

1 Village Market

ENCOUNTERS IN BLACK DIASPORIC SUBURBS

Food has not just been fodder for our journeys, but embodies the journeys themselves.

Michael Twitty, in *The Cooking Gene*, p. 72.

There are two kinds of people in the world, those who leave home and those who don't.

Roy, in Tayari Jones's *American Marriage*

Located on a main boulevard in Cascades, the Village Market, the community's largest local retailer, is the pulsing heart and soul of the neighborhood.¹ The name of the market recalls the countries and regions from which Cascades's residents come. Although Queens is a part of New York City proper, its eastern sections are considered "suburbs in the city" due to their tree-lined streets, Tudor-style homes, manicured lawns, and wider open spaces compared to Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant. At the Village Market, middle-class residents find the meats, produce, and spices they need for home-cooked meals. A casual visitor immediately notices that the market is neither an ordinary Pathmark or Shop Rite nor a higher-end Whole Foods or Zabar's. Nor is Cascades your typical New York City area: not only are its residents predominantly Black, but they are also palpably multinational. Their range of accents, skin tones, and styles of dress demonstrate that this is a central meeting place for various diasporic groups. The marketplace is a diverse, multilingual space, and many of its clientele own suburban-style homes with well-tended gardens and entertain weekend guests with dishes that bring New Orleans, Cap-Haïtien, and Spanish Town, Jamaica, into

their suburban kitchens. On an evening stroll through the neighborhood, the aromas of oxtail, rice and beans, spiced cabbage, jerk chicken, salted pork and grits, fried fish, and baked mac and cheese waft through the air. While to White observers these might seem like exotic cuisines, they represent the culture of places I call Black diasporic suburbs.

When you cross the main boulevard to get to Village Market, you move between MTA buses and wave away a dollar van driver with his locs held together in a beanie hat of black, red, and green stripes. The bass of a Beres Hammond lovers rock song vibrates the street, and the van's reggae air horn sounds to announce the beginning of a dancehall music set. When you come into the parking lot, men of various colors and ages ask, "Taxi, taxi?" To the left, there's a man selling Nollywood movies. The crowd of customers at the entrance to Village Market indicates its popularity. An older Black woman holds her young granddaughter close to her tiered skirt of blue cotton while she picks out yellow plantains. Next to the plantains are mangoes, strawberries, blueberries, cantaloupes, fuyu persimmons, and grapes. The side display of fruits and vegetables announces the variety of foodstuffs found in the market, the range of places where those who live nearby come from, and the local culinary influences of New York's many diasporas. I grab a squeaky cart and walk toward the entrance. The Asian manager, likely in his fifties, and I make eye contact, and he gives me the usual nod and informal soldier's salute. I enter a brightly lit and busy produce section with a dizzying assortment of foods from all over the world.

The Korean and Brazilian yams are popular. Cassavas, maniocs, and batatas (sweet potatoes) are clustered behind the fruits section. A caramel-complexioned woman in her forties ties a knot around one bag of green beans and another of okra to weigh them. She is wearing a skirt suit, and her collar has a gold-plated name tag that says "Usher." She belongs to the after-church crowd. To the left are spice buns, sorrel leaves, and bags of brown sugar stacked one on top of the other. Further down the aisle, Black customers of all ages, shapes, and tones reach for small plastic bags to hold their grapefruit, cucumbers, ears of corn, and eggplants. Others feel papayas, peaches, and avocados to ensure that they are at just the right degree of ripeness, read the ingredients in the coconut water, or look for fresh garlic, thyme, and ginger root. Along a side wall are scallions for seasoning callaloo; collard greens and kale for side dishes; and spinach for stews, salads, and smoothies.

A young couple debates an item in front of metal containers filled with salted pork tails in brine. Behind them, a worker stocks the bacalao (salted codfish). In the meat section, three young siblings giggle near the bin of frozen goat meat. Their mother asks the butcher to slice her pork shoulder into medium-sized cubes. Untrimmed oxtail is on sale, but the smoked turkey neck is in short supply. The fish section has a long line of customers. Bachata plays in the background as shoppers take the plastic trays used to weigh whiting, conch, tilapia, blue snapper, and shrimp.

