join them, often sent back funds for the voyage, and were on hand to offer a sense of security and prospects of assistance. Like other immigrants, West Indians created what Charles Tilly (1990: 90) has called “migration machines: sending networks that articulated with particular receiving networks in which new migrants could find jobs, housing, and sociability.” As Irma Watkins-Owens shows in her essay, West Indian women, as well as men, were centers of these “migration machines.” At the beginning of the twentieth century as well as later, women were important figures in initiating and sustaining migration chains.

The very presence of an established (though aging) West Indian community drew immigrants to the city once mass migration resumed following changes in U.S. immigration law in 1965. Once again, New York offers employment possibilities for West Indian arrivals. Networks of friends and relatives continue to channel West Indians to the city, serving as financial safety nets for the new arrivals and sources of information about life in New York. By allocating most immigrant visas along family lines, present U.S. immigration law reinforces and formalizes the operation of migration networks. New York is appealing because it is home to vibrant West Indian neighborhoods and institutions. Moreover, New York itself has an image that draws newcomers. To many West Indians, New York is a symbol of North American influence and power and the object, as Bryce-Laporte has written, of their “dream[s], curiosity, sense of achievement, and drive for adventure” (1987: 56).

The most obvious common thread in the New York West Indian migrant experience throughout the twentieth century is the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination, a topic I take up at length later. Several chapters point to other continuities. Irma Watkins-Owens’s portrait of independent West Indian women in early-twentieth-century New York—often migrating on their own, working in low-end personal service jobs, and serving as central figures in informal kinship networks—does not sound all that different from today. Contrary to stereotypes about the West Indian “genius” for business in the early 1900s, Suzanne Model’s analysis of census data shows that West Indians had low self-employment rates then, just as they do now. Indeed, what self-employment existed in the earlier period, according to Philip Kasinitz (this volume), was largely in the professions, not in the types of small businesses we usually associate with immigrant entrepreneurial activity.

But despite continuities, much has also changed. Today’s New York West Indian community is more than ten times the size it was seventy years ago. Whereas West Indian migration shrank to small numbers in the long hiatus between the mid 1920s and the mid 1960s, today’s huge influx has already lasted longer than the earlier wave and is still going strong.⁸ Barring draconian U.S. legislation, a large flow is likely to continue for years to come.

Today's immigrants come from a different Caribbean than their predecessors. West Indian societies are no longer British colonies but independent nations, with black- and brown-skinned elites and government leaders. British influence has declined, while American political, economic, and cultural influence has grown. Modern technology—especially television, telephones, and jet travel—and growing tourism allow people in the most remote West Indian villages to have an up-close view of American life before they even get here.

New York is also a very different place than it was during the first wave. The city's black population is much larger and more dispersed, as is the West Indian population. The core of the West Indian community, centered earlier on central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, has shifted to the Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Flatbush sections of Brooklyn. Distinct West Indian neighborhoods have also developed in southeastern Queens and the northeast Bronx as well as in neighboring Mount Vernon, just across the city line in Westchester. Large numbers of post-1965 migrants flocked to neighborhoods experiencing an exodus of whites that opened up a substantial stock of decent housing (see Crowder and Tedrow, this volume; Crowder 1999).

In the post-civil rights era, West Indians (especially the better educated) have access to a much wider array of jobs in the mainstream economy; higher education, including elite colleges and universities, is more available. The political arena has enlarged for blacks. As Philip Kasinitz (1992) details in *Caribbean New York*, the first cohort of West Indian immigrants played down their ethnic distinctiveness in the public arena. Entering America at the height of racial segregation—and when they were a much smaller community—West Indian New Yorkers immersed themselves in the broader African American community. Few West Indians who rose to political prominence claimed to be Caribbean leaders; indeed, they deliberately muted their West Indianness in public life as they appealed to, and were largely supported by, a predominantly native African American electorate.⁹ Today a new breed of politicians has emerged who represent distinct West Indian interests and have a political base in the city's large, densely populated West Indian neighborhoods. Dominant political interests have helped this process along; two predominantly West Indian districts in Brooklyn were created through redistricting in the 1990s, and political figures of all stripes actively court West Indian leaders and make use of West Indian symbolism in order to obtain votes. As Linda Basch (this volume) points out, mainstream New York politicians now clamor to strut down Eastern Parkway on Labor Day at the helm of the "West Indian American Day Carnival Parade," currently the city's largest ethnic celebration, which draws crowds of one to two million people.

Today's racial/ethnic hierarchy provides a radically new context in which West Indians interact with other New Yorkers. In 1920 the 152,000 black New Yorkers constituted a little under 3 percent of the city's population, and an even smaller proportion were Asian or Hispanic.¹⁰ By 1998 the city was more

than a quarter black, nearly a third Hispanic, and 8 percent Asian. In the early 1900s, newly arrived Jewish and Italian immigrants were considered as belonging to separate, and inferior, races; today their descendants make up the bulk of New York's (declining) white population, dominate leadership positions in both the public and the private sector, and are often West Indians' employers and on-the-job superiors.