In the spices and rice section, flags from Caribbean, Latin American, African, and Asian countries are on display alongside the American flag. Basmati rice and Goya products are located directly across from the extensive collection of flours and seasonings. Jamaican jerk seasoning, Guyanese mango sour (chutney), Ghanaian fufu flour, Haitian Rebo coffee, Sylvia's Southern Spices, curry powder, butter beans, Maggi bouillon cubes, and canned mackerel are taken off the shelves and placed into shopping carts in a hurry. Near the cashier are cocoa balls imported from Jamaica and an assortment of peanut and caramel sweets. The lines for the ten cashier booths staffed by Bangladeshi women are long, often extending into the aisles.

Village Market offers a preview of the myriad of consumption practices at the center of the everyday life of this Black middle-class community. A trip to the local grocery stores in the neighborhoods of study is an opportunity to see the multiplicity of regional and national cultures that animate suburbia and the global food industry that supports it. "We have the market down der, and everyone in the neighborhood goes. I'm in der all de time," Damian told me. When Damian, a forty-eight-year-old realtor, arrived in New York from Jamaica in the 1990s, he initially came to take care of an ill parent. After their recovery, he decided to stay. He aspired to be a chef. Although he wanted to work in New York's elite restaurants, after graduating at the top of his class in culinary school he was never called back after interviews. "Everybody below me has corporate jobs right now, yuh undastan?" Damian passionately exclaimed. He excelled in culinary school, but, because New York's restaurant scene was a racially- and gender-unequal industry, Damian's White, less-qualified classmates landed jobs in high-end kitchens as chefs. Once employers saw that he

was a Black man and heard his Jamaican accent, Damian never received job offers after interviews.

Although eager to stay in the United States to be close to family, Damian also remained connected to Jamaica. He visited every year and contemplated returning permanently. But he lamented that, despite the racial barriers he has encountered from White New Yorkers, returning permanently to the island is impossible. He explained, "Jamaica had a brain drain in the late 80s and 90s. 'Cause people like us, we left. We left, and everybody left. So, we left the young kids that we should be the role models for. We left that vacuum there for them. 'Cause when I was growing up, I had somebody, a big brother I should say. When I was growing up, it used to be a village which raised the child. Now, the village left." The village Damian is referring to is the people who were the pillars of his hometown community in Kingston. The seamstresses, construction workers, factory workers, merchants, teachers, and policemen who he felt had held his town together boarded planes at Norman Manley airport, some never returning to their natal home. They were a part of the mass out-migration of Black people from the Caribbean and the US South in the twentieth century. They were leaving repressive political and economic regimes behind, as well as loved ones, longtime friends, and lands their ancestors had known for generations. They protested with their feet against the declining colonial and postcolonial conditions of life in their islands and regions.

Although their bodies were displaced, their psychic and spiritual connections to the people and places left behind remained.² Their minds and hearts were also impacted by the shock of their displacement, by feelings of alienation, as they encountered a foreign culture that was often unwelcoming because of White disdain towards their race and origin. Thus, for comfort and support they turned to the loved ones they had left behind. Damian spent hours at a time on the phone talking to his younger brother in Jamaica, to whom he regularly sent prepaid calling cards. Like the hundreds of thousands of other Jamaicans who have left the island since the 1960s, Damian was negotiating life as what Peggy Levitt (2001) calls a "transnational villager." People like Damian, who were once a part of villages all around the Black Atlantic, have created new villages in cities and suburbia. Their nostalgia for the places they left behind and desires to

plant roots in their new homes energize their neighborhoods and local institutions like Village Market. Residents exchange a portion of their middle-class earnings to make meals that psychically transport them to their places of origin. But they also cook up new ways of knowing, being, and acting in the *mélange* of their encounters with one another.