A fuller understanding of what is new about the recent West Indian migrant experience requires consideration of a wide range of other factors.¹¹ These include not only the context—economic, political, social, and cultural—in the Caribbean and New York that shape why (and which) West Indians leave their homelands and what happens after they move, but also the different economic and power relations in the contemporary, postcolonial world order that are deeply implicated in the processes and trajectory of West Indian migration.

TRANSNATIONAL TIES

Insight into many of these dynamics arises through the analysis of transnational practices, which, like much else, turn out to be a mix of old and new. As defined by Basch in her chapter, transnational practices refer to the way migrants sustain multistranded social relations, along family, economic, and political lines, that link their societies of origin and settlement. In this way, Basch argues, migrants build “transnational social fields” that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders.¹²

As Watkins-Owens makes clear, transnational practices were alive and well in the first wave of migration (cf. Foner 1997). Then, as now, letters went back and forth between New York and the Caribbean, and migrants sent substantial amounts of money home.¹³ In her chapter, Watkins-Owens mentions that handmade clothing and shoes traveled the Brooklyn–Barbados network in the early part of the twentieth century; today, migrants ship barrels filled with clothing, food, and household goods that are unavailable or exorbitantly priced back home. (One barrel sent by a Trinidadian domestic worker in the 1980s contained almost eight hundred dollars worth of goods, including three gallons of cooking oil, forty pounds of rice, twenty pounds of detergent, flour, tea, cocoa, toothpaste, and other items [Colen 1986: 62].)¹⁴ Watkins-Owens also shows that the practice of leaving young children behind with relatives or sending them back home has a long history. And first-wave women, as well as men, were involved in New York–based voluntary associations that raised money for scholarships, school supplies, and other projects in the home societies. By the 1930s, some West Indians in New York were active in nationalist political organizations that agitated for their home country's independence (Kasinitz 1992: 113–115).

What's new? For one thing, new technologies of transportation and communication have increased the density, multiplicity, and importance of

transnational connections and made it possible for migrants to operate more or less simultaneously in New York and the West Indies. In the jet plane age, it is faster, easier, and cheaper to travel back and forth. Round-trip fares to Jamaica and Barbados in the fall of 2000 ran from about \$380 to \$430. Admittedly, as Philip Kasinitz (this volume) points out, regular trips home are still no easy matter for the poor and undocumented. Only six of the thirty-four food service workers in Mary Waters's study (this volume) had been back for a visit; only nine of the twenty-five teachers had traveled home in the last ten years. Other researchers find more frequent contact. Four out of five of Reuel Rogers's (this volume) respondents made regular trips back. Among the forty Jamaican New Yorkers in my 1980s study, the vast majority had been to Jamaica in the previous three years. Several flew home on short notice to see sick relatives or attend funerals. Many returned for weddings or to attend to business affairs in Jamaica. Friends and relatives also often came up from Jamaica to visit in New York (Foner 1983). Caribbean-based research finds much the same thing. According to anthropologists George and Sharon Gmelch, many people in the rural Barbadian parish they studied in the 1990s visited relatives in the United States, especially Brooklyn, each year (1997: 178).

Telephone contact, impossible eighty years ago, allows migrants to hear about news and people from home right away and to participate immediately in family discussions on major decisions. Telephones have now spread to virtually everywhere on the islands. Rates have become cheap—in 2000, a three-minute call to Jamaica cost as little as \$1.80 with AT&T's one-rate international plan; phone parlors and prepaid phone calls are even cheaper. Among the Jamaican New Yorkers I interviewed in the late 1980s, the vast majority had phoned someone on the island in the previous six months. They readily phoned home in case of serious problems or crises, to deal with business matters, or, in some cases, simply to chat (Foner 1983). Today, some West Indians are able to send faxes and videotapes to relatives back home—a few, whose relatives in the Caribbean have access to the Internet, can even use e-mail.

Political developments have also spawned new kinds of transnational links. West Indian New Yorkers now come from independent countries with established nationalist ideologies and institutions, and they are a potential base of support for government projects, policies, and leaders in the homeland. Political leaders at home encourage emigrants to participate politically and economically in their home country, leading Linda Basch (this volume) to write of "deterritorialized nation-state building." Government representatives of St. Vincent and Grenada, according to Basch, treat New York immigrant organizations as a basis for Vincentian and Grenadian national interests in New York and the United States. The Vincentian government not only funds an umbrella organization to link smaller Vincentian groups in New York, but also holds meetings at the consulate so that the prime minister can speak directly, by telephone, to the migrants.

Today, candidates for office in places like St. Vincent can hop on a plane to attend fund-raisers and garner support in New York. On one weekend, Basch notes, the opposition leader from St. Vincent, the mayor of Georgetown, Guyana, and the chiefs of state from Barbados and Antigua were all in New York visiting constituents. Dual nationality, granted by all the new nations of the Anglophone Caribbean, means that West Indian New Yorkers who become U.S. citizens do not lose their rights in the Caribbean.¹⁵ Indeed, island governments see nationals who become U.S. citizens as potential lobbies that can influence American representatives on behalf of the home country.