This book ventures into the cultural worlds of multiethnic Black middle-class suburbs and illustrates how Damian's experiences are not unique. His negotiation of racial exclusion, social mobility, and trans-spatial ties mirrors the lives of large segments of Black diasporic people in gateway cities like New York. Many villagers have left the American South and Global South and have set up new suburban villages. I ethnographically explore two such New York suburbs, Cascades and Great Park, to address the following questions: How do middle-class Jamaicans, Haitians, and Black Americans articulate cultural identity in multiethnic and multiracial places? How do these overlapping diasporas define cultural belonging in light of their social mobility and racial exclusion in New York? Fifty years after watershed racial, immigration, and colonial policy shifts in the United States and the Caribbean, what legacies do these groups carry with them on their journeys to middle-class suburbs, and how do these histories manifest in their social identities, interactions, and micro-practices in everyday life?

Participants in this ethnographic study offered up statements such as "Jamaicans like curry, but Haitians use a creole sauce" or "Black Americans make the collards different than Trinidadians" as expressions of cultural differences within the Black middle class. These were not trivial remarks about cuisine preparation; rather, they were important insights into how the participants made sense of their shared and divergent histories. Their Black epistemologies—or how those who fit under the Black racial umbrella come to know, understand, and interact with themselves and each other in suburbia—were expressed through cultural norms, and nothing signals a group's shared beliefs and practices more than food, a necessity of everyday life. Therefore, although the book is not about food per se, food provides an entrée into the quotidian identities and politics of Black middle-class diasporas.

Ethnographically, food is a site of memory, consciousness, and community across borders. Many of my understandings of the cultures of the

people whose lives fill the pages of this book arose around food: I interviewed people as they prepared dinner, met with them over homemade appetizers, and listened to their life stories while they tended herb gardens in their backyards. I spent many hours in local restaurants watching cross-ethnic encounters within them. I sat at kitchen tables and listened to the life experiences of families gathered in fellowship. Food was cooking or cooling in the background as my interviewees granted me entrance to the interior of their lives. They discussed issues of family, hardship, success, the desires of their hearts, the problems on their minds, the joys of their spirits, and the contradictions in their politics. The foodways of the Black diaspora³ were portals into private domains and public problems of the families I spoke with. As a result, I use foods of the African diaspora as metaphors for the quotidian articulations of their identities in this text.

MIXED GREENS: THE AFRICANA CLASS MOYENNE

The Black middle class has received increased attention since the turn of the twenty-first century. Books such as *Living with Racism* (Feagin and Sikes 1996), *Black Picket Fences* (Pattillo-McCoy 1999), *Red Lines, Black Spaces* (Haynes 2008), and *Blue-Chip Black* (Lacy 2007) have elucidated the complex role of race and class for Black people who have “moved on up” out of poverty and segregated urban areas and have attained middle-class incomes and suburban lifestyles. The Black middle class negotiates a unique and peculiar position in racial capitalism. Racism and nationalism are key factors in the economic system of exchange and production. Therefore, the term *racial capitalism* provides a lens to analyze how the global economy is built on the assignment of value and power to workers based on the racial category they are put into by affluent White society. Although Marxists posit that our economic system is based on class conflict, a Black Marxist perspective argues that class and racial conflict order the global economy and, therefore, our class stratification system (Du Bois 1935, Marable 1983, Robinson 2000). For example, the Black middle class has expanded due to political mandates for Black access to desegregated schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. However, their class ascendance

is characterized by continued patterns of racial exclusion designed by White society. This book builds upon these works by deconstructing “Black” or “African American” as a racial category and demonstrates that the Black middle class consists of heterogeneous cultural, nationality, regional, and ethnic groups that differ in their relationships to the racialized economy and to multiple and overlapping Black social worlds.

The socioeconomic positions and cultural experiences of these different nationality groups vary in important ways. Since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, the in flow of hundreds of thousands of Black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa have transformed Black mobility and cultural geography. Between 1980 and 2016, the Black foreign-born population in the United States increased from 816,000 to 4.2 million.⁴ As Black immigrants have moved from a “presence to a community” (Kasinitz 1992), *Black* has emerged as an umbrella term, a category that now includes a myriad of nationality groups—the descendants of racial slavery in the United States, people of African descent from the Caribbean and Latin America, and African immigrants. As Black immigrants either obtained well-paid jobs soon after they arrived as highly skilled workers or professionals or worked their way up from low-paid occupations into the middle class, they have joined middle-class Black Americans in educational, work, and residential spaces. Together, Black immigrants and Black Americans have toiled in the face of White racism, economic insecurity, migration, and the problems of restrictive immigration policies and unkept promises of civil rights legislation to attain middle-class jobs, buy homes, and build lives in New York’s suburban enclaves. This book is about their communities and overlooked diasporic narratives.

Large-scale Black migration from the Caribbean and Africa has raised questions in the United States about how migrants and their children will fare in a postindustrial, bifurcated, and racially segmented economy. Segmented assimilation theory, the prevailing perspective on the trajectory of Black immigrants, predicts that their children will experience downward economic mobility if they become culturally similar to poor, urban Black Americans (Portes and Zhou 1997). A variant on assimilation theory argues that low numbers of children of Black immigrants are finding their way into the so-called mainstream—constructed as White—occupations and schools (Alba and Nee 2003, Alba et al. 2011).

Models of immigrant outcomes commonly used in sociology advance assimilation discourses that are based on public and intellectual continuities of colonial racism. Old and neo-assimilationist perspectives privilege the movement of ethno-racial groups into a constructed White mainstream but downplay and undertheorize Whites' active resistance to resource sharing with racialized groups and their repackaging of biological racism as cultural, class, and ethnic difference. Assimilation discourses also overlook racial projects that divide Black people by nationality and class in order to undermine their unified political opposition to White hegemony (Bonilla-Silva 2003, Omi and Winant 1994, Pierre 2004; Winant 2001). This book is in conversation with the work of race theorists and historians of the African diaspora invested in building knowledge of Black people by bringing them from the margins into the center of cultural analysis (Bald 2006, Gilroy 1993, Guridy 2010, Hall 1990, Lewis 1995). I focus on the dynamic politics of belonging that trans-geographical Black people engage in together in suburbia and how their identities dialogue with both their histories and contemporary experiences with racial oppression and their class consciousness. Joining the effort to interrupt the reign of assimilation theory (Treitler 2015) and decolonizing knowledge production (Go 2013, Harris et al. 2013), the book focuses on Black culture not as a deficit but as a set of diverse social relations of identity making, creativity, resistance, accommodation, and collective survival across Black diasporas.⁵ I argue that the Black middle class consists of overlapping diasporas (Bald 2006) whose identities and mobilities are constantly being negotiated through their encounters with different national and regional groups in suburbia.

The diasporic framework of Black middle-class life in New York organizes this book. *Diaspora* does not simply describe a people on the move, dispersed outside of their homeland. *Diaspora* is a verb.⁶ It encompasses the ongoing dialogue between Africans in the Americas with the places they consider their homelands and with other Black peoples across the world. The diasporic framework provides the tools needed to unpack the cultural identities of Black Americans, Haitians, and Jamaicans as a) outcomes of their racialized migrations from the American and Global Souths and b) their entrance into suburbs with complex racial and class histories that shape their experiences within them. These migrants are part of a post-civil

rights movement and post-colonial generation with heterogeneous positions in the global political economy. Their identities emerge from the interactions across racial, class, gender and nationality boundaries. The myriad of ethnic groups within the Black middle class are like the ingredients in Aunties' plate of mixed greens. They share similar roots, create distinction between one another, yet work together, at times harmony through their differences across color, tastes, and preparation.

The diasporic diversity of the Black population is nothing new to New York City or the United States. At the turn of the twentieth century, thousands of Black immigrants lived in the United States, most having moved from the Caribbean and Latin America to Florida, Harlem, and Boston to escape labor exploitation in declining post-slavery agricultural economies (Putnam 2013, Watkins-Owens 1996). Together with Black Americans, they co-created jazz and hip-hop, danced to soca and reggae, shared jambalaya and patty recipes, named streets after the Tuskegee Airmen, and built pan-African coalitions to resist Jim Crow in their city. Outside of Harlem, Black southerners and Black immigrants encountered one another in New York's suburbs as early as the 1930s (Haynes 2001).