If many West Indian New Yorkers maintain close, ongoing ties with their home societies, they do not belong to transnational villages or localities of the kind found among Mexican New Yorkers by Robert Smith (1998).¹⁶ Migrants from Ticuani, a small *municipio* of less than twenty-five hundred people in southern Mexico, organized a New York committee that helped build two schools and rebuild parts of the municipal palace and church after an earthquake, and raised over \$100,000 to install water pipes in the *municipio*. The Ticuani Youth Group, formed by young Ticuanis in New York, sponsored sports tournaments to raise funds for public works projects in the *municipio*. In Mexico, communities such as Ticuani have been historically important units for the organization of politics and society; they have a set of indigenous corporate institutions, including communal landholding and religious cargo systems with offices linked to communal rituals. The social organization of rural West Indian life is very different, as my own study of a Jamaican rural community demonstrates (Foner 1973). There are few parallel structures of the Mexican type found in West Indian communities. And, as far as I know, there are no village-based West Indian associations in New York.

By and large, West Indian migrants' connections to the home society are mediated by informal personal networks. The formal associations that link New York and the West Indies crosscut local community ties. Most are island-based, like the St. Vincent Education and Cultural Club that Basch describes in her chapter. There are voluntary associations based on shared professions (Barbadian nurses, for example, or Vincentian teachers), alumni groups based on school ties back home, church-based groups, and political associations that draw on islandwide constituencies. While the New York Ticuani Committee claimed to have a list of all Ticuani households in New York—1600 people attended the wedding of one member, representing the majority of Ticuanenses in the city—people from the rural Jamaican community that I studied in the late 1960s generally did not maintain contact in New York unless they were relatives, close associates, or happened to work or worship in the same place. When I interviewed a number of people from the community in New York in the 1980s, they knew little about their co-villagers in the city. In several cases, I was a source of gossip and information—and in one or two instances, addresses—of villagers in New York.

West Indians' transnational connections extend beyond the New York–West Indies axis. Through a detailed account of one Jamaican family's

movements, Karen Olwig shows how West Indians are involved in family networks that knit members together across global space. Some family members who moved to New York later returned to Jamaica or moved elsewhere. While living in New York, they maintained ties with relatives in England, Canada, and the West Indies, as well as other parts of the United States (cf. Ho 1993). Although the family Olwig highlights was unusual in many ways, their members' global family networks were not. Many West Indian New Yorkers have kin in England as well as in Canada. According to 1991 census counts, Britain was home to some 263,000 West Indians of foreign birth, Canada to about 270,000 (Henry 1994; Peach 1995). For example, a Guyanese homecare worker I know well, who had lived in New York for about ten years, not only maintained close ties to family back in Georgetown but also kept up contact, through letters and phone calls, with her mother, who lived in London.

A number of West Indian New Yorkers are "twice migrants," who went to Britain in the 1950s or early 1960s during the mass West Indian migration there and then moved to New York in search of better incomes and/or to join relatives. Thus, one of the people Karen Olwig interviewed had lived in London for a number of years before moving to New York in the mid 1960s. Even when living in London, she made lengthy visits to her family in New York. Once in New York she kept up close contact by phone with relatives in England, Canada, and Dominica, as well as other parts of the United States. Indeed, in 1997 she was contemplating yet another move—this time to Nova Scotia, where her daughter had settled.

The case of a Trinidadian steel drum master from Port of Spain, Trinidad, whose living arrangements span two countries and several cities may be extreme, but it highlights the way some West Indians move between different locations. The steel drum master's home is in Miami, where he leads a band for the carnival on Columbus Day weekend. Around the end of November, he goes to stay with his mother in Trinidad until the spring, when he heads to California to work at Disneyland for two months. He spends July and August in Brooklyn, preparing his arrangements for the local West Indian Carnival (Pareles 1999). Most migrants' work schedules do not allow this kind of pattern, yet, during retirement, commuting becomes a possibility. Many Jamaicans I met in the late 1980s planned to spend winters in Jamaica and the warmer months of the year in New York when they retired; several had older relatives who had already adopted this strategy (Foner 1983).

RACE AND ETHNICITY

For West Indian New Yorkers of African descent, being black is the "master status" that pervades and penetrates their lives. This was true in the past and continues to be true today.

West Indians are increasingly visible now that they are an ever growing proportion of black New York, yet they still often find themselves lumped with African Americans. Even when other New Yorkers recognize them as West Indian, as foreign, or, as many whites say, “from the islands,” West Indians are seen as an ethnic group within the larger black population. Their racial status, in other words, is always salient.

Today’s West Indian migrants, to be sure, face much less overt prejudice and discrimination than their predecessors in the first wave. In the aftermath of the civil rights revolution, American whites are more racially tolerant and less likely to voice racial sentiments in public. A series of laws and court decisions have banned discrimination, and new agencies and systems are in place to enforce them. Still, racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against blacks have had a tenacious hold—and persist in a variety of forms. At one extreme, blatant interpersonal racism—physical attacks or threats, denials of housing or employment specifically for racial reasons, and harassment by the police—is unfortunately still with us (Waters 1999b: 80, and this volume). Indeed, a number of well-known racial incidents in New York City in the past few decades have involved West Indians. In the Howard Beach incident in 1986, the victim, Michael Griffith, a Trinidadian immigrant, was struck by a car and killed after being chased on the highway by a group of white teenagers. The victim who sparked the Crown Heights riots in 1991 was a seven-year-old Guyanese boy named Gavin Cato, killed when a car driven by a Hasidic Jew jumped a curb. Less dramatic, but still painful, West Indians tell of an accumulation of racial slurs, insults, and slights, and of their sense that whites do not want to socialize or associate with them. Young black men, whom many whites see as potentially dangerous, have an especially hard time. It is not unusual for whites to cross the street or clutch their handbags when they see a young black man approach—and they do not stop to wonder whether the man is West Indian or African American. Mary Waters notes that the teenage boys in her study reported far more racial harassment from whites and the police than did the girls, and they also felt less at ease when they left their all-black neighborhoods.

Race, as Crowder and Tedrow’s chapter makes clear, is a primary factor determining where West Indians live. Choice plays a role: like other newcomers, West Indians gravitate to areas with kinfolk and friends, where they find comfort and security in an environment of familiar institutions. Yet racial discrimination and prejudice put severe constraints in their way. West Indians, as Crowder and Tedrow’s analysis shows, are as segregated from whites as American blacks. Real estate agents often steer West Indians to black neighborhoods or withhold information on housing availability elsewhere, and West Indians themselves often prefer communities where they can avoid racism and rejection. “Some neighborhoods,” one West Indian New Yorker said, “are not yet ready for black people. And I don’t want to be a hero” (quoted in Waldman

1998). Those who have braved open hostility and branched out from West Indian areas in Brooklyn and Queens to adjacent white communities find that their new neighborhoods become increasingly black. Antiblack prejudice tends to fuel a process of racial turnover as whites begin to leave and no new whites move in; at the same time, the growing number of black families makes the neighborhood seem more welcoming to West Indians looking for homes. The result is a pattern of segregation in which West Indian residential enclaves are located in largely black areas of the city and its suburbs. Indeed, Crowder and Tedrow show that West Indians are not very segregated from African Americans.

West Indians' lack of access to white neighborhoods—and the inevitable racial turnover that takes place when middle-class “pioneers” move into white communities—confines most to areas with inferior schools, relatively high crime rates, and poor government services, and limits their informal contacts with whites. Outside of work (and sometimes at work as well), most West Indians find themselves moving in all-black, or largely black, social worlds. This is fortified by patterns of marriage, which are another indication of the continuing racial prejudice and distinctive social distance separating whites and blacks in America. Census figures show that white Americans who intermarry are far more likely to wed an Asian or Hispanic than a black person—whether West Indian or African American.

The sting of racial prejudice is especially painful because West Indians come from societies with different racial hierarchies and conceptions of race. To be sure, the legacy of West Indian plantation slavery and colonial social arrangements has left in its wake the assumption that African ancestry is inferior; dark skin, moreover, continues to be correlated with poverty. But blackness does not have the same stigma that it does in the United States, and blackness is not in itself a barrier to social acceptance or upward mobility. In most West Indian societies, people of African ancestry are the overwhelming majority (the exceptions are Trinidad and Guyana, with their large East Indian populations) and there are hardly any whites or Europeans. That people with dark skin occupy high status roles is a fact of life—and unremarkable. “Blackness,” as Milton Vickerman puts it in his chapter, is normal in the West Indies the way “whiteness” is normal in the United States.

The very notion of who is considered black also differs in the West Indies. Whereas in the United States the category “black” includes those who range from very dark- to very light-skinned, in the West Indies blackness is a matter of ancestry, skin color, hair type, facial features, and socioeconomic status. People defined as “black” in the United States belong to different groups in the West Indies, where there is a keen consciousness of shade—the lighter, the better. Thus, in Jamaica, “blacks” are generally thought of as impoverished individuals with African ancestry, dark skin, and certain facial features and hair type. People who combine features from several types (African and Eu-

ropean, Asian, or Middle Eastern) are traditionally considered “brown” or “coloured.” Moreover, money “whitens”; as individuals improve their income, education, lifestyle, and wealth, they seem progressively “whiter.” What matters, above all, is having education, wealth, manners, and well-placed associates, not race.

Whatever their achievements or shade, West Indians of African ancestry are considered “black” in New York. On arrival, as many migrants have told researchers (including myself), they became aware, for the first time, that they were black—and were often astonished at being discriminated against because of their skin color (Bashi Bobb and Clarke, this volume; Vickerman, this volume, 1999; see also Foner 1987). Although they knew about the structure of American racial inequalities before they came, they were unprepared for the degree of interpersonal racism they encountered in their day-to-day experiences.¹⁷

Given these realities, no wonder that issues of race loom so large in the literature on West Indians. Although West Indians learn to “become black” in America, several chapters in this volume demonstrate that their sense of racial consciousness is not the same as African Americans’. Rogers makes the point that West Indians do not have the same highly cultivated sense of racial group consciousness as African Americans. In Waters’s study, the immigrant parents had a negative view of becoming too “racial”—that is, being overly concerned with race and using race as an explanation for lack of success at school or on the job. In general, West Indians tend to subordinate racial considerations to the overriding goal of achieving material success in America, and they believe that individual effort can overcome racial barriers (Bashi Bobb and Clarke, this volume; Vickerman, this volume; Waters 1999b: 78).