By 2012, the non-Hispanic Black foreign-born community in the United States comprised over 10 percent of the Black population (see table 1). One-third of Black people in New York are foreign born. Like the Black American population, Black immigrants are stratified by class and often live together in the same residential environments, propelled there by racial residential segregation and drawn there by personal choice. In this book, I explore the lives of people who make up the Black American and Black immigrant middle and upper-middle class.

This book explores the articulations of Black identity in suburbs where Black Americans, and Caribbean and African immigrants influence its cultural geography. New York has been for a long time a North Star for Black southerners, a gateway city for Caribbean immigrants, and a newer destination for African immigrants (Kent 2007). I focus specifically on the largest Black nationality groups in the United States and New York: the Black American, Haitian, and Jamaican diasporas. I distinguish Black middle-class people by their national origins for several reasons. First, Black Americans are a distinct group with unique cultural lexicons and migration histories.⁷ Regionality is an important boundary in Black

Table 1 Socioeconomic Characteristics among Blacks by Nativity (2012)

	<i>Black American</i>	<i>Black Immigrant</i>
Total Population	25,554,024 (89.7%)	2,908,991 (10.3%)
Median Family Income	\$36,000	\$45,000
Median Household Income	\$41,000	\$52,000
Lower-Middle Class (%) (\$30–\$49,999)	19.8	17.2
Middle-Middle Class (%) (\$50–\$99,999)	28.0	30.7
Upper-Middle Class (%) (\$100,000+)	14.0	21.0
Some College (%)	30.5	26.7
College (%)	16.8	28.2

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (2012). Class categories adopted from the definitions used in Lacy's (2007) *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class and Status in the New Black Middle Class* for lower-, middle-, and upper-middle-class Blacks.

American identity formation (Robinson 2014). Cultural differences between those who identify with their Southern or Northern heritages, or a mixture of both, yield different subjectivities and practices. For example, as they encounter Black immigrant groups in diasporic suburbs, Black Americans with roots in the South erect boundaries against them because they equate Blackness with being from the South. Others maintain that they are not “African” American because, unlike recent Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants, their ties to Africa were ruptured long ago when their ancestors were kidnapped from Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. These beliefs are a preview of the complicated identity work occurring in Black diasporic suburbs. Their inclusion of these perspectives into sociological paradigms of race, class, migration, and urban sociology improves our social theories by reflecting Black lived experiences that are hiding in plain sight.

In addition to exploring the differences between Black American and Black immigrants, this book also disaggregates the homogenizing category “West Indian” by exploring the distinct experiences of Jamaicans and Haitians. Both groups bring their languages, cultures, citizenships, and

patterns of mobility with them on their journeys to middle-class suburbs. The term *West Indian* was created by European empires to categorize their Caribbean colonies. Today, West Indian identity does resonate with many immigrants who feel a sense of pan-Caribbean unity and political consciousness across colonial divisions based on language and history. However, the term obscures diversity as much as it excludes. For example, Jamaicans are usually treated as the test case for the West Indian immigrant experience in research studies. Haitians, on the other hand, are often marginalized or regarded as outsiders because of their colonial and linguistic differences from English-speaking Caribbean immigrants. This marginalization is also shaped by their country's history of geopolitical power struggles with European and US imperialism. When members of their unique diasporas meet locally, however, their encounters become a recipe for comparatively understanding Black identity making in the twenty-first century, dynamics elucidated in this book.