A further complication is that West Indians have a strong sense of ethnic, as well as racial, identity. It is not an either/or situation. West Indian immigrants may embrace both their racial and ethnic identities without contradiction, although one identity may be more salient than another depending on the particular contexts and circumstances (Rogers, this volume). The immigrants’ ethnic identity is nurtured by their immersion in West Indian neighborhoods and social networks in New York, and their continued contact with relatives and friends in the home society. They also attempt to distinguish themselves from, and avoid the stigma associated with, poor black Americans. Many West Indians assert an ethnic identity in order to make a case that they are culturally different from black Americans, emphasizing their strong work ethic, their valuing of education, and their lack of antisocial behaviors. Although this strategy may help individual West Indians, Waters argues that it ends up reinforcing stereotypes of blacks as inferior.

West Indian identities have implications in the political arena. On the one hand, the shared experience of being black in America and West Indians’

identification with African Americans around this “linked racial fate outlook” provide a basis for coalition building between the two groups (Vickerman 1999). On the other hand, because West Indians also often distance themselves from African Americans, such coalitions cannot be taken for granted. As Rogers puts it, a politically unified black community does not exist on all issues and in all political contexts, and West Indians may have very different frames of reference than African Americans for making sense of the political world.

The American racial situation has also shaped scholarship on West Indians so that they are constantly compared with African Americans rather than with other groups. Academic debates about whether West Indians are an economic success story typically focus on whether they do better than African Americans and, if so, why (for a summary of this research see Waters 1999c). In New York, West Indians’ median household income is higher and the percentage of households in poverty is lower than for African Americans. A consistent finding is that West Indian immigrants have higher labor force participation rates than native-born blacks. West Indians’ dense social networks connect them to jobs, and they have what Waters calls a “different metric” for judging the worthiness of jobs than African Americans; even low wages in New York look good compared to what is available back home, and West Indians’ sense of self is still tied to their status in the home country. Waters also argues that white employers generally prefer foreign over native blacks; they view the latter as less reliable, less productive, and less tractable than immigrants (cf. Model, this volume; Bashi Bobb and Clarke, this volume).¹⁸

Important as the comparisons with African Americans are, Kasinitz points out that they have led to a situation where scholarship on West Indians has ignored or minimized the significance of other critical features of their economic incorporation. Although researchers have paid much attention to the fact that West Indians are slightly more entrepreneurial than African Americans, they have largely missed the significance of the lack of an autonomous West Indian economic enclave, and of West Indians’ low self-employment rates compared with those of other immigrant groups. Without an economic enclave—characterized by multilevel structures of co-ethnic workers, bosses, service providers, and customers—less-educated West Indians in both the first and second generations may be at a disadvantage compared with other immigrants. Also, because African Americans in New York are well represented in public-sector employment, it is not considered particularly noteworthy that West Indians’ rates in this sector are also relatively high (see Model, this volume, on West Indian employment patterns). Often overlooked is that they have extremely high rates of public-sector employment compared with other immigrant New Yorkers, and Kasinitz suggests that this may partly explain why so many West Indians are involved in electoral politics.

For members of the second generation, born and bred in the United States, the key question is whether they will become black American. How they identify themselves therefore takes on special significance. Waters lays out three possibilities: the assertion of an ethnic identity, an immigrant identity stressing national origins and one's own or one's parents' experiences in the home country, and an American—that is, an African American—identity, in which one chooses to be viewed as a black American. The identities may overlap, as Vickerman's study (this volume) indicates. The second-generation individuals he interviewed nearly all saw themselves as partially West Indian—but also as American. Indeed, they were more conscious of race as a life-shaping issue than their parents because they had grown up in the American, rather than Caribbean, racial system and because they were not buffered by dense West Indian immigrant social networks (see Bashi Bobb and Clarke, this volume). At the same time as they assimilated into the African American community, they saw their West Indian identity and cultural values as setting them apart from generalized negative views of blacks.

How members of the second generation identify themselves is rooted in structural circumstances; those from middle-class backgrounds and from families involved in ethnic organizations and churches are most likely to be ethnic-identified (Waters 1994a, this volume). In turn, identities can also influence economic outcomes. Being ethnic-identified and involved in the ethnic community can reinforce attitudes and behavior that contribute to success in school and protect the second generation from the negative features of American—and black American—youth culture (cf. Zhou and Bankston 1998). By the same token, the American-identified teens in Waters's study came from poorer families and attended dangerous, substandard, and virtually all-black schools. Their experiences with racial discrimination and their perceptions of blocked social mobility led many to reject their parents' immigrant dream—and to be receptive to the black American peer culture of their neighborhoods and schools that emphasizes racial solidarity and opposition to school rules and authorities, and sees doing well academically as “acting white.” Such an adversarial stance is often a recipe for academic failure.

Identification with African Americans, it is critical to stress, need not lead to downward assimilation for the second generation, as notions of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993) would suggest. Kathryn Neckerman and her colleagues (1999) argue that incorporation into the growing African American middle-class “minority culture of mobility” provides strategies for economic mobility, including black professional and fraternal associations and organizations of black students at racially integrated high schools and universities. And, as Kasinitz (this volume) notes, New York African American communities can provide West Indians, of both the first and second generations, with a market for goods and services, a base for political support, and programs promoting black educational achievement.

Looking ahead, it is unclear whether second-generation West Indians who identify ethnically in their teens and young adulthood will continue to do so as adults. Even if some members of the second generation retain a strong West Indian identity over their lifetimes, how will others view them? Will they be recognized as West Indian? As black ethnics? Or simply as black Americans? Much depends on the future of the color line in America. If, as pessimistic prognoses have it, we are moving toward a black/nonblack racial order, there could be dire consequences for the children and grandchildren of West Indian immigrants. Without an accent or other clues to immediately telegraph their ethnic status to others, they will be seen—and subjected to the same kind of racial exclusion—as black Americans (Waters 1994a).

Yet there are signs that monolithic conceptions of blackness are being “tweaked,” to use Vickerman’s phrase, and one factor is the growing number of black immigrants (and their children) who emphasize their ethnic distinctiveness. Since racial hierarchies within the United States vary by region, this “tweaking” is especially likely to occur in places such as New York, where foreign-born blacks and their children now represent almost half of the city’s black population (and where there is also a sizable and successful black middle class).¹⁹ Continued mass immigration from the West Indies will sustain, and probably increase, this proportion, further chipping away at notions of a monolithic blackness and enhancing West Indians’ “visibility.” Ongoing replenishment of the immigrant community will keep alive an ethnic awareness among the second and third generations in a way that didn’t happen in the past. From the 1930s to the 1960s, migration dwindled to a trickle; in contrast, many of today’s second and third generations will grow up alongside immigrants of the same age and in communities where sizable numbers retain ties to the home country (see Kasinitz, this volume).

If these forces are leading New Yorkers to have a greater awareness of ethnic diversity within the “black” population, it is also the case that West Indian influences are increasingly felt within the wider black community, leading some scholars to speak of the “West Indianization” or “Caribbeanization” of black New York (cf. Sutton 1987). Kasinitz writes of assimilation in reverse, as Brooklyn’s African American teenagers incorporate Jamaican dance hall music into their repertoire and imitate Jamaican patois. “What this means for African Americans and for black identity in general,” he notes, “is among the least researched, but potentially most important, aspects of contemporary black immigration to New York.”

FUTURE RESEARCH

This brings us to future research needs. The studies in this volume shed new light on the West Indian migrant experience in New York, yet we still have a lot to learn.

If continued large-scale immigration makes it imperative to study the impact of West Indians on the broader New York black community, it is also important to explore the experiences of new immigrant cohorts. More than thirty-five years have passed since the Hart-Celler immigration reforms opened the door to the contemporary mass influx. How are the newer immigrants, arriving at the dawn of a new millennium, faring compared with their counterparts who came to the city several decades ago? And what kinds of relations do the newcomers maintain with their predecessors? A growing number of studies are examining the trajectories of the new West Indian second generation, yet soon a sizable third generation will emerge, and we will need research that explores their lives as well.

In *Caribbean New York* (1992), Kasinitz charted the development of West Indian politics in Brooklyn in the 1970s and 1980s, but additional studies are clearly needed to update the story. Some research has been done on West Indian organizations in New York (e.g., Basch 1987a), yet this area also deserves more attention. So does religion. Given religion's importance in the lives of West Indian New Yorkers, it is surprising that the church is barely mentioned in most scholarly accounts. Randal Hepner's (1998) study of a Brooklyn Rastafarian church is a fascinating case of cultural reinvention in the immigrant setting; future researchers should also focus on the various Protestant churches that attract large numbers of West Indians in New York.²⁰ We also need more studies of the dynamics of West Indian migrant family life, a topic that has both theoretical and policy implications. How do family structures and values change in New York? In what ways are family and kin ties a source of support? What kind of conflicts and strains develop in West Indian families—and what are the consequences? How widespread are the “transnational families” discussed in the literature, and how do the separations, reunions, and continued contacts between close family members “here” and “there” affect their lives?²¹ The whole study of transnational practices calls for systematic research to document just how extensive these practices are and their significance—positive as well as negative—for West Indian New Yorkers.

The essays in this volume focus on West Indians of African ancestry, but a growing number of New York West Indians are East Indian—descendants of Indian indentured laborers brought to the Caribbean (particularly Guyana and Trinidad) in the nineteenth century to replace African slaves on the sugar plantations after emancipation. East Indian West Indians are a fascinating case since they typically attempt to establish an Asian identity as a way to avoid being labeled black and have developed distinctly Indo-Caribbean neighborhoods, the Richmond Hill section of Queens being an especially popular area.²² Ethnographic studies are required to document the experiences of this “minority within a minority,” to use Kasinitz's term, as well as to explore relations they have with their compatriots of African ancestry.

Also important are relations among West Indians from different national backgrounds. In New York, ties develop among West Indians from different islands and a common West Indian identity takes on new significance (see Foner 1987; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1987). At the same time, home country identities remain important, as Linda Basch's chapter on Vincentians makes clear. Indeed, Crowder and Tedrow show that West Indians often cluster among their compatriots when they settle in New York. Future research should probe just how meaningful home country allegiances are—and in what contexts—as well as the particular types of bridges and bonds uniting West Indians in New York. Also relevant are West Indians' relations with other immigrant communities in the city, not just in terms of potential political coalitions but also as they affect identities and the development of popular cultural forms.