The diasporic Black middle class is characterized by socioeconomic differences that shape their identity work. The increasing ethnic heterogeneity of racialized groups in the US labor market translates into meaningful inter- and intra-ethnic group differences, a process that José Itzigssohn (2009) calls *stratified ethnoracial incorporation*. For example, later chapters discuss that English-speaking Jamaicans' mode of entry into the United States often as skilled laborers facilitates their middle-class grounding in suburbia, while French- and Kreyol-speaking Haitians, who are more likely to enter through family reunification or political asylum (Kent 2007), have a more arduous road to the middle class. The brain drain of nurses and teachers from Jamaica translates into consistently higher incomes for them in US schools and hospitals compared to Black Americans and Haitian immigrants. Black Americans' middle-class occupations are largely in the public and financial sector. Haitian immigrants, too, have attained middle-class status through unionized health care occupations, but in contrast to Jamaicans, they largely have done this from the bottom up.

Yet my ethnographic observations demonstrate that, despite these socioeconomic differences, Black American, Haitian, and Jamaican households' cultural economies have followed similar logics of collective support. Multigenerational and single-parent households are part of the mosaic of their middle-class lifestyles. These households supply domestic

and international remittances, sending money and goods to relatives across households and back home. This practice enhances their identities as monied middle-class people because they have adequate resources to share with family members elsewhere. How members of the diasporic Black middle class make, spend, and save money transgeographically illuminates the interaction between their socioeconomic situation and their cultural identities.

SUBURBAN SOIL: SAME ROOTS, DIFFERENT ROUTES

Most Black people in the United States now reside in the suburbs. The number of Black families living within New York City is decreasing; however, the suburbs saw a 30 percent increase in Black families between 1990 and 2010.⁸ The historically distinct pathways followed by Black Americans, Haitians, and Jamaicans to the suburbs demonstrate the ongoing relationships within the Black diaspora outside of Africa. The African diaspora was created by racial slavery. For four centuries, European empires trafficked African peoples of different geographical and cultural origins and dispersed them throughout the Americas. After emancipation, but in response to varying conditions of racial inequality, labor exploitation, and political suppression, Black migrations from across the Atlantic to the industrial cities of the United States generated nearly unprecedented contacts among free Black people with different languages, nationalities, and colonial histories. The social structure of New York's suburbs allows us to widen the conversation about contemporary relations within the African diaspora in important ways.

The adults I interviewed are a part of the post-Break Black middle class. I use *the Break*, a term coined by Howard Winant (2001), to describe the time period when White supremacy was challenged by international antiracist and anticolonial resistance between 1945 and 1970. This epoch of wide-scale global transformation led to an unprecedented number of Black migrations from the American South and Global South to Northern metropolises. The adults I interviewed largely came of age after this Break period. The Black American middle class that emerged after the 1960s has been referred to as the post-King generation or the post-integration

generation (Lacy 2007, Pattillo-McCoy 1999). These descriptions make sense when the Black middle class is understood as consisting of the children and grandchildren of the civil rights movement, the descendants of slavery in the United States. These generational markers also distinguish the new Black middle class from newly educated and monied Black people in the 1950s, whom Franklin Frazier (1957) called the Black bourgeoisie.

In order to understand the localized identities and practices of the Black middle class in the twenty-first century, however, we must move beyond the nation and use a more *global and comparative perspective* that encompasses international racial histories, migrations, and political situations. New York's Black middle class cannot be comprehended without engaging with the complicated social hierarchies of the US and Global Souths from which its members have come. The racial caste system of Charleston, the uneven industrialization of Kingston, and the dictatorship politics of Port au Prince are interrelated global processes and have shaped Black migrant experiences and perspectives. The multinational composition of the Black middle class in New York requires that we look at their lives and consciousnesses through the ways in which the nation-states to which they belong(ed) structured and articulated global White supremacy. Black people across the Atlantic have engaged in collective political action and cultural work to chip away at American and European socio-economic domination from enslavement through rebellion, revolution, emancipation, colonialism, and independence. They are currently living in a neoliberal, colorblind era, which requires sociological attention and theorization that respects the ties that bind them and the differences that set them apart.