West Indians, like other immigrants, generally move to the United States as children, teenagers, or young adults. What happens as they age and reach the end of their working lives? Karen Olwig's essay demonstrates that New York is not necessarily a permanent place of residence for West Indian migrants. What proportion will remain in New York after retirement? Return "home" to the islands? Commute back and forth? Or move to join their children elsewhere in the United States? Many West Indian retirees (as well as younger immigrants and their children) are already flocking to south Florida, where the weather is warm, the Caribbean is close, and sizable West Indian communities exist. A study of transplanted West Indian New Yorkers in Florida would make a fascinating addition to the literature.²³

Careful comparisons across cities and nations and with other immigrant groups will also deepen our understanding of the New York West Indian experience. My own comparisons of West Indians in New York and London have brought out the importance of context—particularly the racial context and the presence of a large African American community in New York—in shaping West Indian identities, achievements, and intermarriage patterns (Foner 1979, 1983, 1985, 1998a, 1998b; see also Model and Ladipo 1996; Model 1997a; Model and Fisher 1999). Additional cross-national comparisons would benefit from the inclusion of Canada since the large West Indian community in Toronto faces yet another set of opportunities and constraints.

An intriguing question concerns West Indians who have lived in Britain for many years before moving to New York. Undoubtedly, the racial and ethnic identities and understandings that develop among these "twice migrants" in New York are influenced and complicated by their earlier experiences in Britain. Such movements can also intensify and alter the shape of transnational connections. Indeed, studies of transnational practices should be sensitive to the type, frequency, and impact of ties with relatives in Britain and Canada—not just with the home societies.

Also on the agenda for the future are comparisons between New York's West Indians and those of other U.S. cities. Most research on West Indians in the United States has been done in New York, and there is a tendency to assume that the findings and analyses of New York-based studies hold true for West Indians throughout the country. Such assumptions often are not warranted. The size of New York's West Indian community, its long history, and the presence of large numbers from so many different nations have provided a base for a much broader range of West Indian neighborhoods and organizations and a launching pad for a greater number of successful political candidates. New York's economic context shapes occupational opportunities; West Indians elsewhere, for example, do not always cluster, as they do in New York, in health care or private household work. New York's West Indians also bring with them a particular range of human capital that affects how they fare in the economy—with a smaller proportion of professionals, for example, than in the Washington, DC, area (Palmer 1995: 28–29).

The extraordinary heterogeneity of New York's immigrant population also provides a very different context than, say, Miami, the second most popular city for U.S. West Indians. In Miami, West Indians live in a city with a "Cuban ambience" and where Cubans greatly outnumber other immigrants (Perez 1992: 83). No one immigrant group dominates New York the same way. Whereas Miami's Cubans are touted as an economic success story, New York's West Indians do better (in terms of employment rates and household income) than the city's two largest Hispanic groups: Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (cf. Grasmuck and Grosfoguel 1997). New York City's black population also has much more political clout than Miami's, and in the early 1990s an African American, David Dinkins, was mayor. Moreover, unlike New York, Miami does not have a dominant West Indian residential neighborhood (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares, forthcoming). An important task for further analysis is to untangle the way particular structural features in each receiving city—including the size, composition, and historic pattern of settlement of the West Indian population—interact to create distinctive West Indian experiences.²⁴

Within New York itself, comparisons with other immigrant groups are useful in highlighting and explaining what is distinctive about West Indians and what gives them an edge in relation to other groups. The role of West Indians' human capital, their fluency in English upon arrival, and their race are obviously critical in such comparisons, though it is important not to slight the cultural orientations that West Indians bring with them. While much has been made of West Indian culture in the contrasts with black Americans, there is a risk it may be overlooked in comparisons with other immigrants precisely because West Indians are native English speakers, come from nearby societies that are heavily influenced by American culture, and do not have "exotic" customs such as arranged marriages or patrilineal kinship. Scholars should bear this in mind.

The essays that follow then, are, a challenge for further study. They offer a rich, detailed, and complex portrait of a major immigrant group in America's quintessential immigrant city. In doing so, they illuminate fundamental issues concerning immigration, race, and ethnicity in American society and global interconnections in the modern world. And they raise new questions that take on added significance as growing numbers of West Indians continue to migrate to New York and transform the city, and are inevitably changed by their own journeys.

NOTES

1. Comments at conference on "Transnationalism and the Second Generation," Harvard University, 4 April 1998.

2. Strictly speaking, the category *Afro-Caribbean* encompasses people of African ancestry from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and other non-English-speaking islands, but the authors who use the term in this volume have in mind people from the former British colonies. Hispanic and Anglophone Caribbean immigrants form separate communities in New York. Language as well as differences in historical and political background distinguish Haitians from their English-speaking Caribbean counterparts.

3. This follows the convention adopted by Kasinitz, who has a useful discussion of terminology in *Caribbean New York* (1992: 14–15).

4. On the causes of West Indian migration see, for example, Deere et al. (1990), Foner (1978), James (1998), Marshall (1982), Palmer (1995), Richardson (1983, 1992), and Thomas-Hope (1992).