Separated by land and sea, Black Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in this study all had unique and overlapping migratory histories. In the mid-twentieth century, inspired by the perennial desire to free themselves of the living legacies of racial and color caste, they left the places of their oppression. Their collective biographies are a part of global revolts against racial formations—that is, racial projects in their respective countries and regions that bolstered White domination by activating old and new technologies of racial categorical inequality. In the United States, Black people's active resistance was expressed in the movement of millions from the Jim Crow South to the North and West. Black Americans' exodus was the

most important population redistribution in American history: the Great Migration, which Isabel Wilkerson (2011) aptly calls the “first step America’s servant class took without asking,” and also referred to as the “Great Escape” (Brown, 2018). Many of my respondents were born and raised in the South, while others had parents and grandparents who came from the eastern seaboard states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia between World War I and the 1960s.

During this same period, Black people in Jamaica and Haiti also set their sights on the North Star. However, they did so under different political conditions. As Blacks in the U.S. were demanding liberation from the terror of segregation and lynching, Black Jamaicans were fighting for their freedom from the British Empire’s crippling hold on the island’s affairs. England had colonized Jamaica in 1655 and created a colonial state apparatus that continued to extract the island’s resources and labor but left many Black Jamaicans in rural and urban poverty. A participant in the international anticolonial movement in the Caribbean and Africa, Jamaica became independent in 1962. The transition from a colonial to a neocolonial state hampered development. Economic stagnation; the ensuing violence; and competition between the country’s main political parties, the People’s National Party and the Jamaica Labor Party, propelled the outmigration of Jamaican professionals and workers in search of material freedom in the land of the “almighty dolla.” Largely locked out of migration to Britain, many Jamaicans came to New York—only to find backbreaking work, an ongoing desegregation crisis, and Black people from other regions and nations with the same goals and difficulties. Just as Haiti is separated from Jamaica by hundreds of miles of Caribbean Sea, the Haitian experience was strikingly different from that of Jamaicans during their era of decolonization or of Black Americans amid desegregation struggles.

During the Break period, Haiti was embroiled in a political dictatorship whose violence and repression from the late 1950s to the 1980s sent people from every class into exile in New York and Miami. The fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986 led to free democratic elections, and Haitians chose Jean Bertrand Aristide, an avid advocate of the country’s rural and urban poor. But within a year he was forcibly removed from office and sent into exile, later reinstated with only formal authority, and

ultimately overthrown by the right wing, all with the direct aid of the US government. Amid US imperialist control and continued popular resistance, political instability crippled the economy. Haitians fled the political terror of their hometowns but actively tried to maintain connections with those they had left behind on the island.

This book reveals the global and comparative character of Black middle class identities. First, my interviewees were people whose lives, migrations, and unlikely encounters in global cities like New York emerge from interconnected national and cross-national political events. These Black New Yorkers and their families participated in mass migrations, provoked by the downfall of an empire, a brutal dictatorship, and the encumbrance of Jim Crow. However, these migrations were undertaken through the individual and household decisions of everyday people seeking a better way of life. Second, the *post-Break* paradigm helps us to recognize that the suburbs where Black diasporic groups meet and mix have experienced significant socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes over time that affect their power and belonging in that space. As my respondents arrived in these suburbs, they confronted the spatial legacies of colonialism, enslavement, segregation, and Black resistance embedded in the suburban soil of Long Island they inherited. The history of their suburban places, too, leave an indelible imprint on my interviewees' understanding of their citizenship as New Yorkers and as Black people in the United States.

Culturally, the term *post-Break* helps us see the Black middle class with new sociological frameworks. Cascades and Great Park are suburban villages created by global migrations and Black social movements that demanded the dismantling of racial segregation. Here diasporic people of African descent from the US South, various Caribbean islands, and immigrant Africans renegotiate their identities and belonging in and through their interactions with one another. How these Americans and immigrants negotiate their diasporic histories and define identities and belonging from the "inside out" (Lewis 1995) as they make sense of suburban life illuminates the new places in which race, class, and nation are constructed, contested, and reconstructed. In a strange journey from enslavement, colonialism, and Jim Crow to the middle class in the wake of the civil rights and decolonization movements, my interviewees, who have experienced economic mobility, have to bear the burden of making a way for