5. The breakdown: foreign-born from Jamaica (137,725), Guyana (130,252), Trinidad and Tobago (127,764), and Barbados (39,903) (March 1997 and March 1998 Current Population Survey, Annual Demographic Supplements, calculated by John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center).

6. Flores and Salvo (1997); Salvo and Ortiz (1992); Department of City Planning (1999).

7. Between the late 1930s and 1965, net migration from the Commonwealth Caribbean to the United States probably never exceeded three thousand a year. "Immigration virtually came to a halt at the height of the Depression, climbed slightly after World War II, but was cut back again in 1952 when the McCarran-Walter Act restricted the use of 'home country' quotas by colonial subjects" (Kasinitz 1992: 25–26). This act imposed a quota of one hundred visas on the colonial dependencies of Europe (Palmer 1995: 10).

8. Immigration and Naturalization Service figures show some decline in Jamaican, Guyanese, and Trinidadian immigration to New York City in the mid 1990s, yet the numbers are still very large: about 100,000 legal immigrants entered New York City from these countries in the period 1990–96 (Department of City Planning 1999: 6–7).

9. See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* (1998), for a detailed and richly textured account of Caribbean radicals in early-twentieth-century America.

10. The city's black population mushroomed between World War I and the 1960s, largely the result of a huge internal migration from the South. A huge migration of Puerto Ricans after World War II brought large numbers of Hispanic migrants to the city; since the 1960s, immigration, particularly of Dominicans, Mexicans, Colombians, and Ecuadorians, has fueled the growth of the city's Hispanic population. Large-scale Asian immigra-

tion is a post-1965 phenomenon, with Chinese by far the largest Asian group in the city (see Foner 2000).

11. Many of these changes are discussed in Foner (2000), which offers a broad comparison of today's immigrant New Yorkers and their predecessors at the turn of the twentieth century.

12. In her earlier influential work, with Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, Basch (1994) used the term *transnationalism*, which has gained widespread currency in scholarly circles. In a recent publication, Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt restrict the concept of transnationalism to "occupations and activities that require regular and sustained contact over time across national borders for their implementation" (1999: 219).

13. Migrant remittances have long been critical in West Indian societies at both the national and household levels, leading some academic analysts to speak of them as "remittance societies." On the role of remittances (from Central America, Britain, and the United States) in these societies see, for example, Manners (1965), Philpott (1973), B. Richardson (1983, 1985), and Stinner, Albuquerque, and Bryce-Laporte (1982).

14. The most commonly shipped barrels are "super jumbos," which stand nearly four feet tall, are two feet around, and can hold up to five hundred pounds. In 1999, the barrels cost sixteen to twenty-five dollars, depending on size. The shipping cost of a five-hundred-pound barrel through a small storefront company was around sixty dollars (Beshkin 1999).

15. See Kasinitz (1992: 32). On the importance of dual nationality provisions among New York immigrants today, see Foner (2000), chapter 6.

16. See Levitt (2000) on transnational villages among Dominican migrants in Boston.

17. Waters (1999a: 153) makes a distinction between West Indians' expectations of structural racism—blocked mobility for blacks in society and a hierarchy in which whites have economic and political power—and the realities of interpersonal racism they encounter in daily life upon arrival. See also Foner (1987).

18. Waters (1999b) contends that West Indians' preparation for and militancy toward structural racism, in combination with their lack of expectation of interpersonal racism, have helped them make progress in the service economy. They push for promotions and perks, yet have easygoing relations with whites on the job.

19. This estimate is based on the March 1998 Current Population Survey, tables provided by John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center. The majority of foreign-born blacks in New York City are West Indian.

20. See Zane (1999). In this regard, it is interesting that the literature on West Indians in Britain has paid more attention to the role of religion, from the very beginning of the influx (e.g., Calley 1965) to the present (e.g., Toulis 1997).

21. In my work, I have explored changes in West Indian women's family roles in New York (Foner 1986, 1997). See Waters (1997, 1999a) on the strains that result when children left in or sent back to the West Indies are reunited with parents in New York. In an unpublished paper, Thompson and Bauer (n.d.) note that, in their exploratory study of members of ten Jamaican families in Jamaica, Canada, Britain, and the United States, one family held biennial family reunions with their extended family successively in Jamaica, Canada, and New York.

22. Indo-Caribbeans are becoming involved in ethnic politics in Richmond Hill. In the 2000 primary contests, for example, an Indo-Caribbean lawyer from Guyana was running for City Council and another Indo-Caribbean candidate from the area, a community-college professor, was a State Assembly hopeful (Thottam 2000).

23. By 1990, Dade County, Florida, was home to 53,676 Anglophone West Indian immigrants, and Broward County to 32,208 (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares, forthcoming). Also see Ho's (1993) interesting study of thirty Afro-Trinidadians living in Los Angeles, the majority having moved there from the New York metropolitan area. Los Angeles appealed to them because of the mild climate and because they believed they would get ahead more easily there.

24. As a beginning step in this direction, see Ransford Palmer's (1995: 27–30) brief profile of the West Indian communities in Hartford and Washington, DC, and my own comparison of Haitians in New York and Miami (Foner 1998b). Also see Johnson (1995) on Boston's West Indian community and Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares (forthcoming) on the children of West Indian immigrants in south Florida